

On Knowing Humanity Journal

Creating a Christian faith-based approach to anthropology, incorporating insights from theology into ethnography and analysis, and allowing religiously committed anthropologists to speak freely of the ways in which their commitments inform their theory and practice. Raising new questions and lines of research on subjects such as: the significance of humanity's unique calling in nature for personhood and the construction of culture; the underlying reasons for humanity's destructive behavior toward self, others, and the environment; and the role that divine redemption and hope play in human lived experience and practice. Reincorporating teleology, in the sense of purpose, into scientific understanding, inviting dialogue between anthropologists and theologians of all persuasions into a deeper understanding of the human condition, and encouraging the doing of anthropological research and writing through the eyes of faith.

VOLUME 6, NUMBER 1
JANUARY 2022

On Knowing Humanity Journal

Volume 6 (1), January 2022

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Faith Integration and the Outrageous Ethic of Sex Only in Male-Female Marriage: Towards an Anthropology of Sex and Marriage for the Christian Community

Robert J. Priest

This article identifies two competing paradigms of sexual ethics in the student handbooks and codes of conduct at American residential colleges and universities. Sexual misconduct is either defined exclusively in terms of consent violation or, regardless of consent, as any sex outside of male-female marriage—the latter found solely in faith communities.

Based on survey results, this article examines faculty convictions related to the above two paradigms at religiously affiliated universities. It finds strong support for both paradigms. Among faculty who reject the “sex only in male-female marriage” paradigm, many consider the paradigm “outrageous” (irrational, extremist, motivated by malice, and productive of human harm)—meriting government sanctions.

However, this article suggests that the most repudiated portion of the Christian sexual and marital ethic, its cross-sex nature, turns out to be in the mainstream of marriage cultures around the world—as studied by anthropologists. In world history, it is the ethic of mere consent that is the extremist outlier. Marriage, as studied by anthropologists, constitutes both a conjugal bond and a biparental bond—attaching men to the social reproduction project, and giving each child a father as well as a mother. The article ends by inviting a comparison of the two paradigms in terms of harms being guarded against, and in terms of the extent to which they are morally oriented towards the good of the next generation.

Historically, Christians have believed that the Bible should be trusted when it instructs on *divine realities* (theology proper), but also when it instructs on *human realities* (theological anthropology). Thus, Christian scholars sometimes call for biblically-based faith convictions to inform the learning enterprise. While an aspiration towards faith-informed scholarship is often deemed “outrageous” in the modern academy (Marsden 1998)—many Christian universities nonetheless formally identify the “integration of faith and learning” as core to their mission (Hamilton 2005; Moroney 2014; Kaak 2016).

Sexuality is one reality that sometimes receives faith-informed attention. Sexuality is addressed in Scripture. It permeates popular culture. It is central to

political conflicts. It is a focus of university scholarship. And it is consequential to the lives our students will live, the relationships they will form, and any offspring their sexual acts will bring into existence.

Competing Sexual Paradigms on American University Campuses

The contemporary sexual paradigm articulated in most American universities makes “consent” the “touchstone of morally permissible sex” (Primoratz 2001, 201), with universities defining “sexual misconduct” as “sexual activity of any kind and

between any two persons without consent.”¹ In the current secular understanding, evident in university discourses on sexual ethics, autonomous selves may use their bodies as they wish so long as everyone involved consents. Only acts that violate consent merit social disapproval.

Congruent with this paradigm is the presence on most American residential college campuses of a “hookup culture” that has mostly displaced an older dating culture, just as that dating culture replaced courtship practices of an earlier era. Today’s college hookup culture is enacted in institutionalized practices, is ideologically hegemonic, and features sexual gratification prescriptively divorced from larger normative meanings (Wade 2017, 2021). Current scholarly interest in hookup culture reflects recognition both of its centrality to sexuality on American college campuses and of problematic outcomes of these sexual scripts (Beste 2018; Bogle 2008, Freitas 2013, 2015, 2018; Garcia et al. 2012; Heldman and Wade 2010; Kelly 2012; King 2017; Padgett and Wade 2019; Stepp 2007; Wade 2021).

In contrast, institutions that aspire to faith-informed scholarship often articulate a paradigm where man-woman marriage, rather than mere consent, represents the core touchstone of sexual ethics. Thus Brigham Young University (BYU), which is affiliated with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, has an honor code that requires faculty and students to:

Live a chaste and virtuous life, including abstaining from any sexual relations outside a marriage between a man and a woman.²

Likewise, the Catholic University of America (CUA) states:

The University affirms that sexual relationships are designed by God to be expressed solely within a marriage between husband and wife. Sexual acts of any kind outside the confines of marriage are contrary to the teachings and moral values of the Catholic Church and are prohibited in the University’s Code of Student Conduct.³

Similar statements on male-female marriage as the touchstone of sexual ethics appear in eleven⁴ of the fifteen residential Catholic colleges that the Newman Society recommends for their faith integration.⁵ However, the consent paradigm is the only one formally invoked by most Catholic universities.⁶ Likewise, universities affiliated with Mainline Protestant denominations mostly invoke only the consent paradigm, although a few defend the “sex only within male-female marriage” paradigm.⁷ For instance, the PC(USA)-affiliated Belhaven University states:

The University upholds the institution of marriage between members of the opposite sex as the proper relationship for . . . activities of a sexual nature. Therefore, any sexual conduct not within these biblical guidelines is prohibited.⁸

1 Specific wording here comes from Loyola University Chicago, <https://www.luc.edu/coalition/learnmore/violence/sexualmisconduct/> (Accessed April 7, 2021), but the same idea appears to be present in most American University statements of community standards. Yale University, for example, defines “sexual misconduct” as “any sexual activity for which positive, unambiguous, and voluntary consent has not been given in advance” [<http://catalog.yale.edu/undergraduate-regulations/offenses/>] (Accessed April 7, 2021).

2 <https://policy.byu.edu/view/index.php?p=26> (Accessed March 23, 2021).

3 <https://policies.catholic.edu/students/studentlife/studentconduct/assault.html> (Accessed March 23, 2021).

4 In addition to the Catholic University of America, this includes Ave Maria University, Belmont Abbey College, Benedictine College, Christendom College, Franciscan University of Steubenville, John Paul the Great University, Magdalen College of the Liberal Arts, Thomas Aquinas College, University of Mary, Wyoming Catholic College.

5 <https://newmansociety.org/college/> (Accessed June 30, 2020).

6 See example in footnote 4 above.

7 This includes universities affiliated with the American Baptist Church (Eastern University, Judson University), with the Friends (Malone University, George Fox University), and with the Presbyterian Church—USA (Belhaven University, College of the Ozarks).

8 https://www.belhaven.edu/pdfs/campus_life/TheKilt.pdf (Accessed June 30, 2020).

Evangelical colleges, nearly all of which emphasize faith integration, usually articulate this same paradigm. Of the 114 U.S. “governing members” of the evangelical Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU), only four institutions⁹ frame sexual misconduct exclusively in terms of consent. For another five, consensual sex outside of marriage was also deemed misconduct, although marriage itself was undefined. However, 105 out of 114 unambiguously define male-female marriage as the touchstone of sexual ethics, affirming that all consensual sex outside such marriage is disapproved (see [Appendix](#)). For example:

The God-ordained context for virtuous sexual expression and procreation is marriage, a sacred covenant between one man and one woman. . . . All premarital and extra-marital sexual activity . . . is immoral.¹⁰ (Taylor University, IN)

Sexual union is intended by God to take place only within the marriage covenant between a man and a woman.¹¹ (Azusa Pacific University, CA)

All forms of sexual intimacy that occur outside the covenant of heterosexual marriage, even when consensual, are distortions of the holiness and beauty God intended for it.¹² (Charleston Southern University, SC)

For most evangelical colleges, such a stance is not merely theoretical. Thus scholars report that while hookup culture is hegemonic at both secular and religious American residential colleges, evangelical schools are the exception (Kelly 2012, 43; Freitas 2015; Dunn and Hendershott 2011). Donna Freitas (2015, 67-68) attributes the absence of hookup culture on evangelical campuses to their “faith-integrated

learning atmosphere,” which she reports was lacking in other religious traditions. As other researchers report, “the idea of delaying sex until marriage . . . has become an untenable narrative in all but evangelical colleges” (Monto and Carey 2014, 614).

This overstates the case. While published research on hookup culture at Mormon institutions is lacking (Wade 2021), Mormon universities are likely similar to evangelical ones. Most researchers report that Catholic universities are as dominated by hookup culture as secular or non-evangelical Protestant ones (Freitas 2015; Dunn and Hendershott 2011; Beste 2019). However, Jason King (2017) demonstrated that a subset of “very Catholic campuses” actively promote a “no sex before marriage” script, with most of their students committed to orthodoxy, religiously active, and enthusiastic about the church and its teaching. They help create an anti-hookup “no sex before marriage” college culture. In short, some colleges exemplify what, for today, are sexual counter-cultural moral communities.

A very few universities profess an “only-in-marriage ethic” without explicitly defining “marriage.”¹³ Some of these may be older formulations not updated for clarity after the US Supreme Court, in *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015), legally redefined marriage. In other cases, universities likely intend to express Christian disapproval of pre-marital sex in wording that tactically avoids publicly naming that male-female portion of the Christian ethic widely seen as “outrageous.” I could find no university that espoused an “only-in-marriage” ethic while explicitly defining marriage to affirm the full legitimacy of same-sex marital unions. Thus, this article will consider primarily the two paradigms that are clearly present in University student handbooks and codes of conduct—one that makes consent the touchstone of sexual ethics and the other that makes

9 Concordia University (Chicago), King University, North Park University, and University of the Southwest—as spelled out in Student Handbooks.

10 <https://www.taylor.edu/about/#>: (Accessed April 7, 2021).

11 <https://www.apu.edu/about/sexuality/> (Accessed April 7, 2021).

12 <https://www.charlestonsouthern.edu/about/what-we-believe/> (Accessed April 7, 2021).

13 This includes the Catholic “University of Notre Dame,” the Southern Baptist “Anderson University” (SC), the Baptist but not denominationally affiliated “Campbellsville University,” the Christian Churches and Churches of Christ “Lipscomb University” and “Bushnell University,” and the Church of God “Anderson University” (IN). The preceding is based on student handbook wording, or in the case of Notre Dame, in a formal statement on marriage, <https://dulac.nd.edu/community-standards/standards/sexual-activity/> (Accessed April 7, 2021).

male-female marriage such a touchstone.¹⁴

In contrasting the “sexual consent” paradigm with the “sex only in male-female marriage” paradigm, we should clarify that neither consent nor marriage is absent from the alternate paradigm. While most American students participate in hookup culture,¹⁵ many do hope eventually to marry. Thus the “consent” paradigm accommodates marriage—not as the central touchstone of sexual ethics, but only as one discretionary option. And under the logic of consent, marriage is redefined. It no longer requires committed permanence, sexual exclusivity, or the logic that one is partnering with one’s natural procreative counterpart. Thus, any two consenting adults of any sex can marry. Marriages, by consent, may be sexually “open.” And either party can divorce their partner at will, with “no-fault” divorce laws protecting them from adverse consequences of being the party that unilaterally broke with prior commitments.

Similarly, in the moral logic of “sex only in male-female marriage,” consent is present as a necessary but not sufficient principle of sexual ethics. Many consensual acts are disapproved. Yet consent is core to Christian marital rituals and vows. As demonstrated by Joseph Henrich (2020), anthropologist and chair of the Department of Human Evolutionary Biology at Harvard University, Christianity historically played a foundational role in validating the necessity of marital consent (“I do”) by both bride and groom—and in prohibiting all sorts of kin-based marital practices that did not protect such consent. But the consent elicited in Christian marriage is not private, temporary, or piecemeal—consent to an isolated act separable from larger meanings or long-term commitments. Instead, this paradigm requires a robust version of consent within a particular moral vision—a publicly articulated covenant commitment to a sexually exclusive relationship in the context of forging two lives together economically and socially (“as long as you both shall live”) into a new social unity oriented not only to adult mutual support and companionship but to the flourishing of any offspring their sexual union produces.

While most American universities signal disapproval only for sexual acts that violate consent, a minority of universities also signal disapproval for any consensual sexual act not within the context of covenant marriage between a male and female. These latter universities nearly always have Christian identities and stated commitments to faith-learning integration.

Most American universities with a religious identity or affiliation are either Roman Catholic, Evangelical Protestant, or Mainline Protestant. And while there have been initiatives within each tradition towards faith-learning integration,¹⁶ the three higher education communities represent distinct cultures, not least in their integration commitments and in the outworking of those commitments in the arena of the sexual—as evidenced in written university statements and the empirical literature on college hookup culture. And yet, arguably, the nexus of faith-learning integration lies less with Board of Trustee approved policies enforced by administrators and staff than with faculty—those centrally responsible for learning (Hamilton 2005, 34-35).

So to what extent do scholars at such Christian institutions themselves affirm an ethic of sex only in male-female marriage? And how does 1.) commitment to “faith-learning integration,” 2.) Christian church attendance, and 3.) views on biblical authority influence scholars towards such an ethic? Alternatively, ‘to what extent do faculty at Christian institutions view such an ethic as “outrageous” (deficient in motivation and outcome) and deserving of being sanctioned by the government?’ To what extent do Christian scholars affirm a third hybrid ethic which retains the traditional Christian commitment to sex only in marriage—but with marriage redefined to include same-sex marriage?

14 Later in the article, I briefly discuss evidence for a possible third hybrid ethic emphasizing sex only in marriage but with marriage defined as inclusive of same-sex partners.

15 Research suggests that between two thirds and three quarters of American college students participate in hookups, according to Heldman and Wade (2010, 324).

16 As with the Cardinal Newman Society, for Catholic colleges. Or for Mainline Protestant ones, the Lilly-funded “Rhodes Consultation on the Future of the Church-Related College,” and the “Lilly Fellows Program at Valparaiso.”

The Sexual Ethics of Scholars at Christian Universities

In this section of the article, I draw from my “Christianity, Sex, and Higher Education Faculty Survey” to explore answers to the above questions. Survey results are from a stratified convenience sample of undergraduate faculty at three categories of religiously affiliated or identified universities in the U.S.: Evangelical Protestant, Mainline Protestant, and Roman Catholic.¹⁷

Survey Sample

Email contact information was secured online for faculty at 85 Roman Catholic Universities (RCU), 85

Evangelical Protestant Universities (EPU), and 100 Mainline Protestant Universities (MPU).¹⁸ In April of 2017, I sent a single invitation to 23,333¹⁹ faculty from these schools, of whom 9793 opened the email, and 1916 completed the survey—giving a response rate of 8.2% (19.6% of those who opened the email invitation).²⁰

A third of respondents (33.3%) reported teaching at a university with an Evangelical Protestant religious affiliation or identity. Just over a quarter (27.8%) reported teaching at a Catholic University, and 38.9% reported teaching at a university with a Mainline Protestant affiliation or identity.²¹ Demographic information on respondents is provided in Table 1 below.

17 The sample is stratified in that it is drawn intentionally from three different categories of institution. It is convenient, in that it surveyed faculty only at schools which posted online faculty contact information and at schools where contact information was most accessible. The sample focused on undergraduate faculty, meaning that if a school had a separate graduate faculty of theology, law, or medicine, for example, these faculty were not included.

18 The 85 Catholic Universities were drawn from the 246 Catholic Universities listed by the US Conference of Catholic Bishops, <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/how-we-teach/catholic-education/higher-education/catholic-colleges-and-universities-in-the-united-states.cfm>. The 85 Evangelical universities were drawn from 140+ U.S. members and affiliates (or recent members) of the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities, https://www.cccu.org/members_and_affiliates/. And the 100 Mainline Protestant Universities were drawn from 226 Mainline Protestant-affiliated Universities. Specifically, this included 26 of 91 United Methodist schools, 31 of 51 PC(USA) schools, 20 of 26 ELCA schools, 8 of 19 UCC schools, 6 of 16 American Baptist schools, 4 of 14 Quaker schools, 2 of 9 Episcopalian schools, and 3 of 5 Mennonite Church USA schools.

19 This number does not include 407 emails of those who had previously opted out of receiving Survey Monkey invitations, or the 115 emails that bounced.

20 Spam filters, the sensitivity of the subject, the fact that only a single invitation was sent, and broader national trends towards decreasing response rates, all likely contributed to this lower response rate.

21 In order to protect respondent anonymity, given the controversial nature of questions asked, the survey did not elicit actual names of university employers, but relied on faculty respondents to categorize “the religious affiliation or identity” of their institution as either “Roman Catholic, Mainline Protestant (i.e. American Baptist, ELCA, Episcopal, Friends, PC-USA, UCC, United Methodist), or Evangelical Protestant (affiliated, for example, with the CCCU).” Those who had difficulty answering the question were asked to provide the name of their school or the name of their sponsoring denomination. This information allowed us to apply RELTRAD to code them suitably, as per Bryan Steensland, Jerry Park, Mark Regnerus, Lynn Robinson, Bradford Wilcox, and Robert Woodberry. “The Measure of American Religion: Toward Improving the State of the Art,” *Social Forces* 79 (2000), 291-318.

Table 1
Faculty Demographics

		N	Percent
Religious Affiliation or Identity of College or University	Evangelical Protestant	638	33.3
	Roman Catholic	533	27.8
	Mainline Protestant	745	38.9
Age	21 - 30	13	.7
	31 - 40	323	16.9
	41 - 50	552	28.8
	51 - 60	560	29.2
	61 - 70	398	20.8
	70+	70	3.7
Sex	Male	1194	62.4
	Female	720	37.6
Ethnicity/Race	Asian/Asian American	36	1.9
	Black/African American	35	1.8
	Hispanic/Latino	47	2.5
	White (Non-Hispanic)	1746	91.1
	Mixed	24	1.3
	Other	28	1.5
Faculty Rank	Administrator/Instructor/Lecturer	24	1.3
	Assistant Professor	421	22.0
	Associate Professor	668	34.9
	Full Professor	803	41.9
Disciplinary Field	Arts (Visual and Performing Arts)	180	9.4
	Humanities	579	30.2
	Social Sciences	552	28.8
	Natural Sciences	342	17.8
	Applied Sciences	263	13.7
Size of Institution (by enrollment)	500 or less	30	1.6
	501 - 1,000	197	10.3
	1,001 - 2,500	797	41.6
	2,501 - 5,000	542	28.3
	5,001 - 15,000	306	16.0
	More than 15,000	44	2.3

Faith Integration

Religiously affiliated universities vary widely in whether faith activities and viewpoints appear in the formal and intellectual life of the school. One indicator that a university values faith integration is that it provides and encourages attendance at school-sponsored religious assemblies, chapels, or masses. Another is that it values Christian faith in its faculty, as evidenced in recruitment and promotion practices.

Finally, those universities that most aspire to faith-learning integration value a culture where faculty bring prayer into the classroom, where classroom appeals to religious authorities (such as Scripture or the Magisterium) occur, and where faculty encourage students toward faith-learning integration. In Table 2, five items, each scored from 1 to 5, provide a measure of university-based faith integration.

**Table 2:
University Faith-Integration**

Question	Response Options	Scoring
1.) What best describes your institution’s practice with reference to regular school-sponsored religious assemblies, chapels, or masses?	Such events are provided, and student attendance is required.	5
	Such events are provided, and students are strongly encouraged (voluntarily) to attend.	4
	Such events are provided purely as a discretionary option for any who wish to attend.	2
	Such school-sponsored religious events are not provided.	1
2.) What best describes your institution’s approach to the religious faith of faculty?	All faculty are expected to affirm a religious faith congruent with that of the institution.	5
	Faculty of other faiths or no faith may be hired and promoted, but with preference sometimes given to candidates whose religious faith is congruent with that of the institution.	3
	The religious faith of faculty plays no formal role in faculty hires or promotions.	1
Rate Your Agreement	Response Options	Scoring
3.) I open my classes with prayer.	Very Often	5
	Often	4
4.) I appeal to religious authorities (such as the Bible or Magisterium) in my teaching.	Occasionally	3
	Seldom	2
5.) I encourage students to integrate faith into their academic work.	Never	1

Responses to each item listed in the above table correlated closely with responses to the other four items, forming a cluster, such that the average (the mean) of the five items combined provides a measure of “University Faith Integration” with a high level of

statistical reliability.²² By this measure, Evangelical Protestant universities exhibit significant and dramatically higher faith integration scores than either Mainline Protestant or Roman Catholic universities—which did not differ statistically from each other.²³

²² A Cronbach’s Reliability Alpha of .915. If respondents failed to answer 1 or 2 of the 5 items, then the mean of the other items was calculated. If 3 or more items were unanswered, a scale mean was not calculated.

²³ University Tradition and Faith-Learning Integration

		One-Way ANOVA							Effects After Controls [†]			
		N	Median	Mean	Tukey	SD	F(df)	P	η^2	F(df)	P	η^2
University Faith-Learning Integration	EPU	638	4.20	4.06	b, c	.71	1697	<.001	.640	1436	<.001	.607
	MPU	745	1.67	1.81	a	.94	(2,1913)			(2,1856)		
	RCU	533	1.40	1.85	a	.65						

Likert scale from 1 to 5.

a = Significantly different from EPU ($p < .001$).

b = Significantly different from MPU ($p < .001$).

c = Significantly different from RCU ($p < .001$).

†= Controls were for sex, age, ethnicity/race, faculty rank, academic discipline, and size of institution.

The following illustrates the differences. Most faculty (94%) at Evangelical Protestant Universities (EPU) report that “regular school-sponsored religious assemblies, chapels, or masses are provided,” with students either “required” or “strongly encouraged” to attend. This compares with 28% of faculty at Roman Catholic Universities (RCU) and 21% at Mainline Protestant Universities (MPU) reporting the same. Most EPU faculty (95%) report that all faculty are expected to affirm a religious faith position congruent with that of the institution. By contrast, most RCU faculty (74%) and most MPU faculty (80%) report that the religious faith of faculty plays no role in faculty hires or promotions. As corroborating evidence, 44% of RCU faculty and 46% of MPU faculty respondents report that they do not attend any Christian church compared to only 3% of EPU faculty. Only 18% of EPU faculty never open class with prayer, compared with 87% of RCU and 88% of MPU faculty who never pray in class. Only 6% of EPU faculty never appeal to religious authorities in their teaching, compared with 67% of RCU and 71% of MPU faculty who never make such an appeal. In short, as measured by these criteria,

Evangelical universities exhibit far higher levels of faith-learning integration.

An Ethic of “Sex Only Within Male-Female Marriage”

There are many sexual behaviors that an ethic of consent would consider acceptable, but that would be unacceptable under the traditional Christian paradigm that affirms sex only within male-female marriage. For example, under an ethic of consent, most American universities do not consider consensual sexual hookups between unmarried people as misconduct. By contrast, some colleges consider all consensual sexual relations between unmarried students as misconduct. But rather than examine only formal university statements, we explore the extent to which faculty themselves align with “an ethic of sex only in male-female marriage” as against an ethic of mere consent. Respondents were asked about five actions likely to be differently assessed based on one’s ethical paradigm. For each item, a score of 5 indicated complete alignment with an ethic of sex only in male-female marriage.

**Table 3:
An Ethic of Sex-Only-Within-Male-Female Marriage**

“In your private moral assessment, to what extent, if at all, would you consider the following to be wrong?”	Response Options	Scoring
1.) Consenting Sexual Relations Between an Unmarried Man and an Unmarried Woman	Always Wrong	5
2.) Consenting Sexual Relations Between Two Adults of the Same Sex	Almost Always Wrong	4
	Wrong Only Sometimes	3
3.) A Married Couple, by Agreement, Having Sex with Others	Not Sure/Can’t Decide	2
4.) Hookup Sex with Strangers	Not Wrong at All	1
5.) In my view, it would be good if all churches endorsed same-sex marriage as having equal legitimacy with male-female marriage.	Disagree/Strongly Disagree	5
	Mildly Disagree	4
	Mildly Agree	2
	Agree/Strongly Agree	1

Survey responses to each item correlated closely with responses to the other four, such that the five items combined provide a measure of “An Ethic of Sex Only in Male-Female Marriage” with a high level of

statistical reliability.²⁴ By this measure, MPU and RCU faculty did not differ statistically; but EPU faculty exhibited significantly higher scores than the other two.

²⁴ With a Cronbach’s Reliability Alpha of .927.

The effect size was large.²⁵

The following illustrates the differences between traditions, but also variability within traditions. Most EPU faculty (87%) believe “hookup sex with strangers” is “always wrong,” compared to 41% of RCU and 42% of MPU faculty. Similarly, most EPU faculty (80%) believe that “a married couple, by agreement, having sex with others” is always wrong, compared with 32% of RCU and 33% of MPU respondents. A majority of EPU faculty (60%) believe “consenting sexual relations between an unmarried man and an unmarried woman” is always wrong, compared to 14% of RCU and 17% of MPU faculty. A similar number of EPU faculty (63%) believe “consenting sexual relations between two adults of the same sex” is always wrong, compared with 17% for RCU and 21% for MPU faculty. Finally, two-thirds of EPU faculty (69%) disagree or strongly disagree with the view “it would be good if all churches endorsed same-sex marriage as having equal legitimacy with male-female marriage,” as compared with 24% of RCU and 28% of MPU faculty.

Since there is variability within traditions both for faith-learning integration and for adherence to an ethic of sex only in male-female marriage, a consideration of the relationship between the two variables is in order, irrespective of the categories EPU, RCU, and MPU. And indeed, faculty at universities that score high on “faith-learning integration” are far more likely to score high on agreement that sex belongs only in marriage between a man and a woman. The relationship remains strong even after controls.²⁶

Faculty who attend a Christian church (this includes 97% of EPU, 56% of RCU, and 54% of MPU faculty), even when controlling for the tradition of the employing university, are far more likely to affirm an ethic of “sex only within male-female marriage” than faculty who do not attend any religious services. Faculty-attenders of non-Christian faiths²⁷ score between the other two. The effect of Christian church attendance on sexual ethics is strong.²⁸

When Christians justify their sexual ethic, it is often Scripture to which they appeal. Indeed, the CCCU

25 An Ethic of Sex Only in Male-Female Marriage

		One-Way ANOVA							Effects After Controls [†]			
		N	Median	Mean	Tukey	SD	F(df)	P	η ²	F(df)	P	η ²
Sex-Only-In-Male-Female-Marriage	EPU	635	5.00	4.35	b, c	.96	389 (2,1898)	<.001	.291	332 (2,1841)	<.001	.265
	MPU	739	2.20	2.64	a	1.43						
	RCU	527	2.20	2.61	a	1.36						

Likert scale from 1 to 5.

a = Significantly different from EP (*p*<.001).

b = Significantly different from MP (*p*<.001).

c = Significantly different from RC (*p*<.001).

†= Controls were for sex, age, ethnicity/race, faculty rank, academic discipline, and size of institution.

26 *r*(1901) = .674, *p* < .001. Even after controlling for sex, age, faculty rank, ethnicity/race, academic discipline, religious category of university, and size of institution the correlation remains strong [*r*(1890) = .509, *p* < .001].

27 Buddhists, Hindus, Jews, and Muslims were categorized as “other,” as were Mormons, Unitarian Universalists, and Bahai—groups with Christian roots, but that most Christian churches do not consider to be Christian.

28 Christian Church Attendance and an Ethic of Sex only in Male-Female Marriage

		One-Way ANOVA							Effects After Controls [†]			
		N	Median	Mean	Tukey	SD	F(df)	P	η ²	F(df)	P	η ²
Christian Church Attender Or Not?	Yes	1311	4.40	3.86	b, c	1.25	712 (2,1898)	<.001	.429	358 (2,1839)	<.001	.280
	No	512	1.40	1.67	a, b	.75						
	Other	78	1.60	2.21	a, c	1.30						

Likert scale from 1 to 5.

a = Significantly different from Christian church attenders (*p*<.001).

b = Significantly different from congregational attenders of other religions (*p*<.001).

c = Significantly different from those who do not attend any church/religious gathering. (*p*<.001).

†= Controls were for sex, age, ethnicity/race, faculty rank, academic discipline, size of institution, and religious tradition of university employer.

summarizes the commitment to faith integration of its member schools:

We are committed to . . . promoting the value of integrating the Bible—divinely inspired, true, and authoritative—throughout all curricular and co-curricular aspects of the educational experience on our campuses, including teaching and research.²⁹

Given such an appeal, it makes sense that faculty views on the truth and authority of the Bible would affect their sexual ethics. Thus faculty who attended a Christian church were also asked to rate their level of agreement (on a 6-point Likert scale from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”) with the statement: “The Bible is without error in what it affirms.”³⁰ Eighty-four percent of EPU faculty who attend a Christian church affirmed some level of agreement with the statement, compared to 59% of MPU and 48% of RCU faculty who attend a Christian church. Among Christian church attendees, the belief that the Bible is “without error in what it affirms” was strongly correlated with affirming an ethic of sex only in male-female marriage.³¹

An Outrageous Ethic

While an ethic of “sex only in life-long male-female marriage” implies judgment on many American patterns ranging from hookup culture to no-fault

divorce, the most persistent public objection to this ethic focuses on the “male-female” aspect of the ethic. Thus, two survey questions probed the extent to which faculty perceived an ethic of “sex only in male-female marriage” as outrageous in motivation and outcome. Faculty rated their agreement on a 6-point Likert scale from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree” with the following:

- 1.) Those who defend male-female marriage as the only genuine marriage are motivated by irrational animus towards gays.
- 2.) Christians who disapprove of same-sex sexual behavior pose a serious danger to the well-being of gays and lesbians in society today.

Responses to the two items correlate closely, allowing for both to be combined in a statistically reliable measure of “The Outrageousness of an Ethic of Sex Only in Male-Female Marriage.”³²

Faculty who do not attend any church or religious group scored highest on this variable, followed by faculty of “other” religions, with faculty who attend Christian churches least likely to affirm these statements. The relationship was strong, even after controls.³³ Of course, Christian churches themselves vary in the extent to which such an ethic is affirmed. Thus, the association of Christian church attenders’ a.) views on whether “the Bible is without error in what it affirms” with b.) their agreement that this sexual ethic

29 <https://www.cccu.org/about/>. (Accessed August 6, 2020).

30 Only Christian-church attenders answered this question.

31 $r(1297) = .735, p < .001$. Even after controlling for sex, age, faculty rank, ethnicity/race, academic discipline, religious category of university, and size of institution the correlation remains strong [$r(1287) = .702, p < .001$].

32 With a Cronbach’s Reliability Alpha of .864.

33 Christian Church Attendance and Perceived Outrageousness of an Ethic of Sex Only in Male-Female Marriage

		One-Way ANOVA							Effects After Controls [†]			
		N	Median	Mean	Tukey	SD	F(df)	P	η^2	F(df)	P	η^2
Christian Church Attender Or Not?	Yes	1203	2.5	2.70	b, c	1.5	308	<.001	.254	145	<.001	.142
	No	524	5.0	4.57	a, b	1.2	(2,1812)			(2,1754)		
	Other	88	1.60	3.74	a, c	1.6						

Likert scale from 1 to 6.

a = Significantly different from Christian church attenders ($p < .001$).

b = Significantly different from congregational attenders of other religions ($p < .001$).

c = Significantly different from those who do not attend any church/religious gathering. ($p < .001$).

†= Controls were for sex, age, ethnicity/race, faculty rank, academic discipline, size of institution, and religious tradition of university employer.

is outrageous in motivation and outcome was also considered. Church attenders who doubted the truthful authority of Scripture were more likely to believe such an ethic to be outrageous. The relationship was strong.³⁴

University religious tradition was also associated with how respondents answered these two questions. While 55% of RCU and 56% of MPU faculty agreed that “irrational animus towards gays” motivated such an ethic, only 21% of EPU faculty agreed. And while 68% of RCU and 64% of MPU faculty agreed that this ethic posed “a danger to the well-being of gays and lesbians in society today,” only 31% of EPU faculty agreed. But while it is true that there were strong differences between different university traditions in the judgment that this ethic is outrageous (deficient in motivation and outcome),³⁵ it is also true that students in each university tradition have significant numbers of professors who deem this ethic outrageous.

Sympathy for Government Sanctions

When a given population widely believes that the historic Christian sexual ethic is outrageous—deficient in motivation and outcome, this contributes to widespread support for government action to actively sanction those wishing to live out such an ethic. There are various contexts—ranging from marriage-related businesses to religious education or adoption services—where those wishing to integrate faith with vocation sometimes face the threat of punitive governmental sanctions. Thus, a wedding photographer who, out of faith convictions, declines to provide intimate boudoir

photography will not be sanctioned by the government. But, should such a photographer decline to photograph “same-sex weddings,” results may be otherwise.

Faculty were thus asked to rate their agreement (on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree”) with three items intended to measure sympathy for government sanction of persons acting from within the male-female marriage ethical paradigm.

- 1.) Wedding photographers refusing to photograph same-sex weddings should be prosecuted for civil rights violations.
- 2.) Colleges affiliated with denominations that believe only male-female marriage is God-approved should be sanctioned by the government if they deny employment to faculty in same-sex marriages.
- 3.) Religious adoption agencies that refuse to place children in homes with same-sex parents should have their license to handle adoptions revoked by the government.

Responses to the three items correlated closely with each other, allowing for the three to be combined into a single statistically reliable measure of “Support for Government Punishment of Actions based on Adherence to the Male-Female Marriage Paradigm.”³⁶ Not surprisingly, those who view the historic Christian sexual ethic as “outrageous” are also likely to support government sanctions of such an ethic. The relationship between the two variables is strong.³⁷

34 $r(1243) = -.655, p < .001$. Even controlling for sex, age, ethnicity/race, faculty rank, academic discipline, size of institution, and religious tradition of the university employer, the relationship was strong [$r(1234) = -.630, p < .001$].

35 University Tradition and Perceived Outrageousness of an Ethic of Sex Only in Male-Female Marriage

		One-Way ANOVA								Effects After Controls [†]		
		N	Median	Mean	Tukey	SD	F(df)	P	η^2	F(df)	P	η^2
An Outrageous Ethic	EPU	612	2.0	2.36	b, c	1.4	169	<.001	.157	150	<.001	.146
	MPU	704	4.0	3.74	a	1.6	(2,1814)			(2,1758)		
	RCU	501	4.0	3.80	a	1.5						

Likert scale from 1 to 6.

a = Significantly different from EP ($p < .001$).

b = Significantly different from MP ($p < .001$).

c = Significantly different from RC ($p < .001$).

†= Controls were for sex, age, ethnicity/race, faculty rank, academic discipline, and size of institution.

36 With a Cronbach’s Reliability Alpha of .842.

37 $r(1807) = .763, p < .001$. Even after controls for sex, age, ethnicity/race, faculty rank, academic discipline, size of institution, and tradition of university, the relationship remains strong, $r(1797) = .712, p < .001$.

Christians historically have understood love as underpinning faithful Christian witness. The charge that the historic Christian view of man-woman marriage is motivated, not by love and concern for human flourishing, but by love's opposite, hate, is a charge which, if widely accepted (as it often is), poses a painful dilemma for Christians. No Christian wishes to commend a gospel of hate and human harm.

A Third Hybrid Ethic?

Since the central charge that the traditional Christian ethic is "outrageous" focuses on the "male-female" portion of the marital ethic, with the central demand being "marriage-equality," one might naturally expect to find Christians adjusting that one element of their ethic, while otherwise retaining the core logic of "sex-only-in-marriage." And indeed, when some Christians affirm "marriage equality," they are often understood as doing precisely that. But, in an earlier research project, when I examined theological "marriage-equality" writings assigned in American seminary classes, insofar as such authors addressed sexual ethics more broadly, it was clear these authors were not affirming an "only-in-marriage" paradigm, but rather a paradigm where monogamous marriage was one discretionary option within a wide variety of other consensual sexual arrangements and practices that people should also ethically approve (Priest 2018, 20-21, 27). Similarly, in my review of university student handbooks, I could find no instance of a university espousing an "only-in-marriage" sexual ethic while simultaneously explicitly affirming same-sex marriage as fully-approved marriage.

Thus I was interested in whether respondents might themselves provide evidence of such a third hybrid ethic. And indeed, a small group of faculty does express such an ethic. While half (49.8%) of respondents—and just over a third (36.3%) of Christian church attenders—affirmed "marriage equality,"³⁸ less than two percent (1.5%) of those endorsing "marriage equality" simultaneously affirm an ethic of sex only in marriage. And of the 14 respondents supporting both

marriage equality and an ethic of sex-only-in-marriage, all identified as primarily or exclusively opposite-sex attracted (n=13) or bisexual (n=1).³⁹ Furthermore, of the 92 respondents who identified as primarily or exclusively same-sex attracted, 85% affirmed marriage equality, 36% attended Christian churches, and not one affirmed both marriage equality and an ethic of sex only in marriage.⁴⁰ In short, the few who profess such a hybrid ethic as their faith-integration stance do not represent the persons such an ethic is for. And those who are same-sex attracted seem uninclined to embrace such an ethic for themselves. Why, after all, should they selectively reject one portion of the biblical ethic and nonetheless feel obligated to accept another part of that same ethic as normative and binding? In short, this data does not provide strong evidentiary support for the functional existence of such a fully embraced hybrid ethical paradigm. Thus I return to a consideration of the only university-based alternative to the "consent" paradigm, the "sex-only-in-male-female-marriage" paradigm.

To summarize, this article has demonstrated the existence of this alternative paradigm, and only this alternative paradigm, clearly and concisely articulated in scores of university student handbooks and codes of conduct. It has shown that many scholars situated at religiously affiliated institutions themselves affirm such an ethic. It demonstrated that factors influencing adherence to this ethic include 1.) the religious tradition of the university employer, 2.) the extent of "faith-integration" emphasis, 3.) whether faculty attend Christian churches, and 4.) whether they trust the Bible as true in what it affirms. But this article has also demonstrated the presence across religious traditions of other faculty who believe this ethic is "outrageous"—irrational, motivated by hate, and productive of human harm. Among such faculty, there is strong support for the idea that government should intervene to sanction any institution attempting to live out this ethic.

But while these research results help us understand some of what is at stake for those espousing a historic Christian sexual ethic, they do little to chart a way forward in the current environment. If faith integration

³⁸ As measured by agreement with: "In my view, it would be good if all churches endorsed same-sex marriage as having equal legitimacy with male-female marriage."

³⁹ Seven of these were EPU faculty, 5 MPU, and 2 RCU.

⁴⁰ By contrast, of same-sex attracted respondents attending Christian churches, 12.5% supported the "only in male-female marriage" sexual ethical paradigm.

is a valued goal, then this article is incomplete if ended here.

Scores of Christian institutions expect their faculty to practice faith integration in their teaching and scholarship and explicitly affirm the historic Christian view that sex belongs only in covenant monogamous male-female marriage intended as life-long. Among these institutions are the two evangelical theological seminaries where I taught for twenty-nine years and the two undergraduate institutions where I taught for five. And many thousands of Christian scholars across disciplines, myself included, explicitly affirm the historic Christian ethic of sex-only-in-male-female marriage. Many such scholars say that they aspire to practice “faith-learning integration” in their teaching and scholarship, an “outrageous” vocational commitment according to George Marsden (1998), presumably requiring courage. But there is no topic on which the cultured of our society are more inclined to repudiate Christian wisdom as “outrageous” than sexuality, no understandings more likely to trigger shame-induction interventions towards any who would advocate such “wisdom.” And while biblical treatments of sexuality are available, little of the faith-integration literature written by Christian scholars in other disciplines prioritizes disciplinary research and writing to develop publicly accessible understandings of sex and marriage congruent with, and supportive of, biblical teaching. Indeed, in the faith-integration literature, any defense of the historic Christian sexual paradigm appears to be the third rail few dare to touch, lest they suffer adverse consequences.⁴¹

But it is not enough for Christian universities to draft statements on sex and marriage based on biblical teaching to which faculty are expected to assent, with lawyers and board members weighing in on how best to secure religious liberty protections. Christian scholars themselves, in each relevant discipline, should be doing the pre-political work of Christian faith integration in and through discipline-specific scholarship on sex and marriage. The downside of an appeal to religious liberty legal protections based purely on biblical expositions of Christian views on sex and marriage is that, for those who do not accept biblical authority, this contributes to the perception that there is no publicly accessible case to be made for such a viewpoint, and thus that the viewpoint is irrational and masks non-rational compulsions and

hateful motivations. And when Christian scholars, across disciplines, fail to make a compelling public case for the positive nature of such a Christian ethic—while others routinely promulgate the view that such an ethic is deeply harmful—it is not surprising that society-wide sympathy for an appeal to religious liberty protections dissipates. Even the phrase “religious liberty” in American media increasingly appears only in scare quotes. In short, the freedom of Christians and Christian institutions to faithfully live out a biblical ethic and commend it to others—not least to our children—becomes increasingly curtailed by society.

Faith integration requires more than mere assent to biblical teaching. It requires, instead, scholars sufficiently convinced of the truth and goodness of what Scripture teaches that this informs research, writing, and teaching in our disciplines. And since realities related to sex and marriage are complex, only when scholars across disciplines courageously prioritize a sustained commitment to faith-informed research and writing on sex and marriage will adequate foundations be laid for wise and faithful engagement with our own children and the wider world.

Among the disciplines whose professional members have studied sex and marriage is anthropology, my own field. While anthropology is hardly a discipline that most people would think of as a sympathetic partner in defense of a Christian sexual ethic, it nonetheless has unprecedented strengths that allow us to reframe the issues raised in the preceding sections of this article in helpful ways. Other ‘sciences of the human’ selectively attend to some specified aspect of human realities (economic, political, psychological, demographic, geographic, linguistic, medical, biological, religious, etc.) while leaving other human dimensions to be treated by other disciplines. By contrast, anthropologists holistically incorporate physical, social, moral, psychological, religious, economic, political, legal, linguistic, historical, and cultural dimensions of human realities into whatever they study, including their treatment of sex and marriage. Furthermore, every other human science historically attempted to formulate generalizable understandings of human realities by paying research attention, at most, to a narrow subset of humanity. Anthropology, by contrast, intentionally included all of humankind as its object of study—and insisted that no human reality can be adequately understood by

⁴¹ For examples of how aggressively such views can be sanctioned in the academy, see Smith 2014.

scholars who do not attend to that reality across cultures in space and time. And at the very core of the social order that anthropologists have devoted themselves to studying are kinship, gender, sex, and marriage.

Not all publishing venues lend themselves equally to faith-integration conversations. And when elite secular culture finds specific Christian views “outrageous,” a dedicated space is needed for Christians to engage each other on the relevant issues from the vantage point both of shared faith and of shared disciplinary expertise. In anthropology, that publication is *On Knowing Humanity Journal: Anthropological Ethnography and Analysis Through the Eyes of Christian Faith*. This online journal provides generous space for integrative scholarship. This issue of the journal includes four articles by Christian anthropologists (Michael Rynkiewicz, Vince Gil, Jenell Paris, and Robert Priest) on sex, gender, and marriage—and provides a platform for interaction between authors. Each author combines Christian faith and professional expertise in anthropology.

In this article, I reconsider the current reigning sexual consent paradigm and its critique of the only university-based alternative to it—the “sex only in male-female marriage paradigm.” Specifically, I invite us to review and assess the charge that the latter viewpoint is extremist, irrational, motivated by hate, and productive of human harm. I do so, not by an appeal to Scripture or by a philosophical appeal to natural law, but by examining my own discipline of anthropology as it encountered marriage worldwide.

Anthropology of Marriage and Family

Consider three leading anthropologists from quite different schools of thought. In his controlled comparison of 250 societies studied by anthropologists, American anthropologist George Peter Murdock (1949, 1) identified the unit of “a married man and woman with their offspring” as the core building block of family and kinship in each of these 250 societies. He referred to this unit as the “nuclear family” but clarified that only in a minority of societies is the nuclear family a residentially separate entity. Instead, he says, the “nuclear family” is like an atom, sometimes alone, but often “combined, like atoms in a molecule, into larger aggregates” (2). He identifies two such larger social aggregates. The *polygamous family* consists of “two or more nuclear families affiliated by plural marriages. . . . Under polygyny, for

instance, one man plays the role of husband and father in several nuclear families and thereby unites them in a larger familial group. An *extended family* consists of two or more nuclear families affiliated through an extension of the parent-child relationship rather than of the husband-wife relationship . . . [such as with a] patrilocal extended family [including] an older man, his wife or wives, his unmarried children, his married sons, and the wives and children of the latter” (1949, 2). Murdock says that each child typically enters the world within one nuclear family (a *family of orientation*). But, because of “incest taboos which regularly prevail within the nuclear family” (1949, 16), each child eventually must “seek in another family for a spouse with whom to establish a marital relation,” thus together with their own spouse forging a new nuclear family, a “*family of procreation*” (1949, 13). “Husband and wife cannot both remain with their own families of orientation in founding a new family of procreation. One or the other, or both, must move” (16).

The British anthropologist Alfred Reginald Radcliffe-Brown likewise identified the “group consisting of a [married] father and a mother and their children” (Radcliffe-Brown 1950, 4) as cross-culturally a fundamental unit of society. He refers to this unit as the “elementary family” rather than the “nuclear family,” as Murdock termed it. Radcliffe-Brown reports that marriage is what gives a child “a legitimate position in society” (5), with “social fatherhood” largely “determined by marriage” (4). He writes, “We may regard the *elementary family* as the basic unit of kinship structure. What is meant by this is that the relationships, of kinship or affinity, of any person are all connections that can be traced through his parents, his siblings, his spouse, or his children” (5). Like Murdock, Radcliffe-Brown also identifies “compound families” as comprised of combinations of more basic “elementary families.” In a polygynous compound family, for example, each child has their own mother and father married to each other. But while all children in the same polygynous family share the same father, not all share the same mother.

The French anthropologist, Claude Levi-Strauss, posits as the “iron rule for the establishment of any society,” the biblical requirement, “You will leave your father and mother” (1984, 61). Because of a “virtually universal prohibition on marriage” to someone in one’s own family of origin, such as a brother or sister, “each family is formed from the union, and hence also the break-up of two other families: in order that a new

family can be established, two other families have to each lose one of their members” (Levi-Strauss 1996, 3). “The family,” Levi-Strauss argues, “originates in marriage [and] includes the husband, the wife, and the children born of their union” (1984, 44). And it is this “nucleus” of married father, mother, and their children around which wider kinship links are established.

What is Marriage?

As missionaries and anthropologists discovered, marriage as a cultural institution existed in thousands of societies the world over—long before Christianity was present. The very existence of marriage as a worldwide institution would seem to imply that this institution served some universal and primordial purpose or function.

In modern *Gesellschaft* societies with market economies, bureaucracies, high mobility levels, and transient and impersonal relationships, marriage provides the only stable friendship that some people have. Thus, the idea of marriage as primordially a solution to adult loneliness, as five Supreme Court justices in *Obergefell* argued,⁴² seems plausible. And of course, if having a close friend is truly the primary purpose of marriage, it would appear arbitrary, irrational, and prejudicial to define marriage as a cross-sex union.

But as anthropologists studied marriage, the idea that marriage was founded to give each adult a singularly close friend was not a theory they adopted—for rather basic reasons. In most societies, through history, people lived in village settings where they worked and socialized with neighbors and relatives with whom they had long and close interdependent relationships. Marriages were not unique outposts of close adult friendship against a broader backdrop of weak friendships. In fact, since activities and interests in such *Gemeinschaft* societies were typically gender-differentiated, with women mostly spending time with women and men likewise with men—the closest friendships were often non-sexual same-sex friendships. Indeed, western missionaries were sometimes disturbed at how seldom marriage was understood as the deepest form of close friendship and took it as their task to advocate a new paradigm of marriage—companionate marriage—understood as profoundly

deep friendship. Empirically, while marriage was present the world over, it did not usually provide a singular outpost of close friendship against a backdrop of social isolation. And while friendship existed the world over (Beer and Gardner 2015, Bell and Coleman 2020), most friendships did not exhibit the normative patterns characteristic of marriage (such as a cross-sex link, sex being core to the relationship, and sexual exclusivity). Thus, a presumed need for a best friend is likely not the most fundamental reason for the worldwide existence of marriage.

To infer a primordial function to a universal institution, one must attend to that institution’s contours across societies and through time. Until recently, anthropologists in hundreds of societies encountered an institution involving male-female sexual union and joint responsibility for resulting offspring. Data on marital regimes in 1231 traditional societies in Murdock’s *Ethnographic Atlas Codebook*, 1998 *World Cultures* (as reported in Bethmann and Kvasnicka 2007, 20) indicate that in 15.1% of these societies (N=186) only monogamous marriage (one man married to one woman) was found, with another 36.8% (N=453) having primarily monogamy, but also “occasional” polygyny (one man married to more than one wife). The boundary between these first two categories was sometimes slim. For example, of 666 married men sampled among *Tukanoans* of the Amazon, one was married to four wives, one to two, and the remaining 664 were married to one wife (Jackson 1984, 164). In another 47.8% of the 1231 societies (N=588), polygyny was “common,” although more men were actually married monogamously than polygynously in most of these societies. Finally, polyandry was also found in 0.3% of societies (N=4), with one woman married to multiple men. In “all three marriage regimes” (monogamous, polygynous, polyandrous), “conjugal unions are intersexual in nature, i.e. they involve at least one member of each sex. This ubiquitous trait . . . underscores that reproduction must be of central importance for the institution of marriage.” (Bethmann and Kvasnicka 2007, 20).

It is because of data collected by anthropologists, such as outlined above, that Oxford University Professor of Anthropology, Peter Rivière, in a publication primarily oriented to deconstructing prior

⁴² *Obergefell v. Hodges*, 576 U.S. (2015), 14.

anthropological ideas about kinship and marriage, nonetheless asserts,

The constituent units of marriage are men and women, and this seems to be marriage's single, universal feature. Thus the study of marriage must in the first place concentrate on the categories of male and female and the relationship between them. This may seem so obvious as to be not worth saying, but in writing on marriage we seem to have constantly overlooked this obvious fact. (Rivière 1971, 63)

Anthropologists develop their concepts and definitions inductively based on what they believe the worldwide cultural patterns exemplify. At the time he wrote, Rivière thought anthropologists would accept as an "obvious fact" his contention that the "constituent units of marriage are men and women." But today, in the midst of a cultural revolution related to sex and marriage, anthropologists inductively define marriage in ways often intended definitionally to include the new patterns related to gay marriage. Thus, for example, a recent leading anthropology textbook defines marriage simply as "a socially recognized relationship that may involve physical and emotional intimacy as well as legal rights to property and inheritance" (Guest 2020, A-52; for similar examples see Crapo 1993, 277 and Haines 2017, 277).

But suppose one wishes to consider marriage before recent developments. Anthropology is helpful both because it is the discipline that best understood worldwide ethnographic realities related to marriage and because anthropologists are dispositionally opposed to ethnocentric conservatism. As Adam Kuper (2000, 149) puts it, "anthropology teachers revel in the most exotic practices . . . [and] particularly relish those that affront Western assumptions about the nature of kinship, marriage, the family, and incest taboos." As such, they are not inclined to promote definitions and generalizations that are easily disconfirmed by cross-cultural realities. If we simply attend to how anthropologists and anthropology textbooks have defined marriage based on the state of worldwide knowledge in the 1970s, say, then we have an indicator of what the worldwide evidence would suggest. And what is central, as Rivière contended, is marriage as a cross-sex union.

The most widely quoted anthropological definition of marriage comes from the Royal Anthropological Institute's *Notes and Queries in Anthropology*:

Marriage is a union between a man and a woman such that the children born to the woman are recognized as legitimate offspring of both partners. (1951, 111)

Judith Shapiro, a leading feminist American anthropologist, after reviewing relevant worldwide anthropology research, defined marriage to include:

That the partners be a man and a woman (a cross-sex conjugal bond); that sexual activity be a defining feature of the relationship; [and] that socially significant bonds be established between the partners and any offspring they may have. (Shapiro 1984, 20)

Anthropology textbooks likewise provide definitions of marriage, such as the one found in Haviland (1981, 205):

A transaction and resulting contract in which a woman and man establish a continuing claim to the right of sexual access to one another, and in which the woman involved is eligible to bear children.

Or in Ferraro (1998, 193):

Marriage is a socially approved union between a man and a woman that regulates the sexual and economic rights and obligations between them.

Or in Kottak (2000, 508):

Socially approved relationship between a socially recognized male (the husband) and a socially recognized female (the wife) such that the children born to the wife are accepted as the offspring of both husband and wife.

Or again in Schultz and Lavenda (2018, 272 & 420):

An institution that prototypically involves a man and a woman, transforms the status of the participants, carries implications about sexual access, gives offspring a position in society, and establishes connections between the kin of the husband and the kin of the wife.

While the above definitions feature marriage as a male-female union, there is one well-known cultural institution in Africa that has been carefully studied by

anthropologists and that does not seem to fit the above definitions (see Herskovits 1937; Bohannan 1949; Evans-Pritchard 1951; Huber 1968; Krige 1974; Oboler 1980; Amadiume 1987; Greene 1998; Njambi and O'Brien 2005).

In much of Africa, a man pays cattle in bride price, and in exchange, he gains not only a wife but her labor and her children as his own. Such marital arrangements are often utilized strategically to gain economic and political power. In many African societies, older, wealthy, and often childless women, either still married to a husband or widowed, can adopt the male identity and role of "husband." To do so, they employ their own cattle as bride price to gain wives for themselves. This gives them control over the labor and offspring of such wives, whose children now belong to the lineage of the female husband (or alternatively to the lineage of the female husband's own male husband). The female husband does not have sex with these women but instead exercises the right to assign them a male consort (perhaps one of her poorer nephews), and everyone refers to her as a "husband." As honorary males and husbands, such women often achieve great economic and political power.

Since the above anthropologists were perfectly aware of this institution, why did they define marriage as male-female unions? Several considerations seem to have informed their assessment. For example, Peter Rivière stresses that only when biological women are defined as men do such marriages occur. That is, he suggests these do not violate the core logic that marriage happens between males and females. And the fact that this form of marriage does not involve sex between "husband" and wife, something typically core to understandings of marriage, suggests this is a partial metaphoric extension of the logic of marriage to achieve selective outcomes. Anthropologists are quite aware that kinship and marriage have their own existence but get metaphorically and creatively adapted and extended in all sorts of ways. If a medieval Catholic nun was "married" to Christ, with a marital dowry provided by her father to the church, and with symbols of marriage accompanying her vows—should we allow this unusual "marriage" to require a redefinition of marriage? Or do we simply agree that cultures sometimes extend the logic of marriage metaphorically in innovative ways? When Kottak says marriage is between "a socially recognized male (the husband) and a socially recognized female (the wife)," he is doubtless choosing wording that accommodates this well-documented institution—but signals marriage's

underlying male-female logic. When Schultz and Lavenda say that marriage "prototypically involves a man and a woman," they again accommodate this exceptional pattern while nonetheless pointing to the fact that marriage historically was uniformly understood as a male-female union.

The above anthropology definitions point to the existence worldwide of marriage as an institution for approved sexual activity historically and *prototypically* built around the male-female binary. This naturally suggests that marriage serves some social good achievable only through male-female collaborative action. And clearly, the one good achievable exclusively by male and female in sexual partnership is procreation. That is, the function of marriage that earlier anthropologists identified was the need of every society to reproduce itself. As individuals, we all die. Thus, procreation and social reproduction are critical to any society's future. And while individuals can achieve many things, the most amazing power given to humans, the ability to bring into existence another human being, is a power the individual cannot exercise alone, but only with a partner—specifically, an opposite-sex partner.

Humans are reproductively dimorphic. While each of us has entire circulatory, respiratory, digestive, skeletal, muscular, and nervous systems, we each have only half of a reproductive system. Only when two individuals, male and female, unite their reproductive halves into a reproductive whole does procreation occur. Just as various parts of a human body (eyes, hands, mouth, throat, digestive tract) collaborate to feed the body and keep it nourished, so two individuals, representing the two reproductive halves of humankind, male and female, must collaborate to contribute to the procreative goal of perpetuating humankind.

"A woman needs a man like a fish needs a bicycle," Gloria Steinem reportedly said. And indeed, in most settings, it is reasonable to emphasize that each person is complete in himself or herself. Biologically, however, each is complete in all respects save one. For purposes of procreation, each of us has only half of what is needed for the singular act of procreation. This requires both a male and female body to function in sexual and procreative complementarity.

But why marriage? Why don't humans procreate like dogs do? Here, anthropologists focused not merely on the biology of procreation but also on social reproduction. Humans are born in an unfinished state that requires long-term biological dependency for

food, protection, and care. Lacking hard-wired instincts for adult success, humans are also born in an unfinished state with reference to language, morality, and culture and are only completed through socialization. Human offspring require remarkable investments of long-term care and socialization for societies successfully to reproduce themselves over time. From a functional standpoint, whatever else marriage does, it provides the institution for approved procreation and in which social reproduction responsibilities and tasks are prescribed and carried out.

Marriage traditionally gives each child a father and mother and bifilial kin ties to both father's and mother's relatives (Chapais 2008, 57-59). While such ties function asymmetrically in cultures with unilineal descent, even then, children find valued ties with recognized kin on both father's and mother's sides. As the great kinship scholar Harold Scheffler (1973, 758) affirms, kinship everywhere is reckoned through both parents—that is *bilaterally*. For example, even in kinship systems stressing patrilineal descent—where one might naturally expect ties only with father's relatives, young males nonetheless often capitalize on their significant kin links with their mother's brothers, a cross-cultural pattern so prevalent that anthropologists have come to name this relationship “the avunculate” (Chapais 2008, 59).

Male and female bodies are not mirror images of one another. While every conception requires the union of a male and female body, purely as a biological matter, female bodies are far more invested in procreation than male bodies. Each conception takes mere minutes of a man's time, who can produce millions more sperm within hours, theoretically free, if so inclined and opportunities avail, to daily initiate other conceptions with other available women. By contrast, women have only a few hundred eggs total, eggs that are enormous compared with sperm and normally released once a month, except when pregnant and lactating, until menopause. Each conception and birth requires nine months of a woman's body in pregnancy, followed historically by a sustained period of two or more years for lactation (Dettwyler 2004), usually followed by years of post-weaning provision and care. Historically, irrespective of variability in cultural ideology related to conception or maternity, each child that a woman births, nurses, and provides post-weaning care for rather naturally acquires deep social ties to its mother.

The link between babies and mothers at a natural level is clear. At birth, it is obvious who the mother is. But who the father is, is another matter. I tell my students, “I have four children . . . I think! I've never tested them genetically to see if they are mine. I know who their mother is. I watched each child emerge from her body. But only by faith do I claim to be the father. I trust the marital commitments my wife and I made to sexual exclusivity. I trust my wife when she tells me these children are mine.” Paternity involves quite different issues from maternity.

What would societies have looked like if people behaved purely as biological creatures acting on every sexual impulse? In such a promiscuous world, children would only have an obvious, natural, and organic link to their mothers. But societies comprised of women with dependent children and unattached males would be societies of deep vulnerabilities for women and children, poorly designed for social reproduction. Female pregnant and lactating bodies, linked to dependent children, have vulnerabilities and constraints that male bodies do not. And by comparison with other species, including non-human primates, “the costs of maternity are disproportionately high in our species” (Chapais 2008, 165). Energy costs of pregnancy and especially milk production are high for all mammals—with pregnant or nursing women dealing with these costs either by working harder in food acquisition and eating more (as with non-human primates), or by “reducing their levels of physical activity and resting more” which human females usually do, but which only works well if others are partially provisioning them (Chapais 2008, 165). Chimpanzees typically nurse offspring for four years, nearly twice as long as most humans do. But “weaned chimpanzees are largely self-sufficient in food acquisition” (Chapais 2008, 164). Upon weaning, a chimpanzee mother's provisioning role is mostly finished. But while human babies are typically weaned “at an earlier age, human mothers must start provisioning them with solid food,” with the “bulk of mothering costs in humans incurred well after weaning” (164). “The cost of provisioning is the difference between the quantity of food a child produces and the quantity it consumes,” which for post-weaning chimpanzees “is practically nil” (164). But human offspring rely on their mothers far longer. In most traditional societies, “children eat more than they gather until they reach their mid to late teens” (164). And while birth intervals for chimpanzees are five or six years, human birth intervals are more

commonly two or three years (Chapais 213). Thus provisioning of chimpanzee young occurs sequentially. New offspring do not require care until prior offspring no longer need care. By contrast, “human mothers must feed more than one child at a time. For example, they may be suckling an infant while provisioning two or three other children” (164). In societies without stable support from men, women and children experience high levels of poverty and vulnerability to the predations of asocial men.

In short, the challenge in any society is not how to attach women to their children. That happens irrespective of marriage. The challenge, rather, is how to attach men to their children—how to get men to contribute their fair share of the social reproduction project.

According to anthropologists (Cai 1995, Shih 2009) who studied the culture, at least one society (variably called the *Na*, the *Moso*, or the *Mosuo*) traditionally had neither marriage nor institutionally recognized fatherhood and thus did not expect fathers to support their own children.⁴³ In this culture, kinship rested exclusively on mother-ties, with adult brothers and sisters of a single mother comprising the domestic unit. Males provided support to sisters and their children, not to a wife and their own children. But this society, as described, represents an extreme outlier. The more common and virtually universal cultural pattern involved marriage and the accompanying expectation that fathers would support their own children, just as mothers do. Marriage is what connects fathers to their children through a connection with their children’s mother—and by extension, connects children to father’s relatives as well as mother’s.

The Challenge of Paternity

Social reproduction works best when men are attached and invested in that work, which is what the institution of marriage historically demanded. And since biologically, every conception and birth requires a male as well as a female contributor, socially it made sense in societies the world over that both parties be attached to their children in service of social reproduction. Marital bonds “are, in effect, parental partnerships” (Chapais 2008, 168). As one

anthropology textbook states, “Almost every society recognizes the difference between mating and marriage. Mating implies sex with no further obligations or permanent responsibilities on the part of the male. Marriage, almost everywhere, implies a man’s contractual commitment to a mother and her child” (van der Elst 2003, 84).

Male commitment is, however, more tenuous, with uncertain paternity a profoundly destabilizing issue. Societies find it easier to require men to partner in the care, provision, and socialization of a child that they believe to be theirs than in a child conceived by some other male competitor for the sexual favors of the child’s mother. The cultural institution of marriage, prototypically involving an expectation of sexual exclusivity, allows men to presume that a child is indeed their own. And from the woman’s side, if sex gives women babies that need care for years to come, it should not surprise if “all the single ladies” sing with Beyoncé, “if you like it . . . put a ring on it.” That is, it should not surprise that women historically showed more interest in someone with a permanent commitment to them and any resulting children, rather than merely a casual fling. Marriage enables women to secure paternal investment in their offspring.

The females of most mammalian species are sexually unresponsive except for brief windows of time during estrus—which itself “triggers rut” in nearby males (van der Elst 2003, 82). By contrast, women’s ovulation is concealed from men (van der Elst 79; Chapais 169-70), and females are not seasonally limited in sexual responsiveness. This means that both husband and wife can have a socially approved partner for ongoing and mutually pleasurable sexual relations,⁴⁴ an exclusive marital relation not threatened by temporary swarms of other men seasonally enticed by a wife’s estrus. And this contributes to marital attachment and stability. When a male and a female are invested mutually in each other and in the children their sexual activities produce, this creates an optimum institution for social reproduction.

But while anthropologists identify “paternity recognition” as a “uniquely human” trait (Chapais 2008, 128; van der Elst 2003, 76), we must distinguish between two possible meanings of “paternity recognition”: 1.) the recognition that procreation

⁴³ Some scholars (Godelier 2011, 364 and Crapo 1993, 175) also include the *Nayar* of southern India here, arguing that their marriage ritual affirmed a fiction, and that what they had did not constitute marriage.

⁴⁴ That each can rightfully expect of the other, as seen in Scripture (I Corinthians 7), but also in other cultures (e.g. Abu-Lughod, 2016, 145).

requires (and results from) male-female sexual union, and 2.) people's actual ability to know with certainty which male contributed to the procreation of which baby. While arguably the former is present in all human societies,⁴⁵ the latter is virtually never fully present. And yet paternity confidence matters. It matters because, as has been documented in a wide variety of cultural contexts, the higher the paternity uncertainty, the less willing a man and his own relatives are, on average, to invest in a man's alleged progeny (Anderson 1974; Anderson, Kaplan, and Lancaster 2007; Bethmann and Kvasnicka 2007; Fox and Bruce 2001; Anderson 2006; Cashdan 1996).

Marriage, with its publicly endorsed and enforced demand for sexual fidelity, and its universal condemnation of adultery, is an institution uniquely designed to foster paternal confidence and, thus, to allow a man to effectively invest in a marital biparental partnership focused on known children (Winking, Kaplan, Gurven, and Rusa 2007, 1644). In her cross-cultural survey of sexuality, Frazer (1985, 20) reports that extra-marital affairs are ranked just below incest "as the most strictly prohibited type of sexual relationship." And in their study of 66 societies with anthropological descriptions of spousal responses to adultery, Jankowiak, Nell, and Buckmaster (2002) report that husbands and wives are equally likely to object to their spouses' adultery as a violation of their marital rights and equally likely to engage in mate-guarding behavior, though often with divergent tactics—and with divergent feared outcomes from spousal adultery.

If a husband commits adultery, his wife fears the loss of emotional, relational, and economic support for herself and her children. But she does not fear being duped "into investing parentally in another woman's offspring" (Barkow 1989, 315). By contrast, a single act of secret adultery by a wife can result in nine months of pregnancy, a couple of years nursing, and many more years of needed care for this child of another man. Whether a husband is confident of paternity impacts his investment (and that of his relatives) in his marital and parental partnership. Indeed, in Betzig's (1989) survey of marital dissolution in 160 societies studied by anthropologists, adultery was the leading cause of divorce, especially the wife's infidelity.

"Compromising a man's certainty in paternity (cuckoldry) is apparently seen worldwide as a breach so great that it often causes the irrevocable termination of the long-term marital bond" (Buss 2006, 246). By contrast, marriages with multiple children under conditions of high paternity confidence were unusually stable (Betzig 1989).

Under polyandry, with multiple husbands married to a single wife, it might appear that paternity concerns are ignored. But the fact that co-husbands are nearly always brothers (Low 2007) minimally ensures that each child is biologically related to each household "father." And even here, mechanisms are often in place to certify one true father. For example, the Tibetan Nyimba (of Nepal)

place great emphasis on the paternity of children; one brother is identified as the "real" (*ngothog*) father, that is, the man believed to be responsible for the child's conception. The mother [indicates who the father is in accord with a theory of conception which holds] that women are likeliest to become pregnant in the second week of their menstrual cycles. A woman's certainty about the paternity of her children is enhanced by the fact that husbands often are away from home for lengthy periods of time. (Levine and Silk 1997, 379)

Polyandry occasionally appears in Amazonia (e.g., Peters 1982). Here, one encounters belief in what Philippe Erikson (2002, 126) calls "polyandrous conception," the idea that conception occurs through multiple acts of sexual intercourse. On this understanding, more than one husband can contribute to the conception of a child and can thus be a child's biological father.⁴⁶

Nonetheless, polyandry is rare, largely present only under unusual demographic and material conditions (Goldstein 1987; Peters 1982; Levine and Silk 1997). As a marriage form, it is "fragile" (Peters 1982, 93), or as expressed by Prince Peter, it is "a recessive cultural trait" (1963, 570). When material and demographic conditions change, younger brothers often move quickly into monogamous marriages (Peters 1982). In short, the rarity of polyandry across societies, as well as its fragility, in comparison with monogamy and

⁴⁵ While Malinowski claimed the Trobrianders lacked any recognition of the biological role of paternity, and David Schneider likewise made that claim for Yapeese, there are reasons to believe both were in error. See Shapiro 2018; Kuper 2000, 151-157.

⁴⁶ This is also referred to as "partible paternity." See, for example, Beckerman and Valentine 2002, Shapiro 2009.

polygyny, is an indicator of preference for marriage regimes where paternity confidence is more easily achievable (Bethmann and Kvasnicka 2007).

Anthropologists have analyzed a variety of cultural practices as reflective of a concern to enhance paternity confidence. These include cultural rites involving menstrual huts (Small 1999), claustration/'Purdah' (Dickemann 1981), and *couvade*—a ritual complex found throughout native South America (Metraux 1949) and elsewhere which occurs during the perinatal period surrounding childbirth. In the institution of *couvade*, for example, both mother and father participate in dietary and behavioral avoidances designed to guard against adverse impacts on the child's well-being (based on a logic of sympathetic magic) and where a father's somatic symptoms often mirror those of his wife—including in some cases, her birth pangs. Fathers avoid their normal violent or dangerous activities of killing (fishing, hunting, and warfare) and cutting (felling the forest for a garden) and typically rest in bed. This ritual establishes a mystical/magical triangular union of solidarity between mother, father, and child—with mother's and child's well-being understood as directly impacted by precautions taken by both parents. This ritual celebrates the biparental creation of a child and makes the "social unit of parents-and-child visible" (Rival 1998; Doja 2005). But while the ritual involves both parents, it is not the mother's relationship with the child which requires special social recognition but the father's. Thus, anthropologists have widely understood this rite as a dramaturgical "affirmation of paternity" by the husband and father (Malinowski 1937, 215; Doja 2005, 945). And when a husband's *couvade* restrictions result in mother and child successfully surviving the dangerous period, and perhaps also when a husband experiences psychosomatic symptoms mirroring those of his wife, this lends subjective confidence to the husband and everyone around that he is indeed the father.⁴⁷ *Couvade* provides, to use Mary Douglas's wording, "primitive proof of paternity" (2002, 65).

Several studies have also documented the widespread tendency of mothers and mothers' relatives to emphasize to the husbands how much the child looks like them (Regalski and Gaulin 1993; Apicella and Marlowe 2004; Daly and Wilson 1982; McLain, Setters, Moulton, and Pratt 2000).

Malinowski reported, for example, that among Trobrianders, it is "extremely bad form and a great offense" to suggest a child looks like its mother. Rather "every child looks like its father. Such similarity is always assumed and affirmed to exist" (1929, 174-175). Naming patterns (such as the widespread use of paternal surnames and patronyms) often signal and publicly affirm links of offspring to their fathers. Even in some matrilineal systems, such as in the Trobriands, where formal names may pass along a mother's line, each child may also have a name bestowed by its father—a name signaling the paternity connection (Senft 2007).

Marriage traditionally is a cultural institution that prescribes sexual fidelity and supports paternity confidence as a contributor to robust male-female marital and parental partnerships. But sexual intercourse occurs in private—with procreative outcomes visible only in and through the body of a woman. No such natural disclosure marks the identity of the biological father (the *genitor*). Furthermore, sexual solicitation and seduction (mate-poaching) frequently are directed at married women. So what percent of the time are husbands cuckolds? To what extent are husbands justified in having paternity confidence? And to what extent does this vary across societies?

In one study, Gaulin and Schlegel (1980) sampled 135 societies using a standardized measure of female sexual promiscuity and found that in 55% of these societies, there were grounds for high paternity confidence—and also found that high paternity confidence was associated with higher investment and support for children by fathers and their relatives. In another study of extramarital sexual activity in 57 cultures, Huber, Linhartova, and Cope (2004) found comparable results. In both studies, a minority of cultures had comparatively low levels of paternity confidence. To explore how paternity confidence matches actual paternity, Anderson (2006) reviewed published reports on nonpaternity rates based on genetic testing. In the 30 studies where genetic data was collected under conditions of low paternity confidence, the median rate of nonpaternity was 29.8%. But in the 22 studies where data was collected in contexts of high paternity confidence, the nonpaternity rate was 1.7%.

47 Rival (1998, 637) cites a case where a husband who scrupulously observed *couvade* interpreted the child's subsequent illness as evidence confirming his own doubts about being the father.

An example of a high paternity culture with high father investment is the Dogon of Mali. The Dogon do not use birth control, and most (83%) Dogon women have high fertility ranging from seven to thirteen live births. In a genetic sample of Dogon father-son pairs (N=1,136) whose families had not converted to Islam or Christianity but whose women continued using the traditional menstrual hut (understood by anthropologists as promoting cuckoldry defense), the nonpaternity rate was 1.3% (Strassmann et al. 2012, 9781).

In short, there are reasons to believe that a high number of traditional cultures, and individual fathers within those cultures, do achieve relatively high levels of warranted paternity confidence. They do this, not by litigating at every birth who the biological father is, but by creating a marriage that publicly affirms who the father is supposed to be, and by creating a supportive marriage culture maximizing the likelihood that the husband is indeed the *genitor*, and then by insisting that this father (the *pater*) simply be presumed to be the father. In most cultures, even the actual genitor has no right to claim legal paternity of a child born to a woman married to another man. Marshall Sahlins (1960, 81) summarizes the core cross-cultural principle, “Almost all societies adhere, implicitly or explicitly, to the dictum of the Napoleonic code in this respect: the father of the child is the husband of the mother.”

Marriage enhances men’s trust in their wives, and trust in their own paternity. It enhances women’s trust that their marital partners are fully committed to them and to the flourishing of their offspring. It benefits children by giving them fathers, in addition to mothers, and a social identity linking them to a whole network of supportive kin.

That is, male-female marriage is a social and cultural formation grafted onto a biological reproductive template. Male-female sex makes babies. Babies need parents. Keeping male-female sex inside marriage gives babies both the parents they need—a father and a mother. Nature provides each child with a mother.⁴⁸ Culture—through the institution of marriage—works to ensure they have a father as well. That is, a marriage culture not only provides foundations for a man’s confidence that he is the biological father of a child and publicly affirms the paternity relationship through symbolic markers, but it

insists that biological paternity is not enough. Men must be social fathers.

The reason cultures of marriage historically stigmatized adultery is because children deserve to know who their father is. They deserve a father who plays the role of father to them, which is best done if simultaneously playing the husband’s role to their mother. You do not consistently get stable marriages and committed fatherhood unless a marital ethic of sexual exclusivity allows a man to presume with a degree of confidence that children are genuinely his own. So, what do we find anthropologically until recently? Marriage as a social institution historically present in societies the world over irrespective of whether Christianity is present or not—built up around two distinct and non-interchangeable “parts”—one part male and one part female, the twoness of marriage grounded in the twoness of sexual and procreative dimorphism. Since all societies need to ensure that the children who result from sexual relations between men and women are cared for and socialized into being competent and good moral adults, then we should not be surprised to discover marriage historically present in societies the world over—binding male and female parties together in service of biological procreation, social reproduction, and the flourishing of the next generation.

A view of marriage as a sexual union of male and female does not rest purely on a Christian or religious viewpoint, but until recently was the default understanding of marriage—even in societies that affirmed same-sex sexual activity (cf. Rynkiewich 2022), as in ancient Greece, New Guinea, or Tahiti. Long before the words of Jesus about the twoness of marriage being grounded in the twoness of God’s creation of male and female (Mark 10:6-9), marriage as an institution binding together male and female partners in a functional complementarity in service of both biological procreation and social reproduction was present in societies the world over. And the motivating end of such a marital ethic: not irrational animus or psychopathology, but sacrificial care for a new generation brought into being by the necessarily joint activity of male with female, a new generation fully supported because of the partnering institution of marriage by fathers as well as by mothers.

⁴⁸ Indeed, the offspring of all mammalian species have dependent relationships with their mothers.

The Relevance of the Anthropological View

Today, when some Christian universities affirm what Christians have always affirmed, they do so against the backdrop of what has recently become a far more influential sexual paradigm whose spokespersons deem the historic Christian sexual ethic outrageous, extremist, and harmful. Anthropology helps reframe consideration of these competing paradigms.

Consider a biological metaphor. A biologist who encounters a self-contained cluster of unique tissues in a member of a newly discovered species, but not in other members of that species, would rightly infer this is more likely a cancerous tumor than a healthy organ. “Outliers” are less likely to represent primordial essential goods than are shared elements. Thus, the charge that the Christian male-female sexual marital ethic is “extremist” (that is, an outlier) rather naturally feeds into the suspicion that it is harmful, pathological. But the anthropological view invites us to reconsider “Which paradigm is the outlier?” and “What outcomes result from each paradigm?”

Which Paradigm is the Outlier?

Christians in diverse societies affirmed a marital ethic that, until recently, shared a great deal in common with surrounding cultures and religions, including a.) the assumption that marital partners should be a man and a woman (a cross-sex conjugal bond), b.) that socially approved sexual activity should be a defining feature of the marital relationship—as against non-marital male-female sexual relations which lacked parallel public moral approval,⁴⁹ and c.) that marriage provides the morally prescribed institution for procreation, where biological fathers (*genitors*) are expected to serve also as social fathers (*paters*), and where each child’s father and mother—married to each other—partner in the joint project of social reproduction.

However, in contemporary American higher education, the only remaining representatives of such an earlier worldwide pattern are outliers. Today, when

Christian colleges affirm what Christians have always affirmed, they do so against the cultural backdrop of a revolutionary and imperialistic sexual paradigm with which they share little.

However, within the broader scope of human cultural history, the new paradigm is the outlier. Admittedly, there have always been (mostly) men furtively soliciting sex from others with no strings attached—with no primordial commitments to sexual partners and any resultant offspring. What is historically and culturally unprecedented is accredited moral authorities (the university sexual consent architects) actively instructing young people that they may solicit sex from others without the entailment of any specified relational commitments or larger normative meanings, without any procreation and social reproduction outcomes in view,⁵⁰ and without the need for consultation, approval, and support from parents and others.

Which Paradigm is Most Productive of Harm?

By what criteria should we assess outcomes of competing ethics? Two options present themselves: outcomes related to consent and outcomes related to social reproduction.

Consent

On one paradigm, approved sex should exist only where consent and mutual commitment are publicly expressed in marriage, an institution oriented to ensuring any resulting children have both a father and mother in a single home committed to them and to each other. Sex here is a normatively meaningful act, hedged about with prescribed denial of consent for any offer of sexual relationship outside marital bonds.

On the alternate paradigm, the only normative barrier to sex with anyone is their individual lack of consent. No other parties (parents, the public) play prescribed supportive roles in identifying and rejecting improper solicitations. The transient will of the solitary individual being solicited—an often young, attractive, and naïve individual—is elevated to a transcendent

⁴⁹ And lacked a parallel concern to provide each child a father, and not just a mother.

⁵⁰ This is not because older sexual ethics insisted that the only justified reason for any sexual act was procreative, as is often incorrectly attributed to them, but rather, that the only relational context in which sex should occur is in a marriage where father and mother are fully prepared to care for resultant offspring. That is, every child ought to be conceived only by parents actually prepared to function jointly—through marriage—as mother and father to them.

status, the sole barrier to desired sex. The challenge, of course, is that this elevation of individual consent as the only barrier to sex with anyone is embedded in a cultural ideology that has first deconstructed the very norms and ideals by which denial of consent makes compelling sense.

Indeed, in the ideology of the new paradigm, offering to have sex with another is a generous and virtuous act of hospitality, with theologians of the new ethic explicitly framing “wanton” and “promiscuous” sex as exemplifying the virtues of “generosity” and “hospitality” (Stuart 1999; Goss 2004; Cheng 2011; Clark 1990; Haldeman 2007; Hunt 1991; Jennings 2013; McNeill 1988; Rudy 1997; Stuart 2003; Wilson 1995). Thus, offering to have sex with someone is like offering someone a cup of tea. The 2015 video “Consent—It’s as simple as Tea” was an instant viral sensation. In a little over a year, this video was reportedly viewed 150 million times and translated into 25 languages (Heffernan 2016), quickly becoming a staple of sexual consent pedagogy in schools and colleges. It concludes, “Whether it’s tea or sex, consent is everything.”

The hospitality metaphor frames (and rationalizes) sexual solicitation as generous concern for another’s thirst, for their well-being, as against the more probable reality that it is the sexual thirst of the initiator that motivates the invitation to uncommitted sex. Ethics related to sharing sex, as against the ethics of sharing food or drink, diverge in traditional cultures. Likewise, in the Bible, while it is good promiscuously to share cups of cold water (and presumably hot tea) with all who thirst (Mathew 10:42), the man who himself thirsts for sex should “drink” from his own well. His “springs of water” should “never be shared with strangers,” never “overflow in the streets.” People should seek sexual satisfaction only with their spouse (Proverbs 5:15-21). Sharing food and drink (commensality) versus sharing sex are different realities with fundamentally different entailments.

Furthermore, in tea-drinking cultures, even the act of declining tea offered by a hospitable host is often extraordinarily difficult to accomplish without giving offense. It is not simple (Brady and Lowe 2020; Kerr 2019).⁵¹ On what grounds does one justify the rejection of a generous offer of hospitality? And when the new sexual paradigm deconstructs and scorns older meanings related to sexual morality—the very meanings

by which refusals of transient uncommitted sex make good sense—it should not surprise that the denial of consent becomes more burdensome, more difficult, not less (Humphreys and Kennett 2010; Gamble 2019; Graybill 2017). And indeed, some scholars attribute elevated rates of sexual assault and rape on university campuses to a hookup culture (Gamble 2019) where sex is stripped of larger meanings, and only consent matters, with evidence suggesting that as many as 78% of college students’ unwanted sexual experiences occur in the context of hookup culture (Flack et al. 2007). While one might easily imagine that a campus culture with “consent” as the solitary ruling center of sexual ethics would be the safest for vulnerable parties, female students in these universities report significantly higher rates of consent violation than do females in universities where male-female marriage is the touchstone of sexual ethics (Vanderwoerd and Cheng 2017; Best 2018, 109-110). In short, there are reasons to believe that the new sexual paradigm itself contributes to the pervasive presence of consent violation in the contemporary world.

Procreation and Social Reproduction

So if the worldwide institution of marriage existed historically, not primarily to serve adult friendship needs, but as an institution oriented towards procreation and social reproduction, then what? This should naturally press us to consider a whole range of additional goods and harms resulting from the diverging sexual ethics that members of our society live by—goods and harms related to the next generation. For example, if marriage historically existed to bind children to their fathers, and not only their mothers, to what extent are new norms undercutting this? And with what outcomes? A wide variety of research questions emerge from such a procreation/social reproduction starting point.

Suppose one begins with a concern for the experience and well-being of emerging generations. In that case, one notes that children enter a world of tertiary strangers, but with pre-established primary (non-tertiary) relationships with kindred—with mother and father, brother and sister, grandfather and grandmother, aunt and uncle, cousin, and so on. Not only do children learn kin terms for an extensive

⁵¹ When it comes to food or drink hospitality, even the Apostle Paul advised Jewish Christians to partake in the hospitality offered by Gentile hosts, “asking no questions for conscience sake” (I Cor. 10:27).

network of kin, but relatives acknowledge their relational commitments to the child through specified kin terms. Children with married parents acquire an optimal social capital network understood as kin, who remain kin across the life course.

And historically, it was the institution of marriage that not only built the primordial links between husband and wife, father and child, but that expanded the kin-based social capital resources that benefitted maturing children. That is, by enhancing paternity confidence, marriage multiplied each child's number of "blood" relatives (what anthropologists sometimes refer to as *consanguineal* relatives). In a marriage culture, each child has a father as well as a mother. And each child has four grandparents, not merely one (mother's mother). And the public institution of marriage underpins the additional category of *affinal* relatives—relatives by marriage, with affinal ties typically nourished by social norms involving gifts, rituals, and mutual obligations. The existence of marriage historically exponentially expanded the supporting cast of relatives for each child and across their life. When the child marries, in a marriage culture, he or she has "four parents' estates to draw from, and that of eight grandparents. [But] for single parents, perpetual impoverishment is their likely lot" (Murray 1994, 14). A culture of faithful covenant marriage, with accompanying kinship ties, benefits children in the contemporary world in many significant ways, as outlined by anthropologist David W. Murray (1994). And whether stable marriages are present or absent is enormously consequential for the flourishing of the next generation and the ongoing good of social reproduction.

Conclusion

This paper has retrospectively examined the anthropology of marriage as it traditionally existed around the world. Rather than the historic Christian view of sex and marriage being an extremist outlier, it argues that the current paradigm where consent is the solitary touchstone of sexual ethics represents the divergent and extremist model. Rather than the ethic of sex only in male-female marriage being primarily productive of harm, it suggests that such a marital ethic is designed to protect successfully against many likely harms. Even when the primary concern is with violations of consent, there are reasons to believe this ethic has great strengths. Rather than the ethic of male-female marriage being motivated by irrational animus,

the anthropology of marriage documents the paradigmatic nature of male-female marriage and suggests that it has the good of social reproduction and the flourishing of the next generation in view, something largely lost from view in the current paradigm of sexual ethics. We leave for another occasion a fuller anthropological examination of recent developments in all these areas.

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Robert J. Priest is an anthropologist. He is retired from full-time teaching, but currently writes, consults, speaks, and occasionally teaches adjunct courses. During his 19 years as Professor of Mission and Anthropology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, he served as the primary dissertation supervisor for 36 Ph.D. students. For a decade he directed the Ph.D. Program in Inter-cultural Studies at Trinity. He has served as president of both the American Society of Missiology (2013-14) and the Evangelical Missiological Society (2015-17). His research and writing have included a focus on the anthropology of religion, race and ethnicity, sexuality and marriage, short-term missions, religious conversion, contextualization, missiology as a field, and witchcraft accusations. On occasion, he has coordinated teams of senior scholars working together on specific research and writing projects, such as in the Africa Leadership Study (2008-2018), where results were published in a 2019 book co-edited by Robert Priest and Kirimi Barine: *African Christian Leadership: Realities, Opportunities, and Impact* (Orbis/Langham).

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APPENDIX

Governing Members of the CCCU

<i>Sex Only in Male-Female Marriage</i>	
1.) Abilene Christian University	We believe Scripture teaches that God intends for sexual relations to be reserved for marriage between a man and a woman. We recognize that this belief may conflict with the practice or vision of the larger culture. Yet we hold to the historic Christian view on this issue while being respectful of those who disagree with us. https://cdn01.acu.edu/community/offices/administrative/dean-of-students/policies/general-university-policies.html#sex [March 19, 2021]
2.) Asbury University	The University affirms the Biblical view of human sexuality as being expressed fully in the context of a marriage between a man and a woman. Sexual Immorality (including adultery, same-sex behavior and premarital sexual intimacy) . . . these behaviors are expressly prohibited in Scripture. Offenses in this area are almost certain to result in separation from the University for a period of time. https://www.asbury.edu/life/resources/handbook-community-life/commitments/morality/ [March 19, 2021] A faithful interpretation of Scripture affirms the principle that sexual purity honors God and that all forms of sexual intimacy that occur outside the covenant of heterosexual marriage are sinful distortions of the holiness and beauty for which God intended. https://www.asbury.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/2019_04_10-AU-Human-Sexuality-Statement.pdf [March 19, 2021]
3.) Azusa Pacific University	Sexual union is intended by God to take place only within the marriage covenant between a man and a woman. https://www.apu.edu/about/sexuality/ [March 19, 2021]
4.) Belhaven University	The University upholds the institution of marriage between members of the opposite sex as the proper relationship for the sharing of activities of a sexual nature. Therefore, any sexual conduct not within these biblical guidelines is prohibited. https://www.belhaven.edu/pdfs/campus_life/TheKilt.pdf [March 19, 2021]
5.) Bethany Lutheran College	We recognize that human sexuality is a wonderful gift from God . . . to be used solely inside of marriage between a husband and wife. https://blc.edu/campus-life/student-guidebook/standards-of-conduct/ [March 19, 2021]
6.) Bethel University, IN	Bethel holds [that] . . . marriage is between one man (born male), and one woman (born female) is the instruction of Scripture and sexual expression is to be confined to the marriage relationship. https://my.betheluniversity.edu/ICS/Resources/Human_Resources/HR_Manual/1.6_-_Covenant_of_Lifestyle.jnz [March 19, 2021.] We agree to follow the Biblical precepts regarding sexual purity. We will avoid immoral conduct including premarital sex, adultery, homosexual behavior, and the viewing or distribution of pornography. https://resources.finalseite.net/images/v1572890917/bethelcollegeedu/rw25jaabi6yjj4oerdka/BU_Community_Life_Covenant_2019.pdf [March 19, 2021]
7.) Bethel University, MN	We believe that sexual intercourse and other forms of intensely interpersonal sexual activity are reserved for monogamous, heterosexual marriage. https://www.bethel.edu/about/faith/covenant [March 19, 2021]
8.) Biola University	Biola University’s position on marriage affirms the goodness of sexual relationships as designed by God to be expressed within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman. . . . When joining the Biola community, students agree to refrain from engaging in behaviors and romantic relationships that are inconsistent with Biola’s position on marriage. https://studenthub.biola.edu/undergraduate-student-handbook-sexuality-relationships [March 19, 2021]

<p>9.) Bluefield College</p>	<p>Bluefield College is committed to an orthodox, traditional view of biblical marriage and sexuality. Dating and relationship practices should be in line with our Christian view of human sexuality. Students should only engage in sexual contact with a person who is their spouse. P. 45, 2020-2021 Bluefield College Student Handbook. https://mybc.bluefield.edu/ICS/Portlets/ICS/Handoutportlet/viewhandler.ashx?handout_id=684671ea-ad46-4232-a4c3-c914c1db8aca [March 19, 2021]</p>
<p>10.) California Baptist University</p>	<p>[calls for] refraining from sexual conduct outside of marriage [defined as] the uniting of one man and one woman in covenant commitment for a lifetime. https://calbaptist.edu/CBU%20Student%20Handbook%202019.pdf [March 19, 2021]</p>
<p>11.) Calvin University</p>	<p>Calvin University holds that premarital intercourse and casual sexual relationships are in conflict with biblical teaching. https://calvin.edu/directory/policies/student-conduct-code#IIIF [March 19, 2021] Our institutional approach is framed by the position of the Christian Reformed Church in regards to same-sex sexual behavior, and the university understands Christian marriage to be a covenant between a man and a woman. https://calvin.edu/about/diversity-inclusion/faq.html [March 19, 2021] Chastity is the biblical pattern for ordering the sexual dimension of our lives, and honors sexual relations as having their proper place in a marriage relationship between a man and a woman. https://calvin.edu/events/sexuality-series/lgbt-homosexuality-faq.html [March 19, 2021]</p>
<p>12.) Central Christian College of Kansas</p>	<p>Adultery, homosexual behavior, premarital sex, and pornography are banned (p. 12). Sexual intimacy is [to be] celebrated [only] within the context of a life-long marriage covenant between a husband and wife. (p 15). https://www.centralchristian.edu/resources/handbook-20-21-2/ [March 19, 2021]</p>
<p>13.) Charleston Southern University</p>	<p>All forms of sexual intimacy that occur outside the covenant of heterosexual marriage, even when consensual, are distortions of the holiness and beauty God intended for it. https://www.charlestonsouthern.edu/about/what-we-believe/ [March 19, 2021]</p>
<p>14.) Clarks Summit University</p>	<p>Based on the model of God’s creative design, we believe that marriage joins one man and one woman and is the only relationship in which sexual intimacy should be expressed. https://www.clarkssummitu.edu/about-csu/core-values/ [March 19, 2021] Clarks Summit University values the sanctity and permanence of marriage. . . Students are not to engage in and maintain same-sex romantic or sexual relationships. https://www.clarkssummitu.edu/life-at-csu/campus-life/student-handbook/ [March 19, 2021]</p>
<p>15.) College of the Ozarks</p>	<p>sexual relations are for the purpose of the procreation of human life and the uniting and strengthening of the marital bond in self-giving love, purposes that are to be achieved solely through heterosexual relationships in marriage. Misuses of human sexuality . . . include . . . gender expression inconsistent with sex assigned at birth (transgender), gender transition, sexual abuse, sexual harassment, sexual assault, heterosexual misconduct, homosexual conduct, or possession of pornographic materials. http://images.cofo.edu/cofo/StudentHandbookSp20.pdf [March 19, 2021]</p>
<p>16.) Colorado Christian University</p>	<p>“Marriage” is a covenanted relationship between a man and a woman validated by a current license issued by a governmental authority. P 111. Prohibited activity [includes] Sexual activity by consensual partners [who are] non-married. . . Same-sex relationships: engaging in a romantic same-sex relationship, defending, or advocating for same-sex romantic relationships. P 115 https://www.ccu.edu/campus-life/community/student-handbook/ [March 19, 2021]</p>
<p>17.) Concordia University, CA</p>	<p>The University community’s commitment to the authority of Scripture leads us to believe that a sexual relationship is to be understood and experienced within the context of that mutually acknowledged commitment to lifelong union known as marriage, and that marriage is the lifelong union of one man and one woman Therefore, sexual intimacy involving genital contact, outside of marriage is prohibited. (p. 26) https://www.cui.edu/Portals/0/uploadedfiles/StudentLife/Student Code of Conduct.pdf [March 19, 2021].</p>

18.) Concordia University, MI	Consensual sexual behavior outside of marriage is prohibited. . . . God in His Word affirms sexual union in the marriage relationship of one man and one woman https://catalog.cuw.edu/undergraduate/student-conduct/article-2-polices-general/ Specifies as applying to both the Ann Arbor Michigan campus and the Wisconsin Campus [March 19, 2021]
19.) Concordia University, NE	Human sexuality was designed and intended by God to occur within the boundaries of marriage between one man and one woman. https://www.cune.edu/application/files/3115/7539/5665/Student_Handbook_Policies_Guidelines_2019-20.pdf [March 19, 2021]
20.) Concordia University, WI	Consensual sexual behavior outside of marriage is prohibited. . . . God in His Word affirms sexual union in the marriage relationship of one man and one woman https://catalog.cuw.edu/undergraduate/student-conduct/article-2-polices-general/ Specifies as applying to both the Ann Arbor Michigan campus and the Wisconsin Campus [March 19, 2021]
21.) Corban University	All dating and sexual relationships should be consistent with those principles that support a faithful heterosexual marriage. In Student Handbook, Corban Community Life Walk-Though 20-21, p. 10, downloaded from: https://www.corban.edu/student-life/student-forms/ [March 20, 2020].
22.) Cornerstone University	Members of the Cornerstone community are expected to commit to sexual purity – appropriately reflected in either celibacy or heterosexual monogamous marriage. http://www.cuhandbook.com/#/section-2/sexuality/ [March 20, 2021].
23.) Covenant College	This creation ordinance establishes marriage between one man and one woman as the only proper context for all sexual relations. . . . Actions taken toward adopting a different biological sex (Gen. 1:27), sexual immorality (I Cor. 6:18, 1 Tim 1:8-11), adultery (Exodus 20:14), homosexual practice (Romans 1:26-27), and all other sexual relations (1 Cor. 6:9-10) outside the bounds of marriage between a man and woman are inconsistent with the teaching of Scripture and will result in disciplinary follow-up by the College. P. 7 https://www.covenant.edu/pdf/student/studev_student_handbook.pdf [March 20, 2021].
24.) Crown College	Crown College strives to enhance and strengthen a biblical sexual identity for its students. The College does not tolerate involvement in, participation in, or promotion of sexually immoral behavior such as premarital sex, cohabitation, adultery, homosexual behavior, or the use or display of pornographic, obscene, or suggestive materials of any kind. https://catalog.crown.edu/ [March 20, 2021]
25.) Dallas Baptist University	Faculty, staff, and students at Dallas Baptist University are expected to conduct themselves . . . in accordance with the highest standards of Christian morality. Toward this end, the University may subject to disciplinary action any faculty, staff, or student who engages in . . . sexual activity with another person outside of a monogamous heterosexual marriage between one biological male and one biological female. https://www.dbu.edu/title-ix/documents/title-ix-policy-dbu-2019-v-6.pdf [March 20, 2021].
26.) Dordt University	Dordt University believes, based on its understanding and interpretation of the Bible that the only appropriate and permissible context in which sexual intimacy may be expressed as overt sexual interaction is in the marriage partnership of a man and a woman. P. 34. https://www.dordt.edu/sites/default/files/student-handbook.pdf [March 20, 2021]
27.) East Texas Baptist University	While ETBU asserts that their standards for students are biblically grounded, and that they’ve received a Title IX religious exemption to hold their standards, they currently do not publicly post full standards on sexuality making them available only to their students. See: https://www.etbu.edu/info-for/current-students/student-policies-and-handbook [March 20, 2021]. However in their Title IX letter of request to the US department of education for Title IX exemptions (to which they currently appeal in justification of their standards), they affirm with their denomination that “the Bible teaches that the ideal for sexual behavior is the marital union between husband and wife and that all other sexual relations – whether premarital, extramarital, or homosexual – are contrary to God’s purposes and thus sinful.” https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/t9-rel-exempt/east-texas-baptist-university-request-02272015.pdf [March 20, 2021]. Furthermore an earlier student handbook showed the wording employed: “the University may sanction any student who engages in: *Sexual activity with a person of the opposite sex other than his/her spouse; *Sexual activity with a person of the same sex;” https://s3.amazonaws.com/sidearm.sites/eastxbapt.sidearmsports.com/documents/2017/10/26/ETBU_Student_Handbook_2017_18.pdf , [March 20, 2021.]

28.) Eastern Nazarene College	“Because we believe that it is God’s intention for our sexuality to be lived out in the covenantal union between one woman and one man” in marriage, other kinds of sexual relations are “contrary to God’s will for human sexuality.” https://enc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/2020-2021-Handbook.pdf
29.) Eastern University, PA	As a Christian community, Eastern University expects a sexual lifestyle that is consistent with our understanding of biblical teaching. For our community, inappropriate displays of affection are not acceptable and sexual intimacy is prohibited outside of marriage between a man and a woman. (p. 19) https://www.eastern.edu/sites/default/files/EU_Student_Handbook_19-20.pdf [March 20, 2021]
30.) Emmanuel College	Emmanuel College adheres to the biblical teaching that God had, and continues to have, a specific design for sexual behavior and marriage (Genesis 1:26-28; 2:22-24). Specifically, the biblical standard is the expression of sexuality within a monogamous marriage between one man and one woman (Mark 10:4-12). Sexual intimacy outside of the covenant of marriage, whether it is between a man and a woman or between two persons of the same sex, is considered an illegitimate moral option based on the teaching of Scriptures and as understood by Christian churches throughout history. https://ec.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Spring-2021-Student-Handbook-Updates.pdf [March 20, 2021]
31.) Erskine College	As a Christian, academic community committed to creating an environment where students, faculty, and staff can flourish, it is the position of Erskine that sexual activity belongs exclusively within the covenant of marriage between one man and one woman. https://www.erskine.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/The-Pilot-2019.pdf [March 20, 2021].
32.) Evangel University	All members choose to become a part of this community . . . pledge to . . . uphold standards of sexual purity: not engaging in sexual activity prior to or outside of marriage, as recognized in the biblical covenant between a man and woman. https://www.evangel.edu/college-arts-sciences-community-covenant/ [March 20, 2021].
33.) Faulkner University	In God’s perfect design for human sexuality, He instituted marriage between one man and one woman as the only permissible means by which couples could fulfill one another sexually. (P. 69.) https://www.faulkner.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020-2021%20Faulkner%20University%20Student%20Handbook(1).pdf [March 20, 2021]
34.) Fresno Pacific University	The Fresno Pacific University . . . affirm[s] the marital covenant as existing only between a man and a woman. Physical intimacy is reserved for individuals within a marriage covenant. https://handbook.fresno.edu/title-ix/education-and-programs [March 20, 2021]
35.) Geneva College	Following the teaching of the College’s controlling denomination, Geneva holds that intimate sexual behavior outside of male-female marriage, whether with a same-sex or opposite-sex partner, is wrong. The College expressly forbids this behavior and will deal with this in the context of the College’s student conduct policy. https://www.geneva.edu/student-life/vp/student-handbook#same [March 20, 2021]
36.) George Fox University	We believe that God has intended sexual relations to be reserved for marriage between a man and a woman. https://www.georgefox.edu/lgbtq/index.html [March 20, 2021].
37.) Gordon College	Those words and actions which are expressly forbidden in Scripture, including . . . sexual relations outside marriage, and homosexual practice, will not be tolerated in the lives of Gordon community members. https://www.gordon.edu/lifeandconduct [March 20, 2021]
38.) Grace College	. . . items expressly forbidden in the Scripture are not acceptable for members of the Grace Schools community. Examples include . . . premarital sex, adultery, [and] homosexual behavior. We affirm the holy institution of marriage as being between one man and one woman, rooted as it is in God’s creation of man and woman and in the relationship of Christ and his church. https://www.grace.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/2-ABOUT-Grace-College-and-Theological-Seminary.pdf [March 20, 2021]
39.) Greenville University	In keeping with Scripture and Christian teaching, marriage is understood to be between one man and one woman. The University does not condone same-sex romantic relationships or recognize same-sex marriages. https://www.greenville.edu/student_life/student_handbook/#PolicyonConsensualIntimateRelationshipsBetweenMembersoftheUniversityCommunity [March 20, 2021]

40.) Hannibal LaGrange University	The University . . . believes that God created male and female in God’s own image; that the gift of sex is reserved for marriage between one man and one woman; and members of our community should therefore abstain from premarital, extra marital and same-sex sexual relationships. https://www.greenville.edu/student_life/student_handbook/#TheologicalAssumptions [March 20, 2021]
41.) Hardin-Simmons University	As an institution, HSU holds the value that the act of sex should be reserved for marriage between a man and a woman. Any sexual act outside of this definition is outside the bounds of how we interpret God’s word in the Bible. (p 86). https://www.hsutx.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/2019-20-Student-Handbook-1.10.20.pdf [March 21, 2021]
42.) Harding University	Harding University holds . . . that God instituted marriage as a relationship between one man and one woman and that gender identity is given by God and revealed in one’s birth sex. . . . The University further holds to the biblical principle that sexual relationships are unacceptable to God outside the context of marriage and immoral. (p. 16) https://www.harding.edu/assets/www/student-life/pdf/student_handbook.pdf [March 21, 2021]
43.) Hope International University	HIU believes . . . Sexual relations of any kind outside the confines of marriage between one man and one woman are inconsistent with the teaching of Scripture. (p. 55) https://www.hiu.edu/uploads/publication/HIU_UOC_Student_Handbook_20-21.pdf [March 21, 2021]
44.) Houghton College	We celebrate the gift of sexuality, which brings new life into the world and binds together husband and wife for faithful, fruitful service to family, church and world. (f.n. 21)—Houghton College’s policies are based on the definition of marriage between a man and a woman as stated by The Wesleyan Church.) https://www.houghton.edu/a-vision-of-our-common-life/ [March 21, 2021] We privilege the understanding of marriage as between a man and a woman. https://www.houghton.edu/undergraduate/houghton-ny/campus-life/spiritual-life/what-we-believe/ [March 21, 2021] We believe that Scripture clearly prohibits certain acts, including . . . engaging in sexual relations outside the bonds of a Biblical understanding of marriage, including premarital sex, adultery and homosexual behavior. https://www.houghton.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/student-guide.pdf [March 2020]
45.) Houston Baptist University	Sexual misconduct [defined as including]. Consensual sexual behavior when it falls outside biblical intentions and/or explicit guidelines, such as sexual intimacies outside of a heterosexual marriage, including any type of intercourse, sensual nakedness, fondling of sexual organs, or sleeping intimately with one another. [and also including:] a. Single students dating married persons. b. Married students dating anyone other than their spouse. c. Homosexual relations. d. Cohabitation with members of the opposite sex. (p. 130). https://hbu-files.wpmucdn.com/uploads/sites/24/2020/11/Student-Handbook-2020-2021-FINAL-revised-11-12-2020.pdf [March 21, 2021]
46.) Howard Payne University	HPU affirms fidelity in marriage, purity/ celibacy in singleness, marriage as a union between a man and a woman, and God’s creation of male and female through biological gender assignments. HPU students are expected to conduct themselves in accordance with these standards of Christian morality. . . . behaviors that violate these standards [include] . . . sexual activity outside of marriage, sexual activity with a person of the same sex, sexual assault/ violence, sexual abuse, sexual harassment, the use of pornographic material, and activities related to adopting a gender other than one’s birth gender (p. 49). https://www.hputx.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/2020-2021-Student-Handbook.pdf [March 21, 2021].
47.) Huntington University	Sexual relations are reserved for the institution of marriage between a man and a woman. https://my.huntington.edu/ICS/Students/Student_Life/Student_Handbook/Community_Life_Agreement.jnz [March 21, 2021]
48.) Indiana Wesleyan University	To follow the teachings of the Scriptures regarding marriage We affirm that sexual relationships outside of marriage and sexual relationships between persons of the same sex are immoral and sinful.” https://www.indwes.edu/undergraduate/life-at-iwu/_files/iwu%20student%20handbook.pdf [March 21, 2021] Same wording appears in the more recent IWU Student Handbook 2020-2021, which is not posted publicly on-line. [Consulted March 21, 2021].

49.) John Brown University	John Brown University seeks to foster an environment of sexual purity and wholeness, which is based on a Biblical standard of fidelity in marriage between a man and a woman, and chastity in singleness. Therefore, sexual intimacy is reserved for a man and a woman in a marriage relationship. (p 23). https://www.jbu.edu/assets/student-development/resource/file/2018/JBU_StudentHandbook_2020.pdf [March 21, 2021]
50.) Judson College, AL	Sexual misconduct [includes] sexual relations outside of marriage. (p. 30). Judson College affirms the biblical teaching that God designed sexual activity to occur only within the context of marriage between a woman and a man. (p. 41) https://www.judson.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Student-Handbook-2020-21.pdf [March 21, 2021.]
51.) Judson University, IL	Any form of sexual immorality-including but not limited to pre-marital sex, cohabitation, homosexual behavior, and the use of pornography-is prohibited. (p. 31) https://www.judsonu.edu/uploadedFiles/_Judson_Public/Campus_Life/Residence_Life/Student%20Handbook%202019-2020_revised%2001.23.20.pdf [March 21, 2021]
52.) Kentucky Christian University	Biblical guidelines should give us clear direction in the one man and one woman in marriage as our guide for sexual involvement. Visitation to dorms or dwellings of members of the same or opposite sex for sexual activity outside marriage is a serious violation of campus rules. http://www.kcuknights.com/Code_of_Conduct [March 22, 2021] Sexual immorality by any student that deviates from or goes beyond the one man, one woman relationship within the traditional bonds of marriage may result in expulsion or appropriate disciplinary action which conforms to the University’s expectations. (p 5) https://www.kcu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Student-Handbook-for-web-17-18.pdf [March 22, 2021].
53.) Lee University, TN	The university . . . stands firmly against those elements of society which condone premarital and extramarital sexual relations, same-sex sexual behavior, and other forms of sexual behavior which violate scripture. Engaging in any sexual acts expressly condemned in scripture (premarital sex, adultery, and same-sex sexual behavior, etc.) will result in disciplinary consequences (p 18). https://www.leeuniversity.edu/wp-content/uploads/Student-Handbook.pdf [March 22, 2021].
54.) Letourneau University	Based on biblical standards, we believe that God has created the institution of marriage to be between one man and one woman, and only within this institution does God bless intimate sexual expression; all other intimate sexual expression outside of marriage is considered immoral behavior. (p. 30) https://www.letu.edu/student-life/handbook.html [March 22, 2021]
55.) Lubbock Christian University	LCU affirms that human sexuality is a gift from the creator God [to be present] . . . within the context of marriage between husband and wife. Sexual intimacy outside of a marriage is inconsistent with the teaching of scripture. https://lcu.edu/resources/student-handbook/code-of-community-standards/?L=0#c14462 [March 22, 2021].
56.) Malone University	Sex should be exclusively reserved for the marriage relationship, understood as a legal, lifelong commitment between a husband and wife. https://www.malone.edu/files/resources/student-handbook-2020-21.pdf [March 22, 2021]
57.) Messiah College	Therefore, we affirm Christian marriage to be the union of one man and one woman and that human sexuality should be understood within this framework. Because of this affirmation, premarital and extra marital intercourse and forms of same-sex sexual expression fall outside of God’s design for sexual expression. https://www.messiah.edu/download/downloads/id/531/sexual_behavior_and_harassment_policies_and_procedures.pdf [March 22, 2021]
58.) MidAmerican Nazarene University	We hold that the full behavioral expression of sexuality is to take place within the context of a marriage covenant between one man and one woman and that individuals remain celibate outside of the bond of marriage . . . In this community, biblical standards of sexual behavior are upheld. (p. 14) https://www.mnu.edu/sites/default/files/uploads/about/disclosures/MNU_Student_Handbook_Spring2021.pdf [March22, 2021]
59.) Milligan College	The Bible portrays faithful monogamy as the model for marriage [understood as between] male and female . . . that . . . become “one flesh.” [Marriage is to be] permanent [and] heterosexual. Both the Old and New Testaments prohibit homosexual activity.

	Milligan Student Handbook 2020-21, p. 7 https://www.milligan.edu/student-handbook/ —which points to sexuality statement where above quote appears: https://www.milligan.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/milligan_hs_policy.pdf [March 22, 2021]
60.) Mississippi College	Sexual impropriety [can involve] consensual sexual activity . . . [including] premarital sex, extramarital sex, homosexual activities, (p. 10). https://www.mc.edu/students/policies/application/files/1515/9801/8050/Mississippi_College_Student_Code_of_Conduct_2020-2021.pdf [March 22, 2021]
61.) Missouri Baptist University	The University affirms and celebrates that God has designed sexual relationships to be expressed solely within the marriage relationship between a man and a woman. Temptations to deviate from this norm include any and all sexual behavior outside of the covenant of marriage and any and all same-sex sexual behavior. (p. 26). https://www.mobap.edu/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/2020.08.12-Spartan-Virtues-Student-Handbook.pdf [March 22, 2021].
62.) Montreat College	Montreat College affirms the traditional Christian teaching that sexual intimacy was designed by God for a woman and a man in the context of a life-long marriage commitment. Therefore, all students, regardless of age, residency, or status, are expected to abstain from sexual intercourse and other forms of interpersonal sexual activity outside of marriage. (p. 35). https://www.montreat.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/student-handbook-20-21-v2.pdf (March 22, 2021)
63.) Mount Vernon Nazarene University	MVNU students are expected to abstain from sexual intimacy in heterosexual or homosexual relationships outside of Christian marriage as defined in the second paragraph above (p72) https://www.mvnu.edu/uploads/StudentLife/studenthandbook.pdf [March 22, 2021] This points to denominational statement as normative for the school: “Because we believe that it is God’s intention for our sexuality to be lived out in the covenantal union between one woman and one man, we believe the practice of same-sex sexual intimacy is contrary to God’s will for human sexuality https://2017.manual.nazarene.org/section/human-sexuality-and-marriage/ [March 22, 2021]
64.) Multnomah University	Misconduct includes . . . Sexual activity outside of a heterosexual marriage. (p. 56). https://s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/uploads.multnomah.edu/2020/08/20222550/Student-Handbook-with-Undergrad-Appendix_2020-2021_Final.pdf [March 22, 2021]. MU affirms that sexual relationships are designed by God to be expressed solely within a marriage between a man and a woman. [from Multnomah University’s Human Sexuality and Purity Understanding (https://s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/uploads.multnomah.edu/2020/04/22165218/2020_Human-Sexuality-and-Purity-Understanding.pdf)] [March 22, 2021]
65.) North Central University	we follow biblical standards for our lifestyle choices and avoid things that would cause us to fall short. Living by these standards and policies is expected of everyone in our community, and we reserve the right to part ways with anyone who doesn’t abide by them. https://www.northcentral.edu/student-life/spiritual-life-at-north-central-university/student-conduct/ [March 22, 2021]. The above references unspecified biblical standards whose violation might lead to “parting” ways, but does not spell them out in any currently public web posting. In the absence of any signal of a change of direction, it is likely that an earlier student guide (still posted in March of 2020) spells out what is no longer explicitly spelled out: “the Bible reserves sex exclusively for marriage between one man and one woman. NCU expects all members of the community to refrain from any form of sexual immorality including, but not limited to, any form of extramarital sexual activity, adultery, promiscuity, touching of intimate parts above or below clothing, homosexual behavior, transgenderism, viewing pornography, or sharing sexual images of one’s self or others.” https://www.northcentral.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/18-19_student_guide.pdf [March 2020]. Furthermore, since NCU identifies as an Assemblies of God School, and refers people to official AOG positions as reflecting its views, the position of the AOG on marriage is almost certainly the taken-for-granted framework for the biblical standards referenced above. See: https://ag.org/Beliefs/Position-Papers/Homosexuality-Marriage-and-Sexual-Identity [March 21, 2022].

66.) Northwest Nazarene University	we commit to a view of sex as being fully realized between male and female within the gift of the marriage covenant as defined by the church. We commit to avoid . . . any sexual contact outside of heterosexual marriage. https://www.nnu.edu/students/undergraduate/experience-nnu/student-handbook [March 22, 2021]
67.) Northwest University	We believe God’s design for the gift of sexuality is that it is to be exercised and enjoyed only within the covenant relationship of marriage between one man and one woman. Sexual relations of any kind outside these confines of marriage are inconsistent with the teaching of scripture, as understood by Christian churches throughout history. This prohibition applies to marital infidelity, sexual relationships between unmarried men and women, and homosexual practice. (P 22) https://eagle.northwestu.edu/departments/student-handbook/ [March 22, 2021] https://eagle.northwestu.edu/apps/large-downloads/NU_Student-Handbook_2019-2020.pdf [March 22, 2021]
68.) Northwestern College, IA	the college lifts up the Christian ideal of marriage between a man and a woman and contends that all sexual intimacy shall be within the bounds of such marriage. Students are not permitted to engage in sexual activity contrary to Biblical standards. This includes, but is not limited to, extramarital, premarital, or same-sex sexuality activity. (p 41) https://assets.nwciowa.edu/nwciowa/public/content/pdf/2020-21_Student_Handbook.pdf [March 22, 2021]
69.) Nyack College	In the context of marriage for which it was created, sex is a celebration of physical, spiritual, and emotional intimacy and unconditional love between two people (which we affirm to be only within the context of a faithful heterosexual marriage between a man and a woman) who have made a covenant to live together in marriage, for the remainder of their time on earth. (p 35) http://www.nyack.edu/files/NYACKStudentHandbook2015_16.pdf [This is an older handbook – but this is the one Nyack posts on-line. Consulted March 22, 2021] See also affiliated denomination statement on the topic. https://www.cmalliance.org/about/beliefs/perspectives/human-sexuality [March 20, 2021].
70.) Oklahoma Baptist University	Marriage is the uniting of one man and one woman in a covenant commitment for a lifetime. . . . Sexual relationships are expected to occur only in the context of marriage. (p. 98) https://www.okbu.edu/student-life/documents/student-handbook.pdf [March 22, 2021]
71.) Oklahoma Christian University	God’s plan [is] that sexual relations be a part of a marriage between a man and a woman. . . https://www.oc.edu/about/history/oc-covenant [March 22, 2021]. We affirm that sexual relationships are designed by God to be expressed solely within a marriage between a man and a woman. . . . Sexual relations of any kind, outside of marriage, are inconsistent with the teachings of Scripture. (p 61) https://myocfiles.oc.edu/files/services/Student_Services/Student_Handbook.pdf [March 22, 2021]. See also: letter to gov’t requesting exemption from select civil rights laws related to homosexuality https://www.campuspride.org/wp-content/uploads/oklahoma-christian-university-request-09052014.pdf
72.) Olivet Nazarene University	Sexual intimacy is only sanctioned by God between a man and a woman in the context of heterosexual marriage. . . . the University prohibits sexual activity outside of heterosexual marriage. (p. 20). https://www.olivet.edu/sites/default/files/pdf/University-Life-Handbook.pdf [March 22, 2021].
73.) Oral Roberts University	I will not engage in or attempt to engage in any illicit, unscriptural sexual acts, which include any homosexual activity and sexual intercourse with one who is not my spouse. I will not be united in marriage other than the marriage between one man and one woman. https://en.calameo.com/read/0033697701626397c8d3a [March 22, 2021]
75.) Ouachita Baptist University	human sexuality is a gift from God for procreation of human life and for the expression of one’s love through marriage. immoral acts [include] homosexual acts, . . distribution of pornographic materials, . . and/or other immoral sexual acts. (p. 17) https://obu.edu/resources/docs/TigerHandbook20202021.pdf [March 22, 2021].
76.) Palm Beach Atlantic University	Inappropriate Sexual Behavior [includes] Sexual activity that is inconsistent with biblical teaching, such as: sexual activity outside the bonds of marriage between a man and a woman. (p 19) https://www.pba.edu/resources/pdf/campus-life-pdf/Navigator%202020-2021%20.pdf [March 22, 2021]

77.) Point Loma Nazarene University	Students are expected to abstain from sexual intimacy outside of heterosexual marriage. https://catalog.pointloma.edu/content.php?catoid=49&navoid=2785 [March 22, 2021]
78.) Point University	Overt sexual activity between males and females should be reserved for marriage; Those who are not in a biblically sanctioned marriage should practice celibacy, whether heterosexual, homosexual, bi-sexual, or transgender in orientation. https://point.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/a_covenant_for_a_christian_community.pdf [March 22, 2021].
79.) Regent University	Sexual Conduct: Regent University fully accepts the teachings of the traditional Biblical view with regard to the goodness of our sexuality, the importance of chastity, and the place of heterosexual marriage as God's intended context for complete sexual expression to occur (Gen. 2:21-24). Sexual misconduct that is prohibited includes disorderly conduct or lewd, indecent, or obscene conduct or expression, involvement with pornography, premarital sex, adultery, homosexual conduct or any other conduct that violates Biblical standards. (p. 8) https://www.regent.edu/admin/stusrv/docs/StudentHandbook.pdf [March 22, 2021].
80.) Roberts Wesleyan College	the College places itself within that tradition of orthodox Christianity that believes, among other things, that . . . sexual activity outside of marriage, which is defined in our creed as a relationship between one man and one woman, is wrong. https://www.roberts.edu/media/3951/ethos_statement.pdf [March 22, 2021]
81.) San Diego Christian College	Members of community required “to “put off” all conduct prohibited by the Word of God including . . . sexual immorality, https://sdcc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/2019-SDCC-Community-Covenant.pdf [March 22, 2021] all forms of sexual activity outside of marriage are prohibited to both students and employees. (p 29). https://sdcc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/SDCC-course-catalog-2020-2021.pdf [March 22, 2021]. Although it does not specify definition of sexual immorality or marriage, the only student handbook currently posted (although older) spells out the likely meaning. “San Diego Christian affirms that sexual relationships are designed by God to be expressed solely within a marriage between husband and wife. . . . Therefore, it is the official policy of San Diego Christian that all forms of sexual activity outside of marriage are prohibited to both students and employees. (p. 9). https://internal.sdcc.edu/sites/default/files/Student%20Life/Resident%20Life/SDC-Student-Handbook-2017-18.pdf [March 22, 2021] See also: SDCC states in Athletes handbook: Students will not participate in practices that are morally wrong according to Scripture such as drunkenness, . . . any form of homosexuality, incest, fornication, adultery, or pornography. https://www.sdccchawks.com/d/2017-18/Athletics_Handbook_2017.docx [March 22, 2021]. [I don’t see more recent Athletes handbook.]
82.) Simpson University	“Simpson University supports the God designed and created human sexuality” as specified by the C&MA sexuality statement. . . . Simpson University cannot condone nor promote sexual behaviors that contradict our denominational and biblical standards (p. 59-60). http://simpsonu.edu/assets/doc/UG-Student-Handbook-20-21.pdf [March 22, 2021]. The denominational statement says, [March 22, 2021], as spelled out in C&MA statement: We are created and embodied as male and female. . . . For a man and a woman, this intimacy may be expressed and consummated sexually when they are united as one flesh in marriage. . . .The divine purpose for sexual union is to reproduce children . [both] homosexual and extra-marital sexual activity [are sinful]. https://www.cmalliance.org/about/beliefs/perspectives/human-sexuality [March 22, 2021]
83.) Southeastern University	Refrain from all sexually immoral behavior including: premarital sex; adultery; lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender behavior; and involvement with pornography in any form. (Biblical marriage consists only of a faithful, heterosexual union between one genetic male and one genetic female, and biblical marriage is the only legitimate and acceptable context for a sexual relationship.) (p. 11) http://cfseu.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/29/2019/02/1819-Student-Life-Handbook-FINAL.pdf

84.) Southern Nazarene University	Sexual intimacy is only sanctioned by God between a man and a woman in the context of heterosexual marriage. http://snu.edu/Websites/snuokc/images/Student%20Development/2019-20_Student_Handbook_updated-1-20.pdf
85.) Southern Wesleyan University	With the Bible as our guide there are certain practices which are not in keeping with the mission of SWU. Activities such as fornication (sexual activity outside of marriage), adultery, homosexual conduct, . . . The University expects students to refrain from such practices. (p 8) in Student Handbook 2020-2021 https://www.swu.edu/life-at-swu/student-handbook/ [March 22, 2021]
86.) Southwest Baptist University	Scripture teaches that heterosexual union is the only acceptable expression of sexuality and must be reserved for marriage and insists on sexual abstinence for those who are unmarried. God’s idea for marriage is a lifelong covenant between one man and one woman. All members of the University family should abstain from unbiblical sexual practices and from behavior, which may lead to a violation of God’s standards on sexual activities. (p. 8) https://www.sbuniv.edu/resources/documents/student-handbook.pdf [March 22, 2021]
87.) Spring Arbor University	Sexuality and Relationships: Scripture teaches that we are all created in the image of God, male and female, and the biblical definition of marriage is an intimate union to be entered into by one man and one woman. Therefore, intimate sexual expression is to be confined to the marriage relationship. SAU Student Handbook 2020-21 (p 11) https://www.arbor.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/SAU-Student-Handbook-2020-21.pdf [March 22, 2021]
88.) Sterling College	We affirm . . . the Bible’s teaching that we are to live either in fidelity within the covenant of marriage or chastity in singleness. Sterling College does not condone involvement in or promotion of sexually immoral behavior such as premarital sex, cohabitation, adultery, homosexual behavior, transgender expression a . . . https://www.sterling.edu/sites/default/files/Student%20Handbook%202020-2021.pdf [March 22, 2021]
89.) Tabor College	we commit to being guided by biblical teaching; . . . including the pursuit of healthy sexuality that celebrates sexual intimacy only within the marriage covenant between a man and a woman; and following Biblical instruction as interpreted by the MB Confession of Faith, (p. 15) https://4c73k3wb9bq2u35upara58lw-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/2020-2021-Student-Handbook.pdf [March 22, 2021].
90.) Taylor University	The God-ordained context for virtuous sexual expression and procreation is marriage, a sacred covenant between one man and one woman. https://www.taylor.edu/about/# [March 22, 2021]
91.) Toccoa Falls College	The College expects all members of the community to refrain from . . . any form of extramarital sexual activity, adultery, promiscuity, homosexual behavior, transgenderism, viewing/participating in pornography, or sharing sexual images of one’s self or others. (p. 47). https://tfc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Student-Handbook-2020-2021.pdf [March 22, 2021].
92.) Trevecca Nazarene University	The ideal for sexual intimacy is marriage between a man and a woman as a means of procreation and expressions of desire for so long as both live. Therefore, the University prohibits sexual activity outside of heterosexual marriage. http://trevecca.smartcatalogiq.com/en/2015-2016/Student-Handbook/University-Policies-and-Procedures/Sexual-Ethics-Policy [March 22, 2021].
93.) Trinity Christian College	Scripture teaches that human sexuality is part of the image of God. Human sexual activity as part of the creational order is to be expressed between a man and a woman and finds its culmination in intercourse between husband and wife. As children of God and as a Christian community seeking to live according to the Word of God, we affirm this standard of sexual conduct. Abstinence is the college’s expectation for all students who are not in such a marriage. (P. 19) http://tcc.trnty.edu/studentlife/handbook.pdf [March 22, 2021]
94.) Trinity International University	Practices that are specifically forbidden in Scripture, such as . . . premarital sex, abortion, adultery, homosexual behavior, use of pornography, drunkenness, profanity, gossip, racism, and infringement on the rights of others, will not be condoned. https://catalog.tiu.edu/university/community-life-expectations/ [March 22, 2021].

95.) University of Mary Hardin-Baylor	UMHB will be guided by the understanding that human sexuality is a gift from the creator God and that the purpose of this gift includes the procreation of human life and the uniting and strengthening of the marital bond in self-giving love. These purposes are to be achieved through heterosexual relationships within marriage. Misuses of God’s gift will be understood to include, but not be limited to, sexual abuse, sexual harassment, sexual assault, incest, adultery, fornication, and homosexual behavior. Student Handbook 2020-21. P. 61. https://go.umhb.edu/students/student-handbook [March 22, 2021]
96.) University of Northwestern	We support the sanctity of marriage as being a covenant between one man and one woman. As followers of Christ, we turn from sexual immorality in its many forms including but not limited to: pornography, pre-marital sexual relations, adultery, and same sex romantic intimacy and/or sexual relations. https://www.unwsp.edu/about-us/christian-values/declaration-of-christian-community
97.) Vanguard University of Southern California	We affirm the AOG position that the consistent sexual ideal in the Bible is chastity for those outside a monogamous heterosexual marriage and fidelity for those inside such a marriage. https://www.vanguard.edu/uploaded/Institutional_Manual/Statement-on-Human-Sexuality-BT00I001.3-2016-0225.pdf March 22, 2021. Inappropriate behavior includes . . . sexual sins such as adultery, homosexual behavior, and unmarried sexual behavior. (Student Handbook 20/21, p. 25) https://www.vanguard.edu/student-life [March 22, 2021]
98.) Walla Walla University	formulates policies for students that reflect the conviction that marriage is “a lifelong union between a man and a woman”. In keeping with this conviction, we expect students to refrain from premarital and extramarital sexual relationships. https://www.wallawalla.edu/campus-life/student-life-office/student-handbook-and-code-of-conduct/wvu-student-handbook-and-code-of-conduct/#c31554 [March 22, 2021].
99.) Wayland Baptist University	The university prohibits . . . inappropriate sexual behavior including, but not limited to: premarital sex, homosexuality, adultery, and indecent or obscene conduct or expression. Student Handbook 2020-21, p. 11. https://www.wbu.edu/student-life/student-services/student_handbook.htm [March 20, 2021]
100.) Warner University	We maintain control of our desires, avoiding pornography and abstaining from premarital sex; we agree with what the Bible teaches about homosexuality https://www.warner.edu/student-life/campus-life-expectations/ [March 22, 2021].
101.) Westmont College	The college does not condone practices that Scripture forbids. Such activities include . . . sexual relations outside of marriage. The college expects our members who choose to marry to abide by the commitment to lifelong heterosexual marriage https://www.westmont.edu/about/community-commitments/community-life-statement [March 2022, 2021].
102.) Wheaton College	According to the Scriptures, followers of Jesus Christ will: uphold chastity among the unmarried (1 Cor. 6:18) and the sanctity of marriage between a man and woman (Heb. 13:4); https://www.wheaton.edu/about-wheaton/community-covenant/ [March 22, 2021].
103.) William Jessup University	Within the Jessup community, we believe sexual relationships were designed by God for within a lifelong marriage between a husband and wife. As such, we expect students to abstain from sex outside of marriage. The university will address behavior outside of our expectations including, but not limited to: same-sex relationships, sexual relations between unmarried persons or persons of the same sex https://my.jessup.edu/studenthandbook/student-standards-of-conduct/ [March 22, 2021].
104.) Williams Baptist University	the values of the University community do not condone sexual impropriety, such as the use of pornography, pre-marital sex, adultery, co-habitation on or off campus, homosexual activity including same-sex dating behaviors, and all other sexual relations outside the bounds of marriage between a man and a woman. (WBU Student Handbook 2020-21 p. 5) http://eagle.williamsbu.edu/handbook/Student.pdf [March 22, 2021].
105.) Wisconsin Lutheran College	You will be expected to conform your life to the values of God’s Word. Notably: God’s Word reserves sexual intercourse for the marriage of one man and one woman, as his gift and for the sake of families. The Bible condemns as sin premarital sex and the trivializing of God’s gift of sex in pornography, sexually suggestive behavior, or sexual harassment, as well as in homosexual acts. (Student Handbook 2020-21, p. 3) https://www.wlc.edu/uploadedFiles/Content/Campus_Life/Student_Life/Student-Handbook.pdf [March 22, 2021].

CCCU -- Sex Only in Marriage – But Marriage Undefined	
106.) Anderson University, IN	All students (of any sexual orientation) are required to abstain from cohabitation with the opposite sex or with same-sex partners, premarital, or extramarital sexual behavior, overnight visitation in the residence of someone of the opposite sex (unless under parental supervision), or any same-sex or heterosexual sexual conduct not believed to be in keeping with university standards. https://anderson.edu/student-life/handbook/ [March 19, 2021]
107.) Anderson University, SC	P 59. Inappropriate Sexual Activity [defined as] Sexual activity between unmarried people of the opposite or the same sex. p. 67 behaviors that the University considers extremely serious [include] Sexual activity outside of marriage https://andersonuniversity.edu/campus-life/student-handbook [March 19, 2021]
108.) Bushnell University	Bushnell University affirms the belief that sexuality is a gift of God intended for the married relationship. . . https://www.bushnell.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Handbook-20-21.pdf [March 19, 2021]
109.) Campbellsville University	Inappropriate Sexual Behavior Definition: Any form of consensual sexual behavior or conduct outside the bonds of marriage. (P 35.) https://harrodsburg.campbellsville.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/2020-21-Student-Handbook-Harrodsburg-UPDATED.pdf [March 19, 2021]
110.) Lipscomb University	All students should practice the Biblical standards of sexual morality. Sexual immorality of any kind is prohibited. https://www.lipscomb.edu/student-life/student-expectations [see See Handbook -- https://drive.google.com/file/d/1_1OcxMubVR0nMjyWLg0LviB1YQX8EVZQ/view [March 22, 2021]
CCCU -- The Only Prohibitions are Title IX Prohibitions (Violations of Consent)	
111.) Concordia University, IL	No student handbook posted, or other information related to sexuality. [other than title IX]
112.) King University	Other than consent – the only other statement says no sex in dorms: “INTIMATE RELATIONS University residence halls are not an appropriate place to engage in sexual activity. Violation of this policy will be addressed through the Student Conduct Process.” https://www.king.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/student-handbook.pdf [March 22, 2021]
113.) North Park University	I could find no University stated position. No definition of marriage. No stated disapproval of consensual sexual relations or of any sexuality that does not violate Title IX. https://assets.northpark.edu/wp-content/uploads/20200824110930/UMC-19519-Handbook-2020-DIGITAL.pdf [March 22, 2021]. While the affiliated denomination formally takes a position that “Faithfulness in heterosexual marriage, celibacy in singleness—constitute the Christian standard. https://covchurch.org/embrace/wp-content/uploads/sites/92/2018/06/NPST_Paper-FINAL-Crops-Bleeds.pdf [March 22, 2021], my discussion with an NPU faculty member confirmed my conclusion that the university as a whole does not align with the denomination on this point.
114.) University of the Southwest	In the latest Student Handbook no evidence of standards aligned with biblical teaching on Marriage, etc. https://www.usw.edu/Student-Life/Student-Handbook

Wither Biological Sex?: The Gender Takeover

A Position Paper

Vincent E. Gil

In this position paper, I argue that current ideological and sociocultural shifts in the use and meaning of the term *gender* have also reconfigured what *biological sex* means. Both terms have been made isomorphic and synonymic. The paper challenges this novel relationship, exploring its confounded history and unpacking how and why genderqueer theorists intentionally minimize body knowledge to enable expressive individualism.

Linguistic, psychological and medical anthropology serve as tools of inquiry in my critique on why *gender* is now given the greater valence. Data from neurosciences are also used to refute notions of the body being just a “mute facticity,” as such theorists claim. Christian dogmas on sex and gender are also examined, as is the insistence on a binary model of humanity despite intersex births and the factuality of gender dysphoria. Christian incorrections, when perpetuated without ongoing analysis and change, continue what some call epistemic oppressions and hermeneutic injustices, contributing another layer to the problematic of sex and gender ideology as rendered today.

Everywhere in the world, the self starts with the body.
Roy F. Baumeister (1999: 5)

Introduction

Anthropology has always been a field where discourse and representations of the Other have been central, yet contested elements. From their earliest efforts, anthropologists have grappled with epistemic and political predicaments brought about by their writings; efforts to represent *that Other*. Such frictions eventually coalesced in self-critique volumes, like the now legendary *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Clifford et al. 1986).

In the 1990s, those self-reflections helped anthropology as a discipline turn that proverbial corner,

aiding itself to redefine methodology—a canonical moment in the discipline’s history. Questioned and reviewed was everything from field methods to how to sensitively capture, and describe, human sociocultural phenomena.¹

Discussions begun in *Writing Culture* continue to this day. To say we are now sensitized, if not sensitive, to the lexical appropriateness of narratives, terms, and meanings would be an understatement.

I am by training and practice a psychomedical anthropologist, with postdoctorals in sexological sciences and public health epidemiology of sexual diseases. My thirty-eight years of work in these domains have enabled scores of published articles, symposia, book chapters, now a book, all on topics that inform sexuality: sexual ethnographies, sexual diseases, explorations of the sexual self and identity, and gender.² Stating this confluence of training and

¹ Zenker (2014) reviewing *Writing Culture*’s 25th anniversary second edition, contextualizes this anthropological shifting by noting the world of the 1990’s had become an “increasingly fragmented, globalized, and (post)colonial world,” where writing was defined as *literary*, or *reflexive*, or *postmodern*, *deconstructive*, *post-structuralist*; with much of anthropology undergoing a “crisis of representation.” The net results are anthropologists with renewed sensibilities, writing ethnographies that are more nuanced, mediated by informant experiences, heightened sensitivities to issues of sex, gender, race, and class. (Zenker, Olaf. *Writing Culture*. *Oxford Bibliographies*, 29 May 2014. Retrieved from <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199766567/obo-9780199766567-0030.xml>).

² For a summary reference to my work, please see <http://drvincegil.com/about>. For a full Curriculum Vita, please contact me at the email address given in this article. My recent book, *A Christian’s Guide through the Gender Revolution* (Cascade, 2021), is the authorial reference under which this paper is written, and my position taken.

work early on is necessary, as it is also a backdrop to understanding my deep interest in sexuality and gender as these are rendered today—my current concern for misappropriated terminology and their effect on our understanding of persons. Thus, this position paper.³

Admittedly, the paper is also the result of frustration with academics and genderqueer philosophers whose aim is not to provide novel theoretical possibilities, but rather, to forcefully change culture by contriving lexical idioms that then inhere their understandings and agenda. These, by repetition, eventually root a new ideology.⁴ Political correctness and fear of push-backs make for unquestioned acceptance vs. possible critiques. The new gender terminology has thus altered the groundwork of essentialist thinking via replacement terms which argue against established understandings, most importantly, biological knowledge of the person (Gil 2021). This position paper attempts to untangle the terms, bring to light rationales used by genderqueer activists, their wrong assumptions, as well as how this “gender moment” affects our culture disciplines, and our faith as Christians.

Two Terms

Two terms, both important, yet distinct in many ways. Two terms, now conflated, confound their well-established differences. Since the 1950’s when the term *gender* was introduced by John Money (Goldie 2015, 6),⁵ it has taken the lead over the term *sex*, augmenting *gender*’s lexical entity and altering the meaning of *sex* biological. This is not just a case of polysemy, the capacity of a term to have multiple related meanings. It is also not a case of synonymy, two terms with sufficient semantic relationship to have them substitute for one another, although that is what has ultimately occurred.

Here, I will argue that such generosity with the term *gender* did not occur through serendipity, or casual preference for the term, or to just avoid the “sex word” altogether. *Gender* has been increasingly and deliberately employed as a lexical means of “liberating the world” from what came to be called “the oppressive duo,”⁶ the male and female binary which is core to biological *sex*. *Sex*, and thus its biologic binarism, had become a threat.

Contemporary gender discourses have not only challenged traditional definitions of all things sexual, but also questioned the veracity and influences of biological *sex* on our self-understanding. *Gender*—meaning the socially prescribed roles, performance of these, and internalized identity that result from a sexually-identified body—is now a well-established and staple term (Fausto-Sterling 2012). Biological *sex*—meaning the sex-chromosomal, hormonal, anatomical/phenotypic make-up of a person—is now given credence more as a social construction than as a factual, physical, epistemic, and thus determinative agent. In this novel discourse, the ‘reality’ and influences of *sex* biological are limited to what we lexically inhere to it (cf., Butler 1990; 1993; 2006).

Of course, how we think with language about our *sex* (its biology, physical embodiment) is intimately linked to how we think with language about our *gender*: both terms are close cousins. But there are distinctions to note about the terms, both connotatively and denotatively, to the degree that one should not hear the now popular phrase, “*gender* is assigned at birth” and believe it is factually correct.⁷ (More on this, forthcoming.)

When this now common elision in terms occurs, we are reminded of how purposely flawed our understanding of the terminology has become. Recently, Vioria and Nieto (2020) have devoted a complete book chapter in *The Spectrum of Gender*

³ I grant you, it’s a strange and eyebrow-raising combination for conservative Christians to sometimes understand, especially when people learn I was also, and earlier, trained in Christian theology.

⁴ Vygotsky (1986) emphasized the role of language in mediating cultural knowledge, a symboling tool that creates “master narratives” which then serve as reinforcing sources for what is believed. And of course, Bourdieu (1991) has argued that language should be also viewed as a medium of power through which individuals pursue their own interests and display their competencies.

⁵ See also Money, Hampson and Hampson (1955), for the original mention of the term.

⁶ Butler (1990), *Gender Trouble*.

⁷ Chromosomal and/or phenotypic *sex* is “assigned”—read, *medically determined*—at birth. *Gender* and identity certainly learn and are influenced by the body, but they congeal through experience and not a simple assignation. This process is discussed later in the paper.

to clarifying the terms, calling this elision “linguistic collateral damage” (115). Such flaws also point to wrong assumptions about the primacy of gender in enabling an understanding of ourselves. In such views, the sexual body doesn’t count for much: It’s the performance of gender and how one lexically defines it that is the greater reality.⁸

These notions, of course, challenge much of established scientific views, even as we further engage research on our chromosomes, hormones, and neurobiology. Contemporary gender notions also challenge Christianity, its historical views and interpretations of male and female humanity. Such challenges raise other issues for Christianity beyond not acknowledging intersexuality, to involve views on gender, as now depicted via identity and through historical social roles.

In the Beginning

Early in the 1990’s, revisionist ideas of sex and gender by philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler pointed out that both one’s biological sex, as well as gender, are only determinative and influential when these are imbued with lexical meaning (Butler 1993). In such thinking, any understanding of biological sex—be it how the brain learns about the body proper, or how the sexual body manifests its attributes and thus influences who we are—can only come when we instill biological sex with meaning through language, and thus create gender. Otherwise, biological sex itself has no real, determinative valence.⁹ In other words, we “authenticate” sex via gender, giving these “facticity,” through lexical attributes (Butler 1993; 2006).

Such thinking reveals the profound need by genderqueer theorists to confound the terms sex and gender, and diminish any impact biological, physical sex has on gender (as a construction) and gender identity (as an internalization of sexual self-understanding).¹⁰ Below, I address the reasons in detail.

I now find the terms sex and gender used interchangeably, with gender often taking on the lead, spoken of as if the gender construct “naturally” overrides—or ought to override—biological sex in its importance. Here, one of the many assumptions made is that cultural ideologies about sex are the sole source for understanding our biological sex, and not at all that the biological sexual experience itself may inform our own understanding, and certainly some of that ideology. Likewise, as stated, the idea that biological sex is just a linguistic reality, but not an ontological one, in its own right.¹¹

As a biological “category,” sex may well be subject to lexical description. Cultural ideology and linguistic terms certainly influence both sex and gender understandings, no doubt. But how we come to understand our embodiment, or “the situation of living and being in a body”¹² isn’t solely or primarily deduced from cultural ideologies about it: The body itself is a biological reality—an information mechanism that the brain begins to engage early on, even when words aren’t around yet, and ‘speaks to us’ in its own terms. Thus, while there is certainly a reciprocal influence between the body, its sexual form, and lexically learned cultural meanings about it, cultural meanings don’t come first: The biological body does come to be first, *and so does its ability to inform the individual’s brain about itself.*¹³

⁸ See Salih (2002), On Judith Butler and Performativity; Heinämaa (2012), Sex, Gender, and Embodiment.

⁹ In psychological terms, *valence* indicates the emotional value that is associated with a stimulus. The term is used in several instances to emphasize the affective component involved in the stimulus being talked about. In the case of “gender” as an affective construct, “giving it *valence*” equates to giving authority, power, influence, to the term, vs. for instance, the concept of “biological sex.”

¹⁰ There are many voices, but they coalesce in the works of such as Judith Butler (1993; 1996; 2004; 2006), Leslie Feinberg (1998), and before them, Simone de Beauvoir (1949). Reasons for the insistence of the term *gender* over *sex* is explained later in this paper.

¹¹ Cf., Stanford (1999), Contingent Ontologies, 3.

¹² For a more complete understanding of this notion, see Wood (2021), *Social Studies of Gender*, Chapter 1.

¹³ (In Opp., Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 1993, 1.) For Butler, both body and gender are part of *discourse*. These “exist” in fact; but are not “constituted” until they are legitimized, identified, constructed through discursive means. Thus, gender “absorbs and displaces sex” (1993, xi), since gender as discursive and performative can “classify,” “accept,” or “marginalize.” Butler continuously upholds her statement that the idea of sex is itself problematic. Sex is not a set object, but is a perfect construct. It is, in Butler’s understanding, a lexical, regulatory/cultural norm that creates an understanding of the body, even its appearance, over time. Subsequently, in this argument, the materiality of the body is discursive.

Going Neuro: Affect Theory and Body-to-Brain Imprinting

Neurobiology now has sufficient research examining neural mechanisms, their influence in sensory processing, sensorial modulation, affect formation and imprinting (e.g., *interoceptive coding*), to understand how such relate to experiences of the body, and eventual body-conscious knowledge.¹⁴ Here, I tap into this sister science for evidence.

Doing so does not equate—and I must be clear here—to my endorsement of the colloquially-known “hardwire paradigm” now so popular in neuroscience, yet so contested as a neuro-developmental model explaining sex/gender distinctions. (For more, read the footnote.¹⁵)

That said, one *can* safely cull from *affect theory* and neuropsychology proper an understanding of how early on in *neonatal* development, the body “informs” the brain “what biological sex it is” (natal male, female, or even intersex). This, through the body’s *limbic system*,¹⁶ and subsequently, through the body’s many organ systems and functions.¹⁷ I am referring to those baseline and elemental cues that come from the body—limbic affects that eventually coalesce into a pre-conscious, then semi-conscious, then (with the onset of language) conscious awareness in the brain, of who we are as a sexed body.¹⁸ To be clear here, these are well-documented limbic messaging systems that begin to operate early on in the newborn, spurred by brain development, body growth, and maturation.

The term *core affect* has been introduced in neurobiology to refer to these basic, psychologically

Such notions imply that the recognizable body is not biologically characterized or authenticated; rather, that it is a culturally characterized entity. While acknowledging the ‘reality’ of the biological body, Butler systematically deconstructs that reality by making the biological body subservient to social and lexical inscription, and it to gender. To Butler, the body has no capacity to speak on its own, or signify its own existence. From a biological perspective, however, what makes a body ‘real,’ ‘male’ or ‘female,’ is not its association with a lexicalized gender, but with things more tangible: its physical entity; its chromosomes and gametes, necessary to distinguish one sex from the other, and necessary for reproduction; an eventual body that differs some in constitution due to hormone action and physical differences; ultimately and despite momentous similarities, one with the ability to carry life to term while the other cannot. (See also Griffiths, *Sex is Real*, 8.)

¹⁴ Barsalou, L. W. (2008), *Grounded Cognition*. See also, Ionescu (2014), *Embodied Cognition: Challenges for Psychology and Education*; and how *interoception* ‘works’ (in Raimo et al. [2021], *Body Representations and Interoception*.) “Interoception” is explained as the *sense* of the internal state of the body (Craig 2002). That *sensing* can be both conscious and sub-conscious, and can encompass the brain’s process of integrating signals relayed from the body into specific brain subregions, allowing for a nuanced representation of the physiological state of the body or its regional parts.

¹⁵ Contestations of the dominant brain organization paradigm, now seen as ‘fact’ in neurobiology, are well noted in Jordan-Young and Rumiat (2010), and Jordan-Young (2010), who sum up the problems with it in the referenced works. This dominant brain organization paradigm proposes that steroid hormones at critical periods of fetal development give rise to permanent structural, functional, sex/gender differences in the brain and in subsequent behavior (cf., Hines [2004] *Brain Gender*; Cahill [2006], *Why Sex Matters for Neuroscience*). The paradigm is known as the “*hardwiring effect*”; and despite its many discontinuities, it has “moved beyond the level of theory to be treated as a simple fact of human development” (Jordan-Young and Rumiat 2010, 3): In simple terms, ‘every human behavior can be traced back to a biological substrate that severely, of absolutely influences it.’ In quoting this, I am not discrediting biological contributions to the development of an individual’s sexual-behavioral venue; only that *biological exclusivity* in determining behavior seems outweighed by evidences from the behavioral and social sciences.

¹⁶ The *limbic system* is a complex of nerves and networks in the brain close to the cortex. The ‘system’ controls basic emotions, and most importantly for our purposes, facilitates memory storage and retrieval, establishes emotional states, and links the conscious, intellectual functions of the cerebral cortex with the unconscious, autonomic functions of the brain stem. All this to say, the limbic system is involved in motivation, emotion, learning, and memory. Its influences are thus far reaching in forming the body of its states of being.

¹⁷ I am not referring here solely to sexual *dimorphism*, or the notion that the sexual body is only, can only be male or female, as significant biological evidence confirms intersex forms, genetically and/or hormonally produced. I am also not arguing about prenatal hormones creating “brain sex,” since that notion has been fiercely debated by biologists themselves (cf., Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body*, [2000, 40-42]), and is beyond the scope of this paper. For affect theory’s impact on body knowledge and cognition, see Duncan and Barrett (2007), *Affect is a Form of Cognition*.

¹⁸ At the neurological level, such *imprinting* is done through neural stimuli creating *affect* (sensations, emotions, feelings). At the behavioral level, we have initial bodily and visceral responses (such as when an erection occurs in males). Once affective cues are *scripted* by learned understandings and made *cognitions*, then, and only then can affect be considered motivational as an agency (Demos 1995, 88). Let’s remember, understanding is not automatically converted to *agency*.

primitive states of awareness that come from physiological properties like *hedonic valence* (pleasure/displeasure), and *arousal* (activation/deactivation).¹⁹ *Core affect* is characterized as a constant feedback stream which codes neuro-psychological and somato-visceral information and represents it to the brain, concurrently organizing the flow of that information.²⁰

Core affect is thus a means by which a person's brain comes to "experience," then "know" information about their bodies; eventually, about the external world as well. This information is ultimately translated into an internal code, or set of representations (Barnard et al. 2007). *Core affect* thus functions as *core knowledges* . . . "the handwriting of which is present from birth."²¹

Important to note here is that *understandings* are formed from the continuous feedback which comes from postnatal body experiences, eventual language development, and not from some in-utero "pre-wiring." The brain is not "sexed" in utero as the genitals are—the brain "does not occur in two distinct forms—male/or/female" (Jordan-Young and Rumiati 2011, 3). Thus, the brain learns its elemental sexual anatomy from a specific body type and maturation schema; but the brain itself does not come "formed" or "conformed" to one or the other sex.²²

Infants and their Organs

Let's generate examples of how the body "informs us" about "the sex of us," well in advance of our linguistic and cognitive maturation capacity to understand meaning. Take infants discovering their "privates":

It isn't long after birth that infants begin to relate primal sensations of pleasure (understood here to be limbically satiating feelings) via genital touching. This happens in both males and females—male infants tugging and pulling on their penises, and female infants putting hands to their vulvas, sometimes stroking it.²³ Comforting, soothing gestures instill in infants limbic connections with their organs way before these have any symbolic, let alone cultural-ideological or linguistic meaning for them. These parts are being identified limbically as something "they have"; by receiving their organs' interoceptive information (i.e., the messages that come back to the brain), they sensorially relate with the organs, touching, pulling, stroking—it calms and distracts them. Infant brains don't cognize the connections the way I'm explaining them here, lexically. But somatoviscerally, the connections form and their effects unfold "this way."²⁴ Thus, the "living and being in a body" provides a baseline awareness

¹⁸ See Barrett 2006; Duncan and Barrett 2007; Russell 2003; Russell and Barrett 1999.

²⁰ "Body sensations (ie., 'somatovisceral' information, from *soma* [body] and *viscera* [organs]) via interoceptive loops (stimuli from the body that reaches the brain) and coding (how that stimuli is represented in the brain) provide the critical bases for core affect: emotional experiences. The ensuing knowledge, behaviors, are optimally guided by these physiological patterns of interoceptive and affective information loops. Such is the early neurobiology of feelings, the coalescing of critical ingredients for *understanding body emotions* and generating *consciousness*. Only later are these interpreted through lexical coding" (Damasio 2000, 142).

²¹ Cf., Bridges 1932; Stroufe 1979. (See also Duncan and Barret 2007, Affect is a Form of Cognition, who state: "*Core affect* is crucial to how cognitive processing in general occurs, ultimately at all levels (unconscious, semi-conscious, consciously); *affect* being the determining factor in how we *learn*, *understand*, and eventually also *absorb linguistic terms*. Core affects even play a part in content management—what is encoded and retrieved as memory" (3).

²² Studies that have imaged the living human brain have found only a small number of sex differences, but these differences are generally small in magnitude. Additionally, such have not been linked to any robust psychological or behavior outcomes. See Dussauge and Kaiser (2012), Neuroscience and Sex/Gender. *Neuroethics* 5: 211-215.

²³ Urban, Olga, MD (March 11, 2021). Is It Normal for Babies to Touch Their Genitals? Retrieved from www.ampflo.health.

²⁴ In infant males—and I choose to use a male example first due to differentials in later lexical coding which happens between them and infant girls, not because males have any advantages in somatic coding or development—phallic soothing inheres in them an early connection with their organ, since the phallus erects outside the body proper; does so frequently; and is thus tactually more accessible. In the ensuing months of maturation, such connectivity suggests "my body and this penis belong to me." The feeling is retained through the coherence of afferent sensations that continue to affirm his body; and coherence with those coded cognitive representations of the body as "his body" that the nonverbal, affective subtext has allowed. In infant females, similar connections generate genital awareness, and afferent feedbacks code representations of vulvar distinctives that are "their body." While infant females also have glans-clitoral erections, data suggest these are not reacted to as often by the infant themselves, or by parents; a point which has not gone unnoticed in explaining why females tend to disavow the frequency of their adult arousals. (See Leguichard, Stephanie [March 5, 2021] Why Don't We Talk About Clitoral Erections?) Despite erection, the female's phallic shaft remains internal to the body, thus it is often only the clitoral glans that is visible, tactile, when erect. While some infant

'knowledge'—organs, functions, feelings—that then inform how this infant comes to understand their embodiment, even at a rudimentary (yet important) level.

By the time infants become toddlers, and through visual comparisons, these notice differences in sexual anatomy that correspond to each sex. By age three, male toddlers have a superlative understanding—limbically and physiologically—of their phallus.²⁵ And, of course, by then they have also learned to urinate standing, pointing their organ to do so; these know about small erections (sometimes large ones) that they (and others like parents) have noticed. Female toddlers, by comparison, have learned to urinate sitting, not touching their organ; and small or large clitoral erections often go by unnoticed by them and their parents. But they have learned the importance of “wiping clean, wiping dry,” keeping their “tutu,” or whatever name their vulva is being called, *clean*.²⁶

Most important here, via newly acquired language capacity and symbols, toddlers learn the word-names and connotations given to their sex organ by others. Children have begun to absorb lexical meaning

systems because their brains are also developing cognition and connecting it with *limbic memory*, and both to the new, learned language about the now ubiquitous penis or less acknowledged vulva. We call all this *epigenetic imprinting*.²⁷ The brain has also semiotically indexed a host of other self-understandings, which this eventual language ability allows the brain to then categorize and further discern.²⁸

Primacy of body knowledge—limbic associations, imprints—sets the child's primary level of awareness of who they are:²⁹ In boys, they are “boys” because they know they have, feel, touch, and urinate through their penis; and with all this, a ton of other limbically-understood feelings and subliminal knowledges that go along with having an external phallus, in a body he is *lexically understanding* to be male.³⁰ Taunt that boy at age three or four—ask him “*Are you a boy? How do you know you are a boy?*” and see how often, if not too shy, the boy will giggle, often point to “down there.”

For the female child, it's another story, as we know. Lexically, she's been “safeguarded” from knowing too much about her vulva, despite her somatovisceral

females do touch their glans, and sometimes do frottage with diaper or other crib objects, this activity is not the same as pulling, stroking, or holding the phallus, as is the case with infant males: there are a series of sensorial activations enabled by the male phallus being outside the body cavity. Ogletree and Ginsburg (2000) have thus suggested the “penis primacy” in our culture is ingrained from a very young age by parents and early education; yet there is no corollary equality for the clitoris. Earlier, Kestenberg (1975) suggested infant girls were “intensely aware” of their “insides,” but questioned whether the child at this stage formed “mental representations” of their vulva. Clower, a contemporary (1975), thus suggested that the vagina is not “cathected” until puberty; and Karen Horney—as early as 1933—claimed “the undiscovered vagina is a vagina denied” (in Baker 1998, 119). Today, we have come to understand female infant genital explorations are not solely clitoral (Mendell 2012, 130), yet remain less ingrained in memory than that of males (Burke 1998).

²⁵ Freud, of course, called this the beginning of the “phallic stage.” (See Freud, S. 1905, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*.) Though contested, psychoanalysts still use this rubric.

²⁶ In a society where female genitalia are constructed as unclean, hygiene, and not function—hygiene, and not pleasure or the right to it—is what is eventually taught *lexically*. In boys, seldom is it their learning experience one which prioritizes hygiene for their genitalia, vs. their size and “activity.”

²⁷ Cortes et al. 2019. “Does Gender Leave an Epigenetic Imprint on the Brain?”

²⁸ The brain is a natural at information mapping, and groups experiences based on similarities of stimuli and learned limbic effects (“imprints”). Once further labeled through language and learning, the brain “indexes” these to facilitate how objects and experiences are conceptualized, then categorized. As well, to provide recall means for the subject to retrieve them from memory. See Jayroe (2008), *Semiotics and Indexing: A Critical Summary*.

²⁹ To Tomkins, father of affect theory and theories of consciousness, human beings are a “structural and process collective” of variously dependent, independent, and interdependent components which combine to produce human mentation and action—“at the nexus of the biological, the psychological, and social spheres” (MacBlog.Mcmaster, Tomkins 101, 2).

³⁰ It would do well to quote here the overall process as explained by Duncan and Barrett (2007, 7): “*Core affective circuitry helps to select the information that reaches conscious awareness by directing it to link with conscious experience. Along with the more deliberate top-down forms of attention, and bottoms-up forms of stimulation from the sensory world, core affect helps to orchestrate the binding of sensory information into a single, unified conscious field. As a result, conscious precepts of the external world [read here, such as linguistic labels] are intrinsically infused with affective content [read here, how the penis feels and how the toddler should react to the labels for it].*” (Brackets mine for clarity.)

experiences with it, and feedback loops that have formed her mental experiences of her body knowledge. The commentary here isn't about what "he has" that "she has not;" it's about how somatovisceral understandings that generate eventual body ownership get convoluted by our culture and its ideologies.

Conceptions of differences are not innate, but they do come from contrasts in sexual biology, from all those visual cues, signals, and "understandings" that flow initially, organically, from body and organs to brain. Concurrently, they also come from observations of similarities and differences between themselves, their bodies and other children's, other adults, even when language hasn't come forward totally and symboling systems are only in their infancy.

On these points, biologists agree.³¹ This "seeing" an object (genitalia), learning their names, are now equated with differentiations; earlier perceptions that have an "about me" quality to them are further understood, and are underscored as personally relevant in some physical way. Others that do not "fit the me" are distinguished, and remain in contrast to one's emerging body ownership.³²

Enter Lexical Gender Ideology

Certainly, as the child develops language ability and learns the meaning of terms, there is then the *overlay* of a *cultural and lexical schema* on how to understand their organs, and many other things "male/masculine," or "female/feminine." *Gender*, as a feature of identity

is then being coalesced from these elemental limbic understandings as well as from the now lexically-learned, and socialized constructions of what it means to be a boy or a girl. Assuming physical and cognitive normativity here, and as the child grows and internalizes these knowledges, gender is certainly being socioculturally formed. It is also being *moderated by those limbic, then affective understandings—imprints—of the body proper*. Biologist Fausto-Sterling summarizes it this way:

In the beginning, infants process bodily information [sensorially]. We presume these varied sensory stimuli imprint brain development as intermodal connections form. With time, what begin as relatively simple sensory shells [read: limbic core affect and imprints] transform into more complex capabilities. A sense of self, independent from parents, emerges; and toddlers associate their newly independent selves with the culturally-specific gender knowledge they are acquiring at more-or-less the same time. Gender [and] roles don't develop in a vacuum. (Fausto-Sterling 2000, 55-56).³³

Fausto-Sterling underscores the importance of how body messaging and social learning interact to generate epigenetic consequences of biological sex. It would thus be a mistake to say that sex biological is foremost a *social construction*, and of any influence *only when it is inherited with word-meanings*—"a linguistic device for convenience and contrivances" (Irigaray 1993, 127).³⁴ Or, that the sexual body carries valence *only*

³¹ "Body image certainly develops and depends on self-exploration and the recognition of sensations of self-touch and eventual feedback from self-examination, from [visual] comparisons to other children's and adults' genitalia." (Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body*, 57. Bracket mine for clarity.)

³² This is probably achieved via the "binding" of somatovisceral information with the sensory information coming from the external world, e.g., comparisons with other children's and adult's bodies, and learned language symbols. The evaluations that occur involve modulation of core affect, since without this modulation, the child will never achieve knowing consciously what they are experiencing when "seeing" or "feeling." (See Duncan and Barrett 2006, 9.)

³³ Brackets in quote and italics are mine for clarity and emphasis. The broader implications of these perspectives boil down to what it means to develop a "self." Cognitive scientists are now confident that all humans *experience* their emotions, even though newborns don't 'reflect' on these *anoetic* experiences. They do experience such as powers of guiding forces in their lives (Panskeep et al. 2010, 8). Eventually, when language is inherited, affect guides a considerable amount of thinking, ruminating, decision-making about what is being learned. In such ways, we develop a sense of self that is independent from others, but not independent from our body.

³⁴ See also Bucholtz (2002), *From Sex Differences to Gender Variation in Sociolinguistics*. Collectively, these works ignore the fact that for language to be used and be meaningful, it must itself be imbued with core affect. Core affect is not only necessary for first-person conscious experience; it is an integral component of normal linguistic functioning as well (Duncan and Barrett, 2007:10). For "words" to function with meaning, they must have an affective dimension. The idea, then, that language functions as a semi-autonomous if not independent agent, absent of core affect, for use by humans in determining whether the body can "speak" or "influence" the brain, is absolutely absurd. And yet, Butler, and before her, de Beauvoir and others take on that presumption *as fact*.

when we explicate it socially. The body as a primary, physical template has *already* inhered limbic understandings and affective imprints in the brain *way before* social learning does its job. That some of these limbic understandings and social learning *co-occur* at particular stages of development is a given; yet both are nonetheless dependent on limbic *imprints*, and on how the cognitive maturation of that child aligns with their linguistic and sociocultural acquisitions.

Judith Butler, nevertheless and again, argues for biological sex as a *secondary variable* in her second book, *Bodies that Matter* (1993) (a misconstrued title).³⁵ Here also, gender is being presented as a social construction, now more powerful than biological sex in how it enables or disables the self: Gender as *performance*, regulated by social, cultural, and juridical institutions, is defined as what we do/are allowed/encouraged to do, and not who we “are.” Which turns our conversation again from biological sex (being) to gender (doing)—notice the hand-over.

Gender is clearly argued as not at all stemming from any bodily cues, but rather, from the social institutions that give meaning to sex, and use language to create gender; indeed, generate socialized compliances to it. Sarah Salih, explaining Butler (who often needs explaining), writes,

Butler has collapsed the sex/gender distinction in order to argue that there is no sex [biological sex, the sexual body] that is not always already gendered. All bodies are gendered from the beginning of their existence. . . which means that there is no “natural body” that pre-exists cultural inscription. (Salih 2002, 55; brackets mine).

Butler “troubles” the naturalness of the body and biological sex. I note her insistence of there not being a “natural body” that in and of itself can inscribe the brain (Butler 1993). Of course, Butler isn’t denying the existence of a physical body; her emphasis is on the denial of the body’s ability to render influence on the brain aside from lexical agency being present *in* the brain. I have already cited neurobiological findings

that evidence how the body can, and does, influence our brain’s understanding of our body, despite lexical agency being present or still to come. There is a natural body, male, female, or intersex, that continuously feeds somatovisceral information to the brain; that sets the early template and needed cognitions for eventual body-self understandings.

Gender: Assignment or Formation?

Views by Butler and other genderqueer theorists emphasize that gender is definitively *assigned* at birth. In fact, the argument goes, gender inscription is what actually makes the sexed body “real” (Salih 2002). Such is wrongly deduced, of course, because gender develops over time from the multiplex influences that interact with the psyche to *teach role, and form identity*, as one grows into knowledges and negotiates these and one’s experiences; body knowledge included.³⁶ To call a baby “a boy” doesn’t translate into him becoming masculine or even seeing himself eventually as a gendered male. Assignment is an apt label only when one refers to a factual sexual biology (chromosomal, hormonal, anatomical) ascribed as birthed.

We are thus assigned a *sex* at birth based on validated and confirmed biological tests from newborn screening, which in the US is done in every state as a public health service. We develop gender via the ideology that surrounds our socialization, yes; but also through those limbic messages about our sexed body that the brain continues to receive postnatally. Gender ideology and our actions toward the neonate do start to situate that newborn into a *gender schema*; but we are not assigned a gender at birth: We are born into a sexed body. That sexed body is assigned a medical term: *male, female*, or in some cases, *intersex*.

Still, genderqueer theory argues for an assigned birth gender,³⁷ its internalization as a gendered identity in a performative and regulated society being guided by language. In such a view, this naming results in social constructions that then direct gender conformity. The body has no part in all of this, since

³⁵ See also Butler 2004, *Undoing Gender*.

³⁶ Fausto-Sterling, 7; 55-56.

³⁷ See, for instance, Ryan Anderson’s (2019) Transgender Ideology is Riddled with Contradictions. Here Are the Big Ones. *The Heritage Foundation*, February 9th. Retrieved from <https://www.heritage.org/gender/commentary/transgender-ideology-riddled-contradictions-here-are-the-big-ones>.

the body is only meaningful—indeed “real”—only when lexical definitions make it a reality. This is merely oxymoronic word play.

In 1964, sexologist Robert J. Stoller divided the concept of gender to distinguish behavioral aspects and social expectations about gender from the individual’s psychological sense of self, partially to explain the condition of his transsexual patients, and to distinguish them from transvestite individuals (220). In doing so, he aligned with his contemporaries in believing there is a “critical period” in gender acquisition, such solidifying around the first eighteen months of life. He named the outcome of this period, *core gender identity*, and believed it to be a stable essence in every individual.³⁸ Of course, anything “core” has to be disputed. . . .³⁹

Distinguishing between gender *role* and *identity*, Stoller anchored gender *identity* to some “core essence” beyond mundane behaviors, language, and roles that are products of social norms. At the time Stoller wrote (1960’s), neurobiology had not taken wings, so concepts like “*core affect*,” “*limbic associations*,” “*somatovisceral coding*,” had not been brought into any body-identity equation. Stoller was theorizing within a psychoanalytic paradigm. Nevertheless, he had the foresight to suggest “biological forces” were possibly involved in the generation of *core gender identity*, “a drive from inside the organism that possibly arose from the endocrine and central nervous system” [Stoller 1964, 228-9]. Even then, there was growing suspicion that the body wasn’t just a “mute facticity.”⁴⁰

Time and again, Butler’s views are inconsistent with every psychoanalytic and scientific understanding of what goes on in early neonate life. In Butler’s view,

there are no somatic influences on the formation of body knowledge, or an emerging self, that count for much until *lexical* gender learning and internalization of such “do their thing.” Salih, again explaining Butler, states,

Gender identities are constructed and constituted by language, which means that there is no gender identity that precedes language . . . language and discourse “do” gender. There is no “I” outside language since identity is a signifying practice (Salih 2002, 56)

I argue here that *gender* isn’t solely a social prescriptive we internalize lexically and then perform because we were assigned it, and thus also and only self-define through it. I argue that gender (as role, as identity, and before that, as aspects of “it” as core knowledges) is influenced by the biological body proper—our limbic, organic, and whole body cognitions—soma to mind.

I am, alike others, “attempting to read individual corporeal experience back into theories of the body and self” (Prosser 1998, 7). To thwart that is to deny an embodiment to identity, an elision of the body as experience. We return to this later in this position paper.

Language, once acquired and internalized, certainly provides added means by which one understands “corporeal experiences;” but these do not originate solely from language. Sometimes, even words fail us. We say we “don’t have the words” for certain feelings; yet those feelings are nonetheless real, and exist in our body, our consciousness despite our inability to name them. Words themselves are sometimes not enough to

³⁸ It would do well to quote Stoller directly here: “*There appears to be evidence of a third component producing gender identity which, variably powerful in most humans, is usually hidden silently behind the effects of postnatal psychological influences. This force has yet not been demonstrated by endocrinological or neuropsychological studies, though some day such a force may be found to be the algorithmic sum of the activities of a number of neuroanatomical centers, and hierarchies of neuropsychological functions. At present, we cannot be more specific*” (Stoller 1964, 228). See also, Germon (2009), *Gender: A Genealogy of an Idea*.

³⁹ Stoller’s “core gender identity” became a disputed concept, but it still retains salience among psychotherapists and in current articles that explain identity. Stoller was underscoring what he and other colleagues were beginning to cognize: that the first and crucial step in sexual differentiation *postnatally*, i.e., the recognition that one was of ‘one version’ and ‘not the other’ physically, was the child’s self-awareness as male or female. To Stoller, this was also the beginning of that subtext, *gender identity*, which instills in that person one’s own sense of what it feels like to belong to a sex and to a gender. See Catharine Stimpson & Gilbert Herdt, eds. (2014), *Critical Terms for the Study of Gender*.

⁴⁰ Once again, let me be clear, that what is being discussed here as interoceptive feedbacks, somatovisceral coding, etc. *is not* the same as insisting *polygenic gene contributions* provide additively to the formation of a gender identity (cf., Vischer, Hill, and Wray 2008). Study after study have demonstrated there is no single genetic variant (or set of genetic variants) that can reliably distinguish between people of varying gender identities (See Polderman et al. [2018], *The Biological Contributions to Gender Identity and Gender Diversity: Bringing Data to the Table.*)

capture the reality we limbically know.⁴¹ Biology is an influence, certainly not the sole one; yet our biology is what forms that early template of our embodied understandings.⁴² That template also keeps on informing the brain about the sexual body over the life course (McEwen 2017).

Even with these sequenced occurrences, how that individual ultimately comes to understand themselves (their *body network*); how they play out that role (their *body image representation*), truly depends on the person and their experiences. “Intervening cultural variables” (gender ideology, gender norms) determine the latitude for variability possible in that person’s culture. In sum, self-understanding and identity result from how individuals negotiate and assimilate all these elements (Raimo 2021). And, despite a society being exceptionally stringent in its gender requisites, gender identity and self-expression are still individuated variables (Howard 2000); variations will occur in *every culture* (Neculăesei 2015, 33-35).

Thus, to make the process simply and causally linear, saying “gender is assigned at birth” and therefore if “wrong,” that assignation doesn’t result in what the person “is,” or “wishes to be,” is a gross simplification of a complex process. That process involves individuation, and mental understandings which include the sexual body and all it tells us of ‘us’. Its conclusion is the person developing an internalized identity which is, of course and in most cases, “gendered.” However, whether such results are concordant with one’s sexual body or at odds with it, is the subject of the next section.

Incongruity of Sexual Biology and Gender Identity

Incongruity between biological sex and gender identity is a reality for some—what the “body says,” vs. what affective, experiential, and thus psychosocial deductions have concretized on how one feels about their body. In some, a similar incongruity seems to stem from gender role discontent, a need to reformulate self-presentation and identification without physical body disjunctions of the type just mentioned being present. Thus, we must separate these two forms of incongruity.

Gender Dysphoria

In *gender dysphoria*,⁴³ body-self dissonances become severe: The body says you are female; you menstruate; you are growing breasts; you have limbic messaging tied to neurobiological and hormonal entities of a female body. But, the affective constructions of these, how such have ultimately concretized and become cognitions themselves in the brain, may result in a persistent incongruity. Such incongruity is classified by the APA as a disorder.⁴⁴ At this moment, there is no known, discernible cause for gender dysphoria and its dissonances—psychological or physiological.

But that doesn’t presume *core imprints* and eventual affective disjunctions leading to distress are not real. We may one day find some biological substrate to intractable gender dysphoria. Until we do, and findings are validated through consistent research and testing, the jury stays out on causes of dysphoria. What remain are solid notions of disjunction between

⁴¹ “Knowing” here consist of moving limbic sensory and motor input “forward” to *association areas* in the brain, which are themselves the sites of cognitive processing. Let’s remember, *no part of the brain works independently*, and thus, “knowing” in order to “say,” requires the coordination and association of all areas, including Broca’s and Wernicke’s areas responsible for language processing and speech. There may be some limbic inputs which have not correlated with learned lexical items; thus, “words can fail us” in their lexically situating an emotion or cognition.

⁴² As suggested earlier, such are pre-reflexive, preliminary, and unstructured awarenesses, because they are logically prior to objective “knowing.” They become reflexive when “knowing” is a cognitive, developed capacity, and when imbued with word-meanings. All of this does not mean there is no awareness, no “about me” before lexical inscription.

⁴³ *Gender dysphoria* is classified as a disorder. Criteria for diagnosing gender dysphoria is detailed in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Version 5 (DSM-V)*, and must include a history of (1) chronic distress, (2) gender nonconformity, and (3) incongruence between gender identity perception and body sex. Per the DSM-V, the presence of (2) and (3) *without* severe and chronic distress about one’s sexed body does not constitute gender dysphoria.

⁴⁴ See APA, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual*, 5th Ed, §302.5 (F64.9) for a complete detailing of gender dysphoria.

“interiority” and “exteriority,” and negative affect toward the body, all of which reinforce the feeling of the body being wrongly sexed. In such instances, the self aims to gain independence from, and primacy over the sexual body.

Whatever its origins, dysphoria disjunctions generate an “interstitial and transitional figure” (Bornstein 1994, 71) who then needs to resolve the conflicting messages between the body and the self. In this sense, gender dysphoria is often manifest as an affective, dissonant result of what should have been a congruent set of understandings and feelings about the sexual body and its psychological gender identity. I realize this is a limited, short-hand description of what—by all accounts—is a complex interaction between stated, and conceivably other variables. What we can agree on at this juncture is that affective body signaling, mental cognitions, personal and internalized experiences can dissociate; sometimes not align at all; and thus cause the historical distress that characterizes this disorder.

Gender Atypicality/Nonconformity

Being *gender atypical* or *nonconforming* are constructs distinct from gender dysphoria. Per the DSM-5 (2013), gender atypicality or nonconformity do not qualify for classification as dysphoria: Gender atypical or nonconforming individuals do not display significant or chronic distress about their bodies, or disown their sexual body outright.⁴⁵ Rather, these pursue a reformulation of their gendered roles and labels, reframing their gender identity, self-presentation, and even sexual orientation. Gender atypical or nonconforming individuals are not

disavowing their biological sex. Most often, these are reconstituting their identity by moving it away from binary schemas and culturally produced role prescriptions, thus altering their self-presentation and self-labels.

Atypicality of gender or nonconformity is an important distinction to make here, because such often gets subsumed under the *transgender* label, despite there not being any dysphoria present or changes to their body ownership network. The transgender label is now also *inclusive*, and has thus accommodated a spectrum of gender variants and identifiers. Moreover, mainstreamed and popular notions of being *gender fluid*, *genderqueer*, appear to further confound current transgender understandings and statistics (Meerwijk et al. 2017; Gil 2021).⁴⁶

Lisa Littman has also introduced research which substantiates a phenomenon she called *rapid onset gender dysphoria*—dysphoria-like symptoms in adolescents not having shown earlier signs of gender confusion or distress (Littman 2018). Such symptoms appear to me as part of a “culture-bound syndrome,” which now seems to coexist along with factual cases of gender dysphoria, and further compounds statistics.⁴⁷ To repeat, none of these atypicalities are enough to render a diagnosis of dysphoria, per the DSM-5. They do not reflect the conflict of gender identity over physical sex/anatomy which is the hallmark of dysphoria.

Intersexuality and Self-Identity

This is another distinctive we need to acknowledge. Medically, *intersexuality* refers to “disorders of sexual development,” or DSD.⁴⁸ Children born with

⁴⁵ See *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of the American Psychiatric Association, 5th Edition*, or “DSM-5” (2013) §302.5 (F64.9) for these exclusions.

⁴⁶ Gender discourses that solidified over the last fifteen years follow two generic lines: (a) activists, who are increasingly “inclusive” of the labels and criteria for gender atypicality or nonconformity, and thus incorporate “the spectrum of gender” without necessary academic or clinical data to distinguish subtypes; and (b) academics and clinicians, who opt for data-driven specificity on all categories of sex and gender. There is reason to opt for the latter, given that some aspects of gender atypicality and nonconformity present with serious comorbidities due to how individuals feel about themselves and society. Lack of celebratory acceptance of all the spectrum often generates pushback on academics, and these get labeled as transphobic for wanting data-driven understandings.

⁴⁷ Melchior (2018), Peer Pressure and Transgender Teens. See also Gil (2021) *A Christian’s Guide through the Gender Revolution*. A ***culture-bound syndrome*** is a broad rubric that encompasses certain behaviors, emotions, and ways of thinking seen only in specific cultural situations. These manifestations are out of the ordinary from the usual behavior of individuals in that culture, and thus are reasons for distress/discomfort. (See also Guarnaccia and Rogler (1999), Research on Culture-Bound Syndromes, 1322–27.)

⁴⁸ Lee et al. (2006). Consensus Statement on Management of Intersex. ‘DSD’ is a term now critiqued by intersex voices like Hida Viloria, who point to such as “negative medical labeling” (Viloria, H. 2017, *Born Both*, 17).

dysgenesis of the genitals, who are chromosomally or hormonally variant, may exhibit a range of genital and internal organ outcomes. In two specific conditions, 46,XY-cAIS (a complete androgen insensitive male who is *phenotypically* female), and 46,XX-CAH (a congenital adrenal hyperplasia female who has been severely genitally *masculinized in utero*), we have studies which suggest that congruence between gender of rearing and the sexual body form is not only possible, but persists without generating conflicts between their biology and identity long term. (Studies underscore that these individuals can, and do continue to manifest gender identities that are congruent with their body form when not surgically or hormonally altered as children—an important point to note.)

In cAIS boys, the cellular inability to process testosterone results in complete feminization of the XY boy's genitalia, and possible variances in internal organs. Such cAIS boys often have undescended testes that still produce testosterone; but the body's inability to react and morph with testosterone enables adrenal estrogen, and free testosterone's aromatization to estradiol, to further differentiate the body at puberty into even greater conformance with the female phenotype.

We have evidence from studies that male limbic coding does not result, notwithstanding testosterone's presence (Haman et al. 2014). And, with rare exception, cAIS children do not challenge their sex of rearing or gender identity as females when adults (Gangaher et al. 2016). In other words, the body's inability to respond to testosterone and an ongoing feminization of the body appear to signal somatoviscerally as a female XX body would. Reared as females despite being a chromosomal XY male, and having a body that is in phenotypic form female, renders a female identification that is gender/body congruent.

In CAH girls, studies demonstrate that these identify with their gender of rearing as girls as well, despite their genitals having been severely androgenized in utero (Meyer-Bahlburg 2005). CAH girls often retain ovaries, and thus secrete estrogen. The androgenization of genitals in utero does not inhibit eventual ovarian production of estrogen.

Consequently, the body develops as a female body; and somatovisceral coding instills female knowledges. Having been reared as girls, and their bodies at puberty continuing to develop as female, seem to generate sufficient concordance to maintain gender self-identification as female. This, despite studies noting “tomboyish behavior,” and their masculinized pudenda.

Studies confirm that their limbic coding seems to follow the path of female bodies, and the brain seems to not be truncated from pursuing a limbic identification with a female body form “despite severe pudendal masculinization in utero” (Meyer-Bahlburg 2005, 432). Once gender of rearing is mentally linked to their feminizing body, female gender identification remains “natural for them” despite genital malformations (Meyer-Bahlburg 2005, 432).⁴⁹ Indeed, CAH girls studied often thought their genitalia were normal, notwithstanding its severe masculinization (Meyer-Bahlburg, 2005, 433).

What can be deduced from studies of these two intersex conditions, and the testimonials of many intersex individuals? We learn that despite mild, or severe dysgenesis of genitals/organs, gender of rearing and a congruent gender identity can align, thus interoceptive messaging and coding seem not only possible, but likely.⁵⁰ Such studies confirm the constitutive, enactive relevance of body knowledge in the formation of a cognitive sexual and gender identity. If it were not so, we would be seeing a great deal more discordance globally between *body* and *identity* in the reports of such studies and books now available.

Suffice it to sum up here by saying there is no discrepancy in understanding the relationship between sex and gender is complex, at times correlational and bidirectional. But correlation is not causation, in either direction; and the terms are not synonyms.

The Current Valence of Gender over Sex

So, why is gender activism so assiduously insisting that gender and sex are interchangeable terms? Why are some so quick to turn biological realities into linguistic euphemisms? And, even more to the point,

⁴⁹ See also Meyer-Bahlburg (2004), Prenatal Androgenization, 97-104.

⁵⁰ See Vioria (2017), *Born Both*, Introduction. Also see Cox and Basham (2018), *Intersex in Christ*; Davis (2015), *Contesting Intersex: The Dubious Diagnosis*.

why is gender given greater valence than biological sex in our contemporary culture?⁵¹

The conflation of gender and biological sex is essential for those that wish to “liberate” one’s identity (gender identity, in this specific matter) from any possibility that one’s sex may have a deeper biological influence, greater than that socially constructed, or “assigned.” To Butler, it is the *binarism* of biological sex—its presumed “regulation” of sex into “the two,” and its molting into “mechanisms of oppression” that become the offenders: Do away with the imposition of the biological binary, and you can do away with its tyranny:

Sex [how one is born] does not determine the interpretation of gender in any significant way, although it is the presumption always inherent in naturalistic and biologic discourses.⁵²

To genderqueer theorists, it is the very sexual essentialism of male and female that “exhausts the semantic field of gender.” Thus, to liberate gender from this “oppressive duo” (binarism), the definition of gender (and any ties to biological sex) must be “expanded, deconstructed, *denaturalized*.”⁵³ Here, then, is Butler’s *coup de grâce*.

Butler continues to insist that “the binary of man and woman performs a regulatory operation of power that neutralizes the hegemonic instance and forecloses the thinkability of its disruption” (2004, 40).

In simpler English, since Butler has been often accused of ‘impossible English,’ what she says here amounts to the following: Having a biological binary in place is, in itself, a regulation; one which then doesn’t

let one think of alternatives and, in this way, closes the door on gender options. Thus, to get past the “normative insistence on the one or two,” Butler suggests we *denaturalize* the binary idea of sex—so that we can then “disrupt,” “put out of play,” a “norm” which she and others feel are regulatory and binding.⁵⁴

Butler states the body is a “mute facticity,”⁵⁵ i.e., a rather silent fact of nature; and like gender, is “produced” (given authenticity) by discourses and performance. As we’ve noted, Butler collapses the sex/gender distinction to argue that there is no sex that is not always and already gendered. To Butler, we do both by naming, within a precise series of lexical acts: Such are the scripts that form for “acting out” sex/gender. These are already socially formed when one is born; we inherit them; they then become regulatory, limiting the subject and constraining their choices. All of it implies there is no body to note prior to cultural inscription; no “real” influence by one’s body (i.e., no “inner truth”), or self, prior to language; and, no performance prior to a semantic script.

Reinscription and Liberation

Following Butler, “Sex, as well as gender, can [thus] be linguistically and performatively reinscribed in ways that accentuate its *factitiousness* [i.e., its constructedness] rather than its *facticity* [i.e., the fact of its existence]” (2006, 130; brackets and italics mine for clarity).

Change the script, and you free the performer to act otherwise; you enable them to reinscribe their identity.

⁵¹ Before I go further, let me quickly acknowledge that I am not blind to the historical oppression of gender ideology in our own, and many cultures. I am also deeply aware, and sympathetic, to those who have experienced the suffocation of gender oppression for multiple reasons, not the least of which is factual dysphoria, and not the most of which is political incorrectness and legal oppression of identities. These points I discuss later, hopefully with empathy. Certainly, they are covered in my recent book, already noted (Gil 2021).

⁵² Stanford, “Contingent Ontologies,” 5. (Brackets mine for clarity.) This line of thinking seems consistent with Simone de Beauvoir’s earlier, and more general assumption that biological givens are themselves *meaningless*, and that the lived body is one *culturally interpreted*: “If we accept the body as a cultural situation, then the notion of a natural body and, indeed, a natural “sex” seem increasingly suspect. The limits to gender, the range of possibilities for a lived interpretation of a sexually different anatomy, seems less restricted by anatomy itself than by the weight of the cultural institutions that have conventionally interpreted it” (De Beauvoir [2009 edition], *The Second Sex*, 21-43).

⁵³ All quotes in paragraph from Butler (2004), *Undoing Gender*, Chapter 2: Gender Regulations. (Bolding mine for emphasis.)

⁵⁴ All quotes in paragraph from Butler (2004), *Undoing Gender*, Chapter 4: Undiagnosing Gender.

⁵⁵ Butler (2006), *Gender Trouble*, 129-136. In this venue, Butler refutes the idea that any pre-linguistic, inner core or essence of body knowledge resides in the body proper, or that it informs the brain. She suggests “that it [the body] has no ontological status apart from the various acts [linguistic and performative] which constitute its reality.”

You free them from the “one or two.”⁵⁶ Note Butler “implicates” sex, but in the word play, never mentions sex biological outright as the foundational culprit. It’s sufficient to call into question the body’s “facticity;” use the cover term “binary gender;” or mention the “oppressive duo” (male/female) in describing sexual binarism as “restrictions,” to focus attention on how terrible it is and how oppressive it becomes.

She has a point: gender, via social constructions of role, can “constrict and negate.” But the “constriction” argument as centered on the cover term *gender binarism*, to also infer biological results that are sex-binary, doesn’t carry truth when we introduce science to question it.

Is Sex the Real Culprit?

Does it create a subversive parody we all unwittingly engage? I mean, are our sex genes the bad genes that initiate a normative binary template, and thereby “conform” us into sexual normalization schemas? Do we have to *denormalize* the sexual binary to free our gender ideology? Biology and genes aren’t the culprits.

We, culture creators, are the culprits behind constrictions and negations. First, by our not acknowledging intersex births, which would then re-write our reproductive outcomes from a *binary* to a *trisomy*.⁵⁷ It is not wrong to cite the statistical binary norm when it is a fact of human procreation: Sexually binary bodies are produced 98 to 98.3 percent of the time in human offspring (Yau et al. 2019). But it is wrong to dismiss the 1.7–2 percent intersex (about 70 million) as non-existent by not acknowledging them; by denying their reality in our reporting; in our theology (next up!), and by not hearing their voices when these speak to us.

Second, we should fault how cultures and societies interpret reproductive outcomes. Gender ideology

isn’t developed from biological sex; it’s born from cultures and societies insisting that the sexual biology should make a difference in how we view males, females, and other biological formats. And cultures do use their languages to cement ideologies about males and females.

Cultural Culprits

The formation of a *sexual division of labor* early on in human culture history—a perceptual-performative cleavage in labor due to presumptions about sexual-biological form and differential ability (Leacock 1981, 474); and from there, *sexual segregation*—the physical, legal, and cultural separation of people according to their biological sex (Grusky and Charles 2001, 689-703), make it facile for any social system to structure *ideological sexual discrimination* (Steinberg 2001). Such ideologies then root in socialization differences for men and women, eventually creating *gender segregation* (or the distinct differentiation of people based on social constructions of what it means to be masculine or feminine).⁵⁸

At that juncture, we get role divisions that inhere themselves as embodied acts of masculinities and femininities, reifying them into standards as we gender-socialize generations. Gender is being constructed not because biology normed a binarism, but because that binarism was imagined by human ideology and action to represent particularistic masculinities and femininities.

Fueled by *patriarchy*, another cultural creation,⁵⁹ specific self-identities emerge, now hierarchical and authoritatively distinct, with differentiated power and vetted privileges for men and everything less for women—all that has gone awry for these in the Judeo-Christian West’s sociocultural and ideological sexual segregation. And there’s more that wrongs the problem

⁵⁶ Butler is overtly out to create “gender trouble” by disrupting the binary view of sex, gender, and sexuality. She argues that gender, rather than being an essential quality following (at least in part) from biological sex, or (at most) an inherent identity, is an act which grows out of, reinforces, and is reinforced by, societal norms, all of which create the illusion of binary sex. This is “restrictive” and “constrictive,” and does not allow individuals to self-define, *performatively*, apart from the body proper. To Butler, there is an inherent limitation to binary sex, an “idea” that must be *disrupted* in order for individuals to *reinscribe* their identity apart from biological sex.

⁵⁷ That is, male, female, and intersex. We continue to represent reproductive outcomes as only binary bodies.

⁵⁸ See, for instance, how such happens in culture systems, in Taggart (1992), Gender Segregation and Cultural Constructions of Sexuality in Two Hispanic Societies.

⁵⁹ As anthropologists, please don’t cringe: Patriarchy became the imported and Western norm. Here I concede that it does not exist universally; however, for the sake of this Judeo-Western focused position paper, the term is well employed, me thinks.

Christianity, Binary Bodies, and the Other

This position paper cannot possibly elaborate what has taken me a whole series of chapters to fill, on how Christianity has contributed to—not resolved—the problematic of gender ideology (Gil 2021). Here, I concentrate on a few dimensions of relevance to the paper’s position.

The Heritage—Ignored

For a faith rooted in Judaism, Christianity hasn’t paid much attention to how historical, rabbinical Judaism has dealt with those that specifically fall outside the sexual/gender binary. Persons who were identified in the Talmud as *tūmtūm* were neither male nor female (*intersex*); or male *and* female, the *andrōgynōs* or hermaphrodites. Others were also recognized: *sāris*, or feminine men, and the *āylōnit*, masculine women (Cohen 1999).

Thus, if one reads rabbinical literature carefully, one notes the latter two categories also include references to variations in *gendered identities*, as seen in transgender persons.⁶⁰ It was understood that some *sāris* more than likely were identified male at birth, but developed female characteristics and identity later. These could become female in due course, usually through some human action. Such were called *sāris adam*, ‘male-born,’ but becoming ‘woman-made.’ There is no direct record that a transition possibility applied to ‘women-born’ becoming ‘male-made.’ However, women born as women, but with masculinized pudenda (what is now known as the results of CAH) were allowed to live as women and identify as women.⁶¹

Such persons weren’t ostracized from Jewish communities, but rather were encouraged to participate in communal *and* religious life, albeit some restrictions on reading the Torah publicly, minor

regulations on inheritance, and serving in the priesthood (Cohen 1999). In historic Judaism, these persons’ legal standing were protected, with a death penalty for those who hurt, slandered, or in other ways harmed them. Moreover, parents of such individuals—all mentioned—could claim them “as they were” (meaning intersex, hermaphroditic, or transgender), and not lose any “piousness” as Nazirites, or religious persons. Nor were parents encouraged to “conform” children to a binary gender schema via any Judaic law (Cohen 1999).

Creation Narratives

Today, we can trace ideological, socialization and performative male/female differences upheld by Christian denominations as stemming from hermeneutical and exegetical interpretations of creation narratives on human origins (*vide*, de Franza 2015). Interpreters of these foundational narratives render the first male and female binary forms as paradigms for all humanity, the only format in “God’s design” (de Franza 2015). The view upheld is that God created a man and a woman (Gen 2:4-23), and this binary, sole, sexual differentiation should be the determining factor—the mold—not only for physiological sex determination, but all else. The argument often extends to cover gender, one’s identity, and even to serve as blueprints for differentiated male/female world views and social scripts.⁶²

Elsewhere, I have unpacked the problematic of insisting on a paradigmatic, binary-only schema, especially when we go beyond creation to *include procreation*—how all of us factually came to be (Gil 2021).

Procreation results in more than binary bodies. The distinction is enormous, given that genetic variation in offspring occurs via procreation, but assumedly was

⁶⁰ The Southern Jewish Resource Network for Gender and Sexual Diversity (SOJOURN) (June 26, 2015), More Than Just Male and Female: The Six Genders in Classical Judaism. Retrieved from <https://sojourngsd-blog.tumblr.com/post/122525505505/more-than-just-male-and-female-the-six-genders-in>.

⁶¹ Freidson (n/d). More Than Just Male and Female: The Six Genders in Ancient Jewish Thought.

⁶² For an example of this thinking, and extension, see Gregg Allison (2009), Toward a Theology of Embodiment. Allison is generating what I’ve called “a theology of *causal difference*” (Gil 2021, 150), a world of experiences, understandings, and motivations *fundamentally different* for men and women due to their “special creations” (Allison 2009, 5). Thus, he exclaims in rather frustrated tone, “*Try as I might, even urged on by my wife, I cannot see life from her—a woman’s—perspective*” (p.6). One has to ask how one bridges this chasm if, in fact, men and women can’t comprehend each other’s perspectives; especially if they are to be in complement and communion with one another. . . .

not “needed” in human creation itself.⁶³ Nevertheless, the omission transmutes into a persistent theological incorrection (de Franza 2015; Cornwall 2009; In opp., Colson, 1996).

A biblical theology of the body that embraces only body essentialism in its binary format isn’t complete. It defaults on other formats resulting from procreation, and offers no acknowledgement of the social elements also involved in their identification. It leaves out *other essentialisms*—those of biological variability, and the significant role culture has in shaping identity, role, and understandings. It is a fact that there are intersex bodies formatted along God’s allowances in human reproduction. (Are these not, as well, embodying *imago Dei*?) It is also a fact that there are many influences which come to bear on how a body—any body—is internalized into an identity.

Contingently, comingling of anatomy, identity, and gender roles—all, often presumed as God-designed—contribute to the significant revulsion of Christian orthodoxy by those not fitting into its assumptions. Also, by others who come to understand themselves extended beyond the “boxes,” social categories, and identities as these are constructed by culture *and* church traditions. Still, by others who find the entire system of classification oppressive and limiting, to the degree that discarding normative biological sex binarism seems the only means of identity liberation.

The point is, Christian orthodoxy has not done well here. Such orthodoxy perpetuates maintenance of this overarching binarism in its theology, seen then as exclusive; and the idea that outside of this position, there is only falsity. It facilitates arguments from genderqueer theorists that these become constrictive, since there is no allowance to believe intersex bodies exist. And, it continues to assume that those who experience gender dysphoria, for example, can’t “simply change their minds;” or better stated, “let Jesus change their minds” to conform mind to body.

On that note, the Christian church must come to a more merciful and embracing acknowledgement of its past wrongs against “these others,” and work to enable a more holistic embodiment of *imago Dei*. Per Christian philosopher Teri Merrick, it still needs to happen:

The affirmation of the binary as the Christian theological norm certainly has the weight of tradition behind it. However, we also know—and those authorizing this statement are in a position to know—that women and those deviating from this norm have been longstanding victims of hermeneutical marginalization. Yet, there is no evidence that those authorized to assert the We-belief [statements] were aware of, or consulted any alternative readings of the Bible or the Church Fathers that might have challenged this assertion.

The fact that a competent consideration of alternate interpretations of the scriptures and classical Christian texts is neither expected nor encouraged, indicates that the religious communities of which I am a part have yet to confront the likelihood that hermeneutical injustice is second nature to us. (Merrick 2020, 97-118)

Take-Aways

Let’s briefly restate: I am challenging flawed rationales from genderqueer activists who require an obliteration of the sexual binary to save gender, and thus humanity, from the tyranny of *sex*. I am also challenging the notion that the body proper is nothing more than an artifact which does not provide input into identity or self-understanding. This is the greater challenge. Finally, I am questioning voices from the Church which insist on a perpetual and only sexual duality, discrediting in the process what *procreation* brings to the human tableau; and spawning from creation “God’s preference” for also identity and role.

The real need for change should be focused not on denying sexual biology, but on how cultures create gender ideology; how roles for binarily-sexed selves and others are cognized culturally and structurally. Complicit are those role socializations we invent and then teach each generation; and the impact such have on how they steer people away from body knowledge—male, female, intersex—and into social fabrications.

Such arighting does nothing, however, to quell the need for incorporating the actual products of biological reproduction, i.e., intersex bodies, and those with gender dysphoria, into our anthropological and theological narratives. Integrating how such individuals negotiate their truth, self-define and identify, is much

⁶³ Let’s recall that Adam clearly refers to Eve as “bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh,” to mean bioidentical genetics. Variability potential, however, is encoded into the human genome to insure *procreated offspring* have the capacity to adapt to different environments, and thus “fill the earth.” See Genesis 2. Such is *not* the “results of the Fall,” as some have suggested. Genetic variability is a requisite for biologically adaptive life on this planet.

needed work—both bio-culturally, and in the church; in its theology; and as a social institution.

Similarly, we ought to distinguish gender nonconformity and the current movement for self-identification from issues related to anatomy proper. Comingling them only further complicates knowing and being. Moreover, by engaging political correctness to the detriment of fundamental and core truths biology and neurosciences bring to the table, we err on the side of a *spectrum*, and do no-one a favor (Soh 2020). This is not to say we don't need to reframe how we enable latitude for gender self-expression, or how the church, in particular, views masculinities, femininities, and androgynous expressions.

Activists that blame biological sex and its normative binarism for the ills produced by culturally-constricting gender ideologies, are “looking in all the wrong places.” All of it, together, favors the consistent confusion of wrong ideas, and by extension the coterminous usage of sex and gender to mean the same thing.

I close this position paper by underscoring that if we have anything to learn here, it is the need for a more principled basis in examining our work—especially our lexicon. Christian anthropologists are encouraged to involve themselves more readily in contemporary dialogues on gender as now rendered. In so doing, Christian anthropologists can help bring clarity to gender issues the church faces. Equally, to challenge cultural-religious propositions that lock us into believing people can be summarily boxed by exegetical propositions without questions, to affirm God's will.

We should pay greater attention to scientific findings: our sexual bodies do speak to us, and inform us. That body conversation is fundamental and continuous. Most often, body messages and affects align; yet sometimes they do not. When they don't, we must believe persons sharing that history. And yes, the body comes in more than just two formats; and yes, it is not the only voice. Influences from our culture, learning, experiences, all contribute to the gauntlet we pass through in generating our embodiment and sense of self.⁶⁴

Agreeing or disagreeing to listen to what this position paper brings to the table is another matter, not settled by clarifying terminology, cultural polemics, or reviewing religious tradition alone. Rather, it demands our will to be informed, to seek out truth, find better grounds than argumentative territory on which to

revisit our theology. Doing so should help us develop a more Christ-like anthropological hermeneutic, and be humane without bias to win the day.

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⁶⁴ “Apologies to Shrek, identities are built up in layers.” Yes, and thank you, Michael Rynkiewich (personal communications, 12/2/2021).

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Homosexuality in Cross-Cultural Perspective

Michael A. Rynkiewich

In the American debate about sexuality, homosexuality is portrayed as an aberrance of choice by one side and as a natural outcome of biology by the other, sometimes with nuanced stances in between. Both sides tend to take for granted that the thing that they are talking about exists, and some argue that it is a unitary phenomenon found across cultures and through time. I question whether or not the English concept of homosexuality can serve as a scientific category for cross-cultural comparison. Similar practices identified in one culture area reveal that the characteristics of same-sex behavior and belief vary significantly, thus deconstructing American narratives. Those arguing for a more traditional perspective have too easily accepted the terms of the debate. Perhaps it is time to step back and take a broader view that includes the experiences and narratives of a full range of the world's many cultures and many Christianities.

As anthropologist Robert Priest¹ has emphasized in another context, "Zeal without knowledge is not good," and to complete the proverb, "how much more will hasty feet miss the way!"² Zeal may lead to a category error in cross-cultural matters. That happens when the American category of homosexuality is treated as if it were a universal phenomenon that is adequate to describe beliefs and behavior in all cultures. A category error occurs when, for example, a young person mistakes someone who shows interest on the internet as a 'friend'. A smile does not always signal good will. Likewise, language and behavior that is carelessly identified as homosexual may lead to an embarrassing confrontation in other cultures, or it may lead to a rush to judgment. Culture is always an open question until a person takes the opportunity to walk a mile in the other person's shoes.

The Problem of Developing Cross-cultural Categories in Anthropology

Anthropology is not an ancient discipline like theology. Although there have been accounts of

various people that were written by travelers since ancient times, not every person with a pencil and a notebook is an anthropologist. The first university position in anthropology was held by Edward B. Tylor at Oxford, as a Reader in Anthropology in 1884, and then as the first Professor of Anthropology in 1896. That same year, Franz Boas was appointed a Lecturer in Physical Anthropology at Columbia University, and then promoted to Professor of Anthropology in 1899. Boas founded the first department to offer a Ph.D. in Anthropology in America. So, professional anthropology begins approximately with the dawn of the 20th Century.

I began studying anthropology in 1964 at Bethel College, in St. Paul, Minnesota.³ I was graduated in 1966 with a major in anthropology, then earned a master's in anthropology in 1968, and a Ph.D. in 1972, both at the University of Minnesota. That means that I have been around for nearly half the life of the discipline. In fact, my first advisor at Minnesota was E. Adamson Hoebel, who himself had been a student of Franz Boas. One of my professors was Robert F. Spencer, who had studied under Alfred Kroeber, also

¹ This article was first presented as a talk given at Taylor University at the invitation of Robert Priest on April 15, 2018. I thank him for that opportunity and for his critique that has informed this revision for publication. The article still retains some of the characteristics of a talk, though I appreciate the critiques offered by Eloise Meneses and the reviewers. I am still responsible for the final form.

² Proverbs 19:2, a variation on the NIV translation.

³ I studied under Claude Stipe and Tom Correll.

a student of Franz Boas. Is it no wonder that I have strong Boasian tendencies?

What makes the discipline attractive to me is its commitment to a two-step process for understanding people, including Americans themselves as a society.⁴ The first way begins with observation, inquiry, description, and analysis. This is called doing ethnography, that is, making sense of the thoughts and behavior of one group of people, and, I might add, the internal variations in culture, which are many.

The second way depends on the availability of written ethnographic reports about several groups of people. This step is comparison. Doing ethnology involves developing appropriate categories, running a cross-cultural comparison, and drawing generalizations. Sounds simple, but, as you might guess, it is and it isn't.

Step One: Doing Ethnography

Ethnographic research involves using the people's language, speaking from a particular perspective, and speaking to a particular audience. However, we have to ask: Whose language? Whose perspective? Which audience? There is no universal language; not English, not Spanish, not Chinese, not Hindi. None of these can pretend to be a scientific language. There is no neutral vantage point. Every perspective is shaped by gender, class, and ethnicity, at the least. Every audience requires a different narrative according to time, place, and composition of the audience. We see this in the existence of two histories of Israel: Kings and Chronicles; as well as four narratives about the life and teachings of Jesus, each serving different purposes.

When anthropologists get the language right, the perspective generous, and the audience identified; then we develop descriptions called ethnographies. An ethnography is something written, but not just anything written. People write travelogues about a vacation they took. Soldiers, business agents, and missionaries report their experiences. These are not ethnographies. Ethnographic research involves a serious attempt to learn the local people's perspective, not to impose one's own.

Ethnography is based on the experience of an anthropologist living among a people for an extended period of time, usually at least a year, often for as long

as two years. Some anthropologists keep going back over a life-time. I lived on an isolated coral atoll in the southern Marshall Islands for 18 months; but I have been back for research at times. In addition, as a Pacific Islands anthropologist and a United Methodist missionary, I have lived and done research in New Guinea during a five year residence.⁵ I have also visited other Pacific islands. Overall, I have spent about eight years of my life in the Pacific Islands. And still, I consider myself an expert only on limited aspects of culture and language, and even that understanding is now dated. During my doctoral research in the Marshalls, I knew about homosexuality and had read some accounts of similar practices in Melanesia and Polynesia, but that was not the focus of my research program.

Step Two: Doing Ethnology

Comparison is a different animal altogether. Assuming that a particular scholar has access to a number of good ethnographies, written over time, in different languages, from different perspectives, and to different audiences; then it may be possible to make comparisons of whole cultures. However, it is more practical to make comparisons of selected aspects of cultures. The first hurdle to jump is to make sure, as we add culture after culture to the comparison, that we are in fact talking about the same thing, or at least something similar in each culture.

Let me provide an example. By 1910, there had emerged in anthropology a pair of concepts called 'totem' and 'taboo'. Broadly speaking, a society employs totems when an animal or spirit is linked to certain divisions of society and ensures their prosperity. Taboo comes from a Polynesian word that means 'forbidden', particularly in a sacred context. In fact, as you might recognize, the concepts had already escaped from the fledgling discipline of anthropology and had found a refuge in the discipline of psychology. In 1913, Sigmund Freud published *Totem and Taboo*, with this subtitle: *Resemblances Between the Psychic Lives of Savages and Neurotics*. Clearly, Freud played fast and loose with the data.

This work, and a lot of early anthropological work, builds on the assumption that totemism is a "thing" that exists out there in the real world. As it turns out,

⁴ For example, Chinese Anthropologist Francis L. K. Hsu studied Americans.

⁵ I worked at the Melanesian Institute in Goroka, Eastern Highlands Province of Papua New Guinea.

totemism is not a universal reality or even regional reality. In 1910, Alexander Goldenweiser deconstructed the concept of Totemism as a cross-cultural comparative concept in his doctoral dissertation, *Totemism: An Analytical Study*. Goldenweiser declared that this is where anthropologists go wrong:

On the basis of material furnished by some one area or a number of areas, a definite group of features is called 'totemism'. Another totemic area is discovered where an additional feature is found, or where one of the old ones is missing. Immediately the questions arise . . . Is *this* totemism? Or Was *that* totemism? Or Is *this* true totemism, and *that* was *incompletely developed*, . . . or a *later development*?⁹ In the light of the foregoing discussion, any definite answer to these questions must needs be arbitrary. (1910, 89-90)

Goldenweiser demonstrated that there is no single universal concept we can call totemism, and the whole comparative project around totemism tends to generate too many useless questions. Franz Boas was convinced since six years later he wrote: "Totemism is an artificial unit, not a natural one" (1916, 321). Warren Shapiro agrees that anthropologists and other scholars assumed that "the expression 'totemism' designated a unitary class of phenomena. Goldenweiser's initial contribution to the controversy, ". . . was to show that the alleged unitary character of totemism is in fact an analytical concoction" (1991, 610).

When anthropologists are doing research, it is a good practice to keep major concepts *in language*⁶ as long as possible. When we move to the level of making cross-cultural comparisons, then we do need a more universal language. However, we always want to discover what is similar and what is different in the cases at hand to ensure that we are talking about the same thing.

When anthropologists make comparisons, we tend to follow a method that Fred Eggan called "controlled comparison" (1954). That is, we do not, as the American proverb says, "Compare apples and

oranges." We compare apples to apples. We do this in order to make sure that we are talking about the same thing, and to be able to say something meaningful about which apples are good to eat, which ones are good to make pies with, and which ones are available in which areas in which months.

A classic example of the problem of developing a universal comparative language is the case of the British social anthropologists who cut their teeth studying African societies.⁷ The research of the 1900s gave us some outstanding ethnographies: E. E. Evans-Pritchard's *The Nuer*, Paul Bohannan's *Justice and Judgment among the Tiv*, and John Beattie's *The Nyoro State*, among others. These gave us concepts like "tribe" and "kingdom" and "patrilineal descent." However, when the Highlands of New Guinea were 'opened up', to use a colonial term, after World War II, students of the British school of social anthropology flocked to New Guinea to study these new people. They brought with them the theories and concepts that anthropologists had developed in Africa.

After nearly two decades, it became clear that something was seriously wrong. J. A. Barnes wrote a seminal article titled, "African Models in the New Guinea Highlands" (1962). Barnes demonstrated that what they thought they knew about African "tribes" and "chiefs" and "kingdoms" did not help very much in understanding New Guinea society, polity, economics, kinship, and religion. In other words, the people of New Guinea had their own reality, their own conceptions of how society is organized; and they followed their own thoughts, not African thoughts.⁸ This caused a reflective and reflexive swing in anthropology that is not over yet. It even made anthropologists rethink what they thought they knew about Africa.

In a similar vein, one year later, Marshall Sahlins wrote "Rich Man, Poor Man, Big Man, Chief: Political Types in Polynesia and Melanesia" (1963). Sahlins made the case that political leadership in Melanesia did not involve anything like a chief ruling over a chiefdom, a polity that was imagined for Polynesia and for Africa. In Melanesia, Big Man leadership involves different dynamics than leadership by a chief.

⁶ A term frequently used by SIL Bible translators to mean "in the local language."

⁷ It's the 'Colonial Connexion', another subject that is also of interest.

⁸ Note that the assumption that these peoples might be similar is based on colonial assumptions about 'primitive' 'natives' with a lower level of social organization. All that was wrong, but that is another subject.

So, now, on the first day of class when I am teaching anthropology, I tell my students that the best way to fail this class is to use questionable terms like “totemism,” or “tribe,” or “chief,” or “animism,” or “primitive,” or “simple.”

Question: Does Homosexuality Exist in the Pacific Islands?

All that to say, when someone asks me to speak or write about homosexuality in cross-cultural perspective, I am hesitant. Most of my life has been focused elsewhere, on land tenure and political organization specifically in the islands of the Pacific. My first question is whether or not the English term homosexuality is a legitimate cross-cultural category? What descriptions do we have of things that people do that are like what Americans mean when they use the term? The answers are so varied and nuanced that some have taken to speak of homosexualities, even within one culture.⁹

Keep in mind that just because we talk about something in American English does not mean that thing is real outside of the world of American English speakers. In this case, not even all English speakers agree about which phenomenon they are talking about. Identity formation, sexual desire and behavior, and self-perception vary greatly and are difficult to capture in a few terms. Americans seem to be still expanding the category, now including LGBTQQICAPF2K+.¹⁰ Can this concept be turned into a category suitable for cross-cultural comparison? Or, put differently, can we learn anything about same-sex feelings, motivations, and relationships by conducting a controlled comparison of Pacific Islanders’ practices? The answer will reflect back on the question of the universality of homosexuality as defined by Americans.

My own doctorate does not help much. I studied land tenure in both the Marshall Islands and Papua New Guinea. I did not ask about sexual practices, and I do not see in the literature on Micronesia much about same-sex attraction. However, the literature from Melanesia and Polynesia is thicker on the subject.

First, the whole issue of what a person is, how a person is constructed, and the place of sexual identity

in one’s personal identity has been raised and addressed by a number of anthropologists working in Melanesia. The work of Marilyn Strathern (1988) and others (e.g., Read 1955; Burridge 1979; Iteanu 1990; Josephides 1991) provides a caution against pretending that Western conceptions of personhood are somehow scientific or universal. There are many systems for constructing a person, perhaps as many as there are cultures.

I made this point for an audience concerned with cross-cultural mission in an article entitled “Person In Mission” (2003). There I argued that persons are constructed differently in different societies, and therefore it is incumbent on a missionary to ask: Who am I talking to?

Melanesia: Is this Homosexual Behavior?

When anthropologists entered the Highlands of Papua New Guinea in the 1950s, they began to uncover some initiation rites and practices that certainly seemed strange to Euro-Americans. The work of Kenneth Read (1980 [1965]) and other anthropologists reveals in traditional cultures a widespread concern with gender formation, particularly a concern by the men that boys who are raised by their mothers need help in becoming men, as the culture defines men. Boys must go through initiation rites in order to be separated from the polluting influences of women and then they need to be properly fortified with male influences (Meggit 1964). In some Melanesian cultures, men thought that only in this way would boys transition to become men.

The context is that, in pre-colonial times, these were societies where strong men were needed to hunt, to garden, and to fight when necessary for kinfolk and political allies. Men were anxious about raising up the next generation of warriors and hunters in order for the society to thrive and survive.

Here is what concerned the men. Baby boys are born in female fluids, nurse mother’s milk, accept sweet potatoes and other food from the hands of menstruating women, and thus are in constant danger of being weakened physically and spiritually. There are social and political issues here as well since their

⁹ Most prominently, Stephen O. Murray, who spent a lifetime as a “comparative sociologist” studying and gathering material from around the world, titled his definitive tome: *Homosexualities*.

¹⁰ Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, Curious, Asexual, Agender, Ally, Pansexual, Polysexual, Friends and family, Two-spirit, Kink, plus anything else that is not heterosexual.

mothers may have come from a former ally who has currently shifted to enemy status in the alliances of yesterday's New Guinea. So, the overriding concern of men has been how to rescue boys, to cleanse them from the polluting influences of women, and strengthen them so that they grow up to be men.

Of course, all of this depends on local definitions of what constitutes a person, how a person grows and develops, what is a male, and what is a female. In the cultural logic, particularly in Highlands societies on the island of New Guinea, boys need to be separated from women. Thus, they are removed from their mother's houses at about age 9 and taken to live in the men's house. Then, boys need to be purged of female influences. In some societies, this means a regular regimen of induced vomiting. Even adult men would regularly take a piece of cane, curve it into a U shape, and ratchet it down their throats until they vomited. Who knows what they might have ingested along with the food that women prepare, and so they take no chances. In other societies, men would roll up leaves with sharp edges into a cigar-like shape, and then jam these up their nostrils until they bleed. Out with the blood comes any female fluids they might have ingested.

Men have noticed, by the way, that girls seem to come to maturity all by themselves: they grow breasts, they begin to menstruate, and then they become pregnant. How is it that boys are so slow to develop while girls jump out ahead? Their answer is that boys are being held back by the detrimental influences of women. In some societies, nose bleeding by males is thought to mimic girl's menstruation and thus this practice will help bring the boy to maturity. One anthropologist entitled his ethnography: *The Island of Menstruating Men*.¹¹

So, boys must be separated from women, and boys must be purged of female influences that might weaken them. Finally, boys must be given semen in order to strengthen them since semen does not develop naturally but must be planted in them (Kelly 1977, 16). This is where 'something like homosexuality' comes into play. In some societies, during initiation rites, men masturbated and deposited semen on boys' heads (Ernst 1991, 5). In other societies, boys were expected to perform fellatio on adult males and thus swallow

semen (Herdt 1981, 2). And in other societies, men performed anal sex on boys and thus deposited semen that way (Schieffelin 1982, 163).

I said "during initiation rites," but that is misleading since in some societies this continued on a regular basis over a period of years. There is another problem with our study, and that is the issue of how to describe something that is rapidly disappearing, if not gone altogether. There is something in anthropology called "the ethnographic present." In the colonial era, this was an attempt to reconstruct culture and society the way it was at the point of the European encounter. Anthropologists often showed up ten to twenty years later, and so they talked to older men, and infrequently, to older women, then tried to reconstruct what life was like before colonialists and missionaries arrived. This approach carries its own ethical issues, of course.

However, in the case of the Highlands of New Guinea, the ethnographic present was nearly at the same time as the colonial contact. In many cases, anthropologists and missionaries followed right behind government patrols into the mountains and valleys of central New Guinea.

Early anthropologists in the Highlands discovered these practices by accident, by which I mean that most of them were not looking for or expecting something like homosexuality. By following men around and watching everything that they did, anthropologists observed initiation rites. Thus, Kenneth Read gives us a rather sanitized description of initiation rites in his classic ethnography, *The High Valley* (1965). Other anthropologists began to develop the story of male initiation rites as observed after World War II into the 1950s and 1960s.

Then, some anthropologists began to make something like homosexuality the focus of their studies. For example, after he discovered initiation rites, the anthropologist Gilbert H. Herdt conducted research into this practice in the 1960s and 1970s.¹² Herdt conducted his research in the Eastern Highlands among a people he calls the Sambia, although that is a pseudonym, given his subject matter. He begins his introduction with these questions:

¹¹ Ian Hogbin. 1970. *The Island of Menstruating Men: Religion in Wogeo, New Guinea*.

¹² "The initial two years of my fieldwork (1974-76) among the Sambia amounted to an accidental study of their sexuality, since it never was my intention to study sex in the field" (Herdt 1999, 6).

Why should a secret society of manly warriors believe that a boy must be orally inseminated to become masculine? What happens when this conviction is implemented through a prolonged ritualized homosexuality? It is with the origins of this male developmental cycle that I will be concerned; with its behavioral manifestations that constantly polarize masculinity and femininity in idioms and myth; and with exploring ways in which we can set about studying that gender symbolism. (1994 [1981], 1)

Herdt then claims that “My anthropological task is this: to explain this puzzling pattern of culturally constituted development in which Sambia heterosexual manhood emerges only after years of normatively prescribed and prolonged homosexual activities” (1994 [1981], 3).

What is the “puzzling pattern”? The puzzle, for Herdt, is that the boys engage in what appears to be homosexual behavior, not just in one initiation rite but over a number of years. However, the goal, and the actual result, is that they become heterosexual men. Of course, this is a puzzle *only* if you think that, in the language of the American worldview, homosexuality cannot be changed to heterosexuality. Yet here are a people who practice *one* in order to get to the *other*. Early on, Herdt used the term “ritualized homosexuality,” but later he dropped the term.

In his new foreword to the 1994 edition of this book, Herdt writes: “It is no longer useful to think of the Sambia as engaging in ‘homosexuality’, because of the confusing meanings of this concept and their intellectual bias in the Western history of sexuality” (Herd 1994, xiii-xiv). Exactly. Yet, the cases from Melanesia do tell us something. First, any concept, like ‘homosexuality’, is always entwined and embedded in other concepts, such as “gender identity,” and even institutions, such as “clan security and warfare.”

Second, inasmuch as these instances of ‘homosexual-like’ behavior seem significant early in the life of a young man, they do not lead to an exclusive pattern of homosexuality as an adult, though occasionally a longer term relationship develops alongside heterosexual behavior (Serpenti 1884, 305). Most of the time, this homosexual-like behavior leads to a heterosexual life, a man married to a woman and producing children for the next generation. Same-sex behavior,

then, is a step in the process of emphasizing male dominance and aggression (Langness 1999, 154; Murray 2000, 25) in order “to promote their masculinity and aggressiveness” (Watson 1971, 269). Trying to interpret Melanesian homosexual-like behavior in terms of Western homosexual narratives is not very productive.

Let’s add to this an interesting account from the Highlands of New Guinea by Bruce Knauff. Knauff provides us with ethnographic descriptions of the hunting and gathering Gebusi, including the practice of same-sex behavior among some young men on extended hunting trips, but not elsewhere in society (1986; 1987). Knauff followed up his initial ethnographic fieldwork with another period of fieldwork carried out twenty years later (reported in 2012). By this time the people had been touched by global flows of capitalism in the form of a nearby mine, and Christianity brought by missionaries. Knauff recounts an incident in which he heard a word in conversation that he did not understand. He asked if it was related to the aforementioned practice of young men in hunting parties. The men, in their 20s, did not know what he was talking about and took offense at the suggestion that such a thing had ever been a part of their culture. He quickly changed the subject.

As we leave this culture area, we can say that homosexual-like behavior in Melanesia (1) is embedded in other concepts and practices and thus has its own narrative, (2) is ephemeral in that it does not last a life-time,¹³ (3) serves other purposes than sexual desire, (4) is connected causatively to the production of a masculine heterosexual identity, and (5) has been susceptible to rapid change and even loss in colonial and globalizing contexts.

Polynesia: Is this Homosexual Behavior?

In the interest of space, I will access only one case study, although a major one, from Polynesia; the research of Robert I. Levy, a psychological anthropologist, entitled: *Tahitians: Mind and Experience in the Society Islands* (1973).

As early as 1791, explorers in the Society Islands could tell that there was something unusual going on, at least unusual to the European eye. James Morrison reported:

¹³ That is, “The modern northern European and American notion that everyone who repeatedly engages in homosexual behavior is ‘a homosexual’, a distinct ‘species’ with unique features, is far from being universally credited” (Murray 2000, 1).

They have a set of men called Mahoo (*māhū*). These men are in some respects like the Eunuchs in India but they are not castrated. They never cohabit with women but live as they do. They pick their beards out and dress as women, dance and sing with these and are as effeminate in their voice. They are generally excellent hands at making and painting of cloth, making mats and every other women's employment (Morrison 1935, 238; quoted in Levy 1973, 130).

Captain Bligh, on the same ship as Morrison, investigated when he encountered a *Māhū*. He reported: ". . . I had myself some idea that it was common in this sea. I was however mistaken in all my conjectures except that things equally disgusting were committed. . . . The women treat him as one of their sex, and he observed every restriction that they do, and is equally respected and esteemed" (Bligh 1937, 16-17; quoted in Levy 1973, 131).

It turns out that the *māhū* is a recognized status. People claim that there is only one for each village or district, just as there is only one chief, and claim that there is never more than one "because when one dies, then another substitutes. . . . God arranges it like that" (Levy 1973, 132).

It is also similar to the status of a chief, in that, as Levy reports:

One can discontinue being a *māhū* as one can discontinue being chief. There is a case in the village of a young man who in his early adolescence dressed from time to time in girl's clothes and was thus a *māhū* and who in his early twenties rejected (*fā'aru'e* 'cast off') the role. It is assumed in the village that this is the end of it and that he is leading an ordinary masculine life. (Levy 1973, 133)

While not all *māhū* engage in sexual activity, those that do perform fellatio, usually on young men. The favor is never returned. Anal sex, by contrast, is considered to be a "non-Tahitian" practice that has been imported from the outside (Levy 1973, 137). Those who visit a *māhū* are not considered to be *māhū* themselves. They are predominately heterosexual,

and for them the *māhū* is just a substitute for a woman (Levy 1973, 134, 235). In addition, two *māhū* never hook up or form a couple. While there are vague reports of female homosexual-like behavior, there is no status like the *māhū* and no evidence that the practice is anything more than a diversion from the more normative heterosexual behavior.

Conclusions

What does our quick survey of Tahitian practices tell us? Unlike Melanesia, in Polynesia, or at least in Tahiti,¹⁴ there is a designated status for a man behaving like a woman; and a person could remain a *māhū* for life. However, like Melanesia, this sexual identity by choice might not last a lifetime. Further, there does not seem to be widespread agreement in Tahiti today about the role of the *māhū*, with some saying it begins at birth and others saying that it is adopted later. Some say that the sexual practice is central to the role, others say that one can be a *māhū* and not engage in sex at all. Overall, there does not seem to be the sharp division and antagonism between males and females like that characteristic of Melanesia.

The two examples afforded by Pacific ethnography do reflect two of the most common patterns around the world for "same sex" behavior: (1) it occurs between different generations in settings of age transition and (2) it occurs around a formal status of gender modification.¹⁵

The examples show significant differences from American assumptions. First, in the Melanesian case, such behavior is generation wide, not a personal choice. The Tahitian example is more like a personal choice, but is not widespread. Second, in both cases, the pattern is open to change. In the Melanesian example, change is expected since same-sex behavior is a step on the way to a heterosexual identity. In the Polynesian example, change is possible if the person changes his mind.

Questions remain: Do the beliefs and practices described belong in the same category? Are they the same thing that people talk about in the United States? Are they all instances of a single global phenomenon that could be called 'homosexuality'? The evidence

¹⁴ There are similar, but not the same, categories recognized elsewhere in Polynesia: Hawaii *aikāne*, Tonga *fakaleiti*, Samoa *fa'alafine*, and Maori *takatāpui*.

¹⁵ "...for whatever ultimate historical and structural causes, the two root forms scarcely overlap in any area of the premodern world" (Herdt 1999, 270). The root forms he discusses are "age structured" and "gender transformed." See also Murray 2000, 5.

does not support the hasty conclusion that such a category exists. It appears that, so far, we are talking about apples and oranges; and that we need to look closer in every case to make sure that we know what we are talking about.

However, with the arrival of globalization, we may not have much time left to figure this out. Global flows of people, products, and perspectives include not only capitalism and Christianity, but also the narratives and practices of homoerotic cultures. As with other exports, there is local resistance, rejection, reinvention, or adaptation. Peter Jackson describes the way that global cities are linked to each other, with a focus on the history of how Bangkok became a “gay capital” (Jackson 2003, 153). Jackson pays due attention to traditional Thai understandings, identities, and practices, and then shows how Thais now negotiate what Dennis Altman has called “global queering” (Altman 1996, 77-78). These global flows include people (through migration and tourism) as well as ideas (homosexuality as defined by Europe and America) that are linked mostly to port cities in capitalist trading networks. Thus urbanization and globalization intersect to create sites for the exportation of different understandings of sexuality—a cultural and social phenomenon, not just a personal one as imagined in the United States.

This reflects other lessons learned in anthropology. First, people create culture, then they forget that they did that, and they begin to pretend that what they created is a given in nature. Second, people are caught in webs of significance not all of their own making, but they are resourceful in negotiating their way through the maze.

Missiological Anthropology

From a missiological standpoint, we have skirted sex and gender issues before. The construction of male and female identities, and how that affects marriage and family life, is a long-standing missiological interest—perhaps last discussed under the guise of “polygamy.” Auli Vähäkangas (2009) reminds us that this conversation has not gone away since childlessness is still an issue in many societies, including those of Tanzania. Childlessness raises issues of wholeness (identity), salvation, and immortality—all missional concerns.

This quick survey of extant literature about same-sex sexual behavior in Melanesia and Polynesia reveals that the American category, homosexuality, even when it is pluralized as homosexualities,¹⁶ still leads to questionable cross-cultural comparisons. The American narrative, with assertions of sexuality being inborn, unchangeable, and natural (if that means everywhere existent among humans) is just that, an American narrative. All narratives are cultural constructs, so we should not pretend that the narratives created in the United States or Europe will help us understand and communicate with all people. Those narratives are inadequate.

The way forward, for missionaries, is to learn to use anthropological methods in developing a critical view of culture, history, and theology as a mission strategy. In this urbanized, globalized, migratory, and newly-gendered world, new mission concepts and practices are in order. Those who develop them must be as grounded in culture as in Scripture.

The conversation around same-sex behavior must include other cultures outside the United States and Europe. Ethnographic descriptions should remain *in language* as long as possible, meaning that local understandings should be allowed to emerge rather than be hidden behind rhetorically powerful Western concepts.

A missiological understanding of same-sex behavior must include the perspectives of the “new faces of Christianity” of which Philip Jenkins writes (2006). Insofar as the church’s center of gravity has shifted south and east, so has the center of the sending mission, leaving the First World on the periphery. No conversation about LGBTQ issues can long continue in missiological circles without voices from the Global South being heard. As Jenkins shows, if we did not already know, the kinds of readings of Scripture proposed in the West are not what Christians in the Global South churches practice, nor, I might add, what their own missionaries teach when they send them back to countries in North America and Europe. To them, the debate about homosexuality might look like a case of poorly contextualized Christianity.

However, we must remind ourselves that no narrative is stable over time. Any narrative is subject to change either by natural literary development, by migration, or by colonial imposition. When conditions change, when people exchange ideas, or when the

¹⁶ The choice made by Stephen O. Murray.

power and money speak, then change happens. It may be soldiers establishing outposts, or missionaries planting churches, or sex tourists paying to indulge their fantasies. Change happens, and thus understanding requires repetitive ethnographic research.

We need to be patient as well as persistent. The behavior described here disappeared, or went underground, in Melanesia and Polynesia with increased contact with the outside world, with the reduction of isolation and fear of attack by enemies, and when people responded to the Gospel. However, Western notions of gender and sexuality are rushing in to revise or replace local iterations, and missionaries are often not prepared to engage that trend if they bring American culture wars to frame the issue.

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The Role of Christian Education in Building Skills and Instilling Moral Values among Students in Higher Ed Institutions for National Unity and Economic Advancement in Sub-Saharan Africa

Victor Priest Chukwuma

Education is more than the acquisition of knowledge. There are people in society who have acquired expertise but lack the character and skills to impact their community effectively. This situation has distorted national unity and lowered economic growth. “African graduates, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, are victims of frequent ethnic conflicts, corruption, nepotism and industries dependent on outdated technology with low returns and low productivity” (Kigotho 2019). Many students graduate from higher ed institutions to cause unrest in their country because of a lack of skills and morals. To revolutionize the education sector in Sub-Saharan Africa requires an integration of biblical principles in the teaching and learning process to build skills and character for national advancement. The approach used in this paper is library research through critical analysis of empirical studies and library resources, both primary and secondary sources, to describe the phenomenon under study.

Introduction

This paper aims to examine the role of Christian education in imparting knowledge, skill acquisition, and morals in higher education for students' preparedness for national unity and economic advancement. In addition, the aim is to restate the need for the development of a Christian philosophy of education in higher ed institutions through the integration of biblical principles in the teaching and learning process, which helps transform the lives of students to be relevant in society.

The Concept of Christian Education

Christian education recognizes the role of the Triune God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) in the educational process. God is the source of all knowledge; he deserves to be honored. In obedience to His word, an educator lives a life of integrity and serves as a role model to students. They impart knowledge, skills, and values that model student

character to become good citizens of their countries. According to Anthony,

Christian education is steeped in misunderstanding and misconception. Part of the reason for this is the multidisciplinary nature of the field. Its foundation is biblical studies and theology, but it seeks to integrate them with the knowledge gleaned from the social sciences: education, sociology, and psychology. Studying Christian education gives a biblical perspective on how God created us to learn and interact together. With these insights, we are able to more strategically fulfill the Great Commission. (Anthony 2001, 13)

An obvious misconception on Christian education is the dichotomy between Christian education and education in general. Education is holistic. It includes acquiring knowledge, skills, and values that impact students with relevant aptitude to be competent in their area of expertise to contribute positively to national development in their respective countries. This article has used the term Christian education to mean

education that applies Christian values in teaching in higher ed institutions. “Christian values are the principles that a follower of Jesus Christ holds as important—the principles of life that Jesus taught. Christian values don’t change over time. They are consistent from generation to generation since their foundation is found in God’s Word, the Bible” (Compassion International 2021).

In a practical sense, Christian values involve loving God and doing his will as a child of God in an educational setting. It includes respect for human dignity, love, care for students and colleagues, and harmony fostering unity and peace among the learning community. Christian educators participate in the mission of God by their character and the services they render to the community; they become light and salt that brightens and seasons a decaying society into a good and prosperous society. A study was conducted among students in higher education to determine students’ perceptions about an effective teacher. Students who participated in the study included students from Africa. The following is the outcome:

- “She was always prepared.”
- “He was very positive.”
- “She had high expectations for me!”
- “She was the most creative teacher I have ever had!”
- “He was so fair!”
- “I liked her personal touch!”
- “I felt that I was a part of the class.”
- “She showed me compassion when my mother died.”
- “He was so funny!” . . . “She taught her class in a fun way.”
- “I was never bored in his class.”
- “He gave all the students respect and never embarrassed me in front of the class.”
- “She did not hold what I did against me!” (Walker 2008, 63)

An effective teacher is a person of good morals and skill in their teaching engagement. These play a vital role in instilling skills and modelling for students character for national development in their respective countries. The fear of God will enable a teacher not to violate work ethics but maintain good working relationships with fellow colleagues and students as they teach. They give quality time to study hard to offer

quality education that develops students’ skills and instills knowledge that lasts for a long time.

Learning can also be achieved through observation. Students observe teachers and learn from them. They know the teachers that are effective in their teaching engagement. Imagine what happens when teachers do not have good morals as they interact with students daily; how will student lives be shaped positively to make a notable impact in society? Hughes illustrates the point saying,

The term Christian Education does not indicate that the content of religious education is Christianity (though it may be), nor that the explicit aim is the nurturing of Christian faith (though it may have that consequence for some pupils). It does indicate that the character of the school, or more particularly the values generally upheld in it, are Christian values, albeit of a fairly elementary kind (e.g., about commitment to honesty and the care of individuals). (Hughes 1992, 112)

Christian education is holistic because it holds firmly to Christian values of honesty, love for humanity, diligence in service, and building a community of learners to impact society positively. Quantitative research was conducted at River State Universities, Nigeria to determine the causes and effects of academic corruption in higher education. The study revealed that corruption is common among lecturers, administrators, parents, and students. The causes of corruption include poor study habits and poor entry qualifications to higher education. The effects of corruption lead to low morals, delayed absorption of graduates into the labor market, and poor quality of university graduates (Dimkpa 2011).

Corruption in higher education is a global problem that comes in different forms, such as politicians interfering with university functions to receive unearned degrees to run for political office. Also, academic dishonesty is exhibited by lecturers when they award degrees to students who have not completed their course requirements. Some students pay lecturers to pass their examination while some lecturers demand sex from female students in exchange for success in their studies. Students plagiarize their research projects. Plagiarism has become a routine practice in higher education (Kirya 2019). Teachers in higher education should be people with good morals and skills in their teaching engagement. They play a vital role in modelling

students' character, and that affects national development in their respective countries. Educational administrators should be men and women of integrity, void of corruption, so that funds allotted for education infrastructure are used appropriately for suitable space for students' learning.

Christian education integrates biblical principles in the teaching and learning processes. It equips students with basic knowledge in their studies, develops their skills, and instills values that help improve the economy and build students' character to become good citizens. Education is a medium through which national unity can be maintained among people of different ethnicities. In modern society, a school is a place for acquiring new ideas and knowledge. Datta indicates that, "Education contributes to the political socialization of a child which transmits certain values, beliefs, ideas, and patterns of behavior in a child" (Datta 1984, 38). In response to Datta's point, it is essential to note that Christian education contributes immensely to adult political socialization regarding developing skills and instilling values that build character.

According to Bastable, "Three major stage-range factors associated with learner readiness—physical, cognitive, and psychosocial maturation—must be taken into account at each developmental period throughout the life cycle" (Bastable 2017, 2). Higher ed institutions deal with adult learners. Adult physical maturation has already been reached because they have experienced biological growth from childhood to adulthood. On the cognitive aspect, they have received some knowledge that they continue to nurture through learning. Subsequently, psychosocial maturation combines psychology and social behavior, determined through social affiliation with different people. Adult learning focuses on life tasks and social roles concerning employment, family, and other activities.

The prime motivator to learn in adulthood is to apply knowledge and skills to solve the immediate problem of national development. At the beginning of any teaching-learning encounter, adults want to know the benefit of the teaching experience because they have rich resource information based on prior knowledge. Thus, they are more practical, multi-tasking, and self-confident. A Christian philosophy of education can expose students to a rich learning experience where they develop their skills and learn values that can build their character.

The Problem of Skills and Morals among Graduates

Morals and generic life skills contribute immensely to the unity and progress of any nation. The generic skills involve a positive work attitude such as innovation, integrity, motivation, communication, interpersonal relationship, problem-solving, and service orientation. "One debate among business owners and policymakers centres on whether higher education institutions are failing to transform the young generation by reorienting education to develop higher competencies, skills, values and behaviour" (Okolie et al. 2020, 295). The goal of education is defeated when it fails to equip students with necessary skills and morals that help modify their behaviour for competence in their work engagement. An interview conducted in Nigeria among final-year undergraduate students showed that courses taught in some higher education institutions do not focus on equipping students with such generic skills. "During the interviews with final-year students, they had some difficulties in understanding the exact meaning of generic skills such as lifelong learning skills, interpersonal skills, leadership skills, integrity and professional ethics skills, and information management skills, among others" (Okolie et al. 2020, 301). The finding showed that the courses taught in some higher ed institutions do not aim to build students' skills and morals but rather their knowledge acquisition for mental engagement alone.

In contrast, a survey among lecturers and students in 20 selected higher ed institutions in Kenya showed that "students who undertake ethical and critical thinking are more productive because of the high memory comprehension, retention and awareness of reality" (Githui 2021, 86). It implies that teaching was not limited to knowledge acquisition. Christian education offers the opportunity for students to experience a transformation of character and equip them with lifelong skills to be competent and resourceful in society. Many graduates in Sub-Saharan Africa are not employable because they lack adequate life skills and character to compete in the marketplace (Dimkpa 2011). Integrating biblical principles in teaching can build character and expose students to a rich learning experience where their self-confidence, interpersonal skills, and commitment to scholarship are achieved.

Philosophy of Education

This section examines the philosophy of education to understand the role of education in skill-building and instilling moral values. Education is one of our best gifts because it prepares people to be relevant in the world. Education is the acquisition of knowledge. Knowledge is about receiving adequate information for relevance in society, most especially in expertise. Also, it includes the processing of data for the proper application of knowledge. Education is the development of skills through a rigorous learning experience. It involves falling, rising, and running towards accomplishing educational goals. It helps to build one's talent in expertise. Education is character formation. Morals are acquired through learning occurrences where students' behavior is modified through teaching and discipline to caution against unruly behavior. It requires a deliberate action by teachers to uphold values that are just and fair.

The philosophy of education is rooted in a branch of philosophy which includes logic, metaphysics, epistemology, and axiology. According to Pazmino, "A philosophy of education attempts to articulate a systematic scheme of thought which can guide practice" (Pazmino 1997, 81). Education is systematic because it incorporates reasoning abilities, worldviews, and values to shape a person. It deals with acquiring knowledge through careful thought and practice in education involving interaction between teachers and students to develop the capacity to reason and make good decisions in life. It also involves skills and character formation for relevance in society. Martin Luther King Jr. examined the misconception of education in his context. He stated the function of education thus: "The function of education, therefore, is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. But education that stops with efficiency may prove the greatest menace to society. The most dangerous criminal may be the man gifted with reason but with no morals" (Martin Luther King Jr 1948). Christian education offers the opportunity for a well-balanced education that focuses on knowledge and skills acquisition and character formation. Pazmino defines Christian education as,

A deliberate, systematic, and sustained divine and human effort to share or appropriate the knowledge, values, attitudes, skills, sensitivities, and behaviors that comprise or are consistent with the Christian faith. It fosters the change, renewal, and reformation

of persons, groups, and structures by the Holy Spirit's power to conform to the revealed will of God as expressed in the Scriptures and pre-eminently in the person of Jesus Christ, as well as any outcomes of that effort. (Pazmino 1997, 87)

To acquire knowledge, skills, and values requires a deliberate action through the Holy Spirit's help. Therefore, a Christian educator should make a conscious decision to spend time preparing adequately. Also, a decision must be made to teach the truth of God's word such that students conform to the image of Christ, which is a process that requires patience, action, and the help of the Holy Spirit.

There is a need to understand the goals of Christian education. Gangel and Hendricks stated that "the mandate for Christian teaching assumes a goal. Those who learn about God must respond positively to him. Almost invariably, when the goal of Christian teaching is raised, the word maturity is raised. Maturity manifests itself in relationships, morality and theology" (Gangel and Hendricks 1998, 64). Christian education aims to build individuals till they come to the full knowledge of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Christian education has made a significant impact in Nigeria. Ajuzie confirms that "modern education originated from the Christian Missionaries. It is in the era of education that the missionaries made their greatest contribution to Nigeria and which in turn has acted as a catalyst to every other development that has taken place in Nigeria today" (Ajuzie 2001, 48). The Wesleyan Methodist Society introduced formal education in Nigeria in 1842; it established mission schools across the nation.

The primary purpose of establishing mission schools across the country was to evangelize the nations so that Nigerians could embrace Christianity. It remains the core objective of their curriculum. They taught their students how to read and write, to read the Bible and understand the message of Christ. They introduced the system of education called the "The 3Rs's (reading, writing, and arithmetic). They also included in their curriculum moral instruction so that citizens honor God and respect parents, elders, and authorities. In addition, they developed students' skills through drawing, needlework, and agriculture. The early missionaries brought about a system of education that helped to impart knowledge, build skills and morals among students during the early missionary period in Nigeria. But due to the hostility of Islamic Northerners, the system of education was affected.

Christian values were seen as a threat to Muslims (Ajuzie 2001; Ejiogu 2009).

There is hope for a brighter future in Nigeria and other nations in Sub-Saharan Africa that have experienced setbacks in their educational system. Christian education will play a vital role in building skills and instilling values among students in higher education to enhance national unity and economic growth. Nonetheless, it requires more efforts from Christian educators who see teaching not only as a vocation but as a call to fulfill the mission of God on earth. The Christian educators' task is to lead individuals to develop personal relationships with God through Jesus Christ as they accept him as Lord and Savior of their lives. And after that, the task is to understand the presence of the Holy Spirit, who will guide them to every truth until they conform to Christ-like character. Hence, higher education teachers respond to the Great Commission mandate (Mathew 28:18-20) by integrating faith in teaching to transform students through the Holy Spirit's help.

Old Testament Model of Teaching

Lawson (2001, 17-18) explains the teaching model in the Old and New Testaments. It is summarized below:

- *Teaching at the national level:* In the Old Testament period, teaching was done at the national level through the observation of the Torah (Law). Teaching was an institutional aspect of life in the community of God's people. The law was taught by the priests, prophets, and leaders who devoted themselves to telling others about God's nature and instructing people on how to live to please God and work in harmony with one another.
- *Teaching in the family circle:* Teaching was done in the family circle. Family served as a means through which the teaching of God's word was communicated to the children. The parents spent time teaching their children about God's word and ensuring that they lived their lives according to the dictates of what was written in the scriptures. Children saw both father and mother as a source of wisdom because of the quality time they spent teaching and instructing them to follow the teachings of the law of God. Christian education was not limited to the school premises. From this

we can see that a Christian home teaches their children values that help them in life.

- *God taught His chosen people:* God himself instructed people to live their lives to honor him in the Old Testament times. In Psalm 25:8-9, David says: "Good and upright is the Lord; therefore he instructs sinners in the way. He leads the humble in justice, and he teaches the humble his ways." Teachers were to align themselves to be used by God to transform students' lives as they carried out their duties.
- *Training on one or more vocational skills:* Education was done by training people in particular skills. It could be occupational, specific, or military training, e.g., David's admonition to Solomon in I Chronicle 22:15 was, "You have many workers: stonecutters, masons and carpenters, as well as those skilled in every kind of work." Also, in I Kings 1-2, we see a young king whom his mother trained. Skills development was also an essential part of education. Therefore, the Christian educator should teach a robust system of education that builds skills and character. (Riley 2001)

The New Testament Model of Teaching

In the New Testament, we have the following model:

- *Teaching focuses on the life of Christ:* Teaching in the New Testament is exemplified by the teaching of Jesus Christ, His life and mission. Jesus provides the model for education in the New Testament because He based His instruction on the already revealed truth of God's word in the Old Testament. Jesus' teaching was based on reflection from the Old Testament law. He moved from mere observation of the law ; a shift from behavior to attitude, from legalism to grace. Jesus' teaching is developed in the context of meaningful relationships with the disciples and self-sacrificial obedience to the will of the Father. Building a solid relationship with students helps students to learn and gives them a willingness to accept change. A teacher should love and be willing to sacrifice their time to develop the skills and character of students.

- *Teaching is the primary responsibility of the followers of Christ:* In the New Testament teaching is seen as a primary responsibility and function of those who have chosen to follow the eternal son of God. The early church devoted itself to the teaching of the apostles, which in turn was based on God's revealed truth in the Bible. Teachers in higher education should see teaching as a calling rather than a vocation; this will help them work as unto the Lord (Riley 2001).

Newton (2001, 126-129) has identified five essential elements in the teaching and learning process:

- *The teacher:* The first attempt of the Holy Spirit is to move through the teacher. The Holy Spirit can be involved in teaching if given the opportunity. The involvement can start from the preparation in the closet and move to content delivery in the classroom setting. It can be profound because the Holy Spirit searches human hearts and identifies areas to include in the course that could lead to transformation. There is a difference between teaching and the spiritual gift of teaching. "Spiritually gifted teachers seem to have a holistic ministry in Scripture, teaching God's Word in a way that changes both individual lives and communities" (Newton 2001, 126). Teaching could be seen in general terms. Someone can choose to be trained to teach, but that does not confirm he or she is spiritually gifted. A spiritually gifted teacher is given special abilities from the Lord to teach. Such a person needs to constantly yield to the Holy Spirit to remain more effective in their teaching career (Rom. 12:3-8; I Cor. 12:7-31; Eph. 4:7-12; I Peter 4:10-11).
- *The learner:* The Holy Spirit works in the learners' lives if only they give him the opportunity. Students can hinder the Holy Spirit's move when they harden their hearts from receiving the truth of God's word.
- *The word:* The Holy Spirit illuminates the hearts of both the teacher and learner to discover the truth found in the Bible. The integration of biblical principles in teaching

becomes effective through the power of the Holy Spirit.

- *Interpersonal interaction:* the Holy Spirit works among teachers and students during class interaction. The Holy Spirit works among groups in the learning environment. He brings the connection between communities of learners to discover the truth of the word of God.
- *The environment:* A conducive environment is required for the Holy Spirit to dwell among his children. It involves good relationships between a teacher and learners. It also entails cleanliness. The classroom should be neat and have adequate lighting for learning to take place. The teaching instructional tools should be determined before the commencement of class. The Holy Spirit can pass through any means for his glory.

Educators need to acknowledge the role of the Holy Spirit in the educational process. The Holy Spirit empowers the teachers to teach effectively. He is also involved in transforming the learner's life through learning experiences in higher education.

Modern Philosophy of Education

This section evaluates the goal of education, its content, environment, and the teacher's and student's roles according to a modern philosophy of Christian education as described by Pazmino (1997).

- *Perennialism:* This is a system of education that is based on the established truth related to God. Thus, a person can encounter truth through reasoning and the special revelation of God. Human beings are rational beings. The great books of western philosophy form the content of the perennials. It includes classics and the traditional liberal arts. The subject taught aims to develop students' reasoning capacities and mental discipline to ethically correct and defend the truth. Teachers are viewed as custodians of knowledge and wisdom. Thus, they are referred to as academic scholars. The purpose of education is to expose students to rigorous reading to increase their ability to have the reasoning capability to do

what is right as they interact with people in society. "It affirms intellectual, spiritual, and ethical purpose in education in guiding the individual to eternal truths. Goals include the transmission and assimilation of the prescribed body of the classical subject matter. Classical advocates of philosophy include Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas and others" (Pazmino 1997, 113).

- *Essentialism*: "The educators stress academic excellence, the cultivation of the intellect, and the transmission and assimilation of a prescribed body of subject matter" (Pazmino 1997, 114). Learning is determined through careful observation and reason. It integrates modern scientific and experimental inquiry together with classical studies. "The teacher is considered a person of letters and sciences who has achieved the level of an expert in the area of her or his competence. Students are viewed as rational beings who are gaining command of essential facts and skills that undergird the intellectual disciplines in adjusting to the physical and social environment" (Pazmino 1997, 114). The essentialists believe in specialization in training. The environment of study includes the classroom and research laboratory. They emphasize mastery of necessary learning skills, discipline, and hard work to achieve a meaningful learning experience.
- *Behaviorism*: This focuses on forming a person to function with efficiency, economy, precision, and objectivity through education. "A behaviourist philosophy incorporates a behavioural modification sequence for desired student responses and skills, and uses appropriate reinforcement" (Pazmino 1997, 115). The learning objectives are well stated to guide the teachers to relate with students to achieve the stated goals. Hence, students are exposed to a rewarding environment with the possible use of programmed instruction and other instructional technologies. Teachers are viewed as skilled technicians, sculptors of both person and environment.
- *Progressivism*: Progressivism fosters reflective thinking for social problem solving, democratic relationships and growth. Progressive educators strive to enable students to adapt to a changing world—life adjustment in societal expectations. Proponents include John Dewey, William

Kirkpatrick, Boyd H. Bode, and John L. Childs. Students are exposed to a learning environment to identify a problem and to offer a solution to it. Hence, the teacher is not an authoritarian classroom director, as in perennialism, essentialism, and behaviorism. Instead, the teacher is concerned for progress, committed to society and democratic ideals, and sensitive to the students' needs.

Ethical Consideration in Education

The goal of a Christian philosophy of education is centered on ethics and reverence for God. Roark suggests that:

Christian philosophy sees values as found in God. He is the creator and, as such, has an intimate knowledge of how life should be lived. His commandments are life-affirming. Man has the freedom to reject his commandments, but that rejection is life-denying. God's commands involve obeying, for that is the way of life. Rejecting or disobeying is to deny life and accept irrationality as the model of existence. (Roark 2011, 362)

Moral values are rooted in God. God is holy and just. Therefore, God's expectation for us is high. Huebner (1975) identifies five values: Technical valuing, which focuses on the efficiency of a teacher, and the ability to control disruptive behavior in the classroom. Political valuing addresses the issue of the authority of the teachers in the educational process. Authority is to be used effectively to shape character. Scientific valuing deals with educational activities that result in discoveries through empirical inference. Students can develop critical minds to be innovative, which plays a significant role in community development. Aesthetic valuing describes the beauty of acquiring values noticeable in a person who is educated. It involves the beauty of integrity, harmony, and purity in fitness in work. Lastly, ethical valuing can distinguish between what is ethically right and wrong. The teacher influences the students positively based on the values they uphold.

Pazmino (1997, 115) suggests a sixth category which he calls spiritual valuing. The spiritual dimension is the bedrock in which the other five values can endure. It involves faith integration in teaching and learning processes. The triune God is the model and source for moral life. "Morality is central to the life of every

community. Any society that ignores this important issue as central to its life will crumble and destroy itself” (Nkansah 2013, 2). For a stable society, ethics needs to be addressed. Every community or organization has beliefs and moral values that govern its life and ethos. These beliefs and values explain the moral behavior of that society. Our ethical decisions and choices are based on our convictions about how we perceive God, the world, and ourselves. At the core of these convictions are our biblical, religious, social, moral, and cultural values that shape our character and behavior. Most of our social ethics today are driven by our cultural and moral values. However, it is God’s character that gives grounds for our social ethics. God’s moral laws have implications for our social life.

In Africa, “Learning begins with the organism. It is the means through which we acquire not only skills and knowledge, but values, attitude, and emotional reaction as well” (Taylor 2002, 1). Education is incomplete without the exhibition of good character, and that is rooted in the culture. Africans had a complex system of education before the coming of Europeans. African children were taught to fit into the culture, to care for the animals, to tend their crops. There are various events in the African setting, such as initiation, that offer the opportunity to learn about customs and rules governing the people of a community. As explained by Awoniyi,

African people have various moral and societal values meant to regulate interpersonal relationships and perpetuate the entire community. Africans have specific standards or norms to be observed. These standards or norms are meant for social cohesion and the smooth running of the community. They are to prevent members of the community from becoming rebellious and thereby endanger the welfare of society. (Awoniyi 2015, 5)

African values are based on relationships and reverence for God. Some essential values of African culture can be embraced in all sectors of life. Embracing the richness of African cultural values can help foster national unity and economic advancement in the African continent. The values can be introduced to students in higher education through collaborative learning. Students work together on group projects that sharpen their skills and develop their morals for use in society. Some important Africa values deduced from Awoniyi (2015) are explained thus:

- *Sense of community:* People live in a community where people share common features such as religion, beliefs, culture, and customs. This promotes unity and progress in the community.
- *Sense of good human relationships:* African culture values love and peace between people, despite the difficulty of living this out. Africans respect the value of human life. Members of the community are taught how to live in harmony.
- *Sense of hospitality:* The love shared in the African culture makes it possible for people to show hospitality to one another—the communal life of fellowship, especially during festivals and birth celebrations. Education in Africa culture is holistic. People are not only taught development of skills but also character. They are taught how to show hospitality to one another.
- *Sense of the sacred and of religion.* African values are based on a divine God who is to be feared and worshiped. In school, people are to be taught God’s ways, which will guide their attitude in life.
- *Sense of respect for authority and elders:* Community relations exist where younger men and women respect the elders. In the school setting, students are taught how to respect their parents and the elders in the community.

Personal Philosophy of Education

Developing a personal philosophy of education will keep an educator focused and determined to fulfill educational goals. Aluan stated that,

Your philosophy of education is your beliefs about why, what, and how you teach, whom you teach, and the nature of learning. It is a set of principles that guides professional action through the events and issues teachers face daily. Sources for your educational philosophy are your life experiences, values, the environment in which you live, interactions with others, and awareness of philosophical approaches. Learning about the branches of philosophy, philosophical world views, and different educational philosophies and theories will help you determine and shape your educational philosophy. (Aluan 2014, 3)

A personal philosophy of education demonstrates a sense of creativity. A philosophy of education must be based on personal reflection on educational experiences. It keeps an educator focused on accomplishing academic goals. It incorporates biblical principles, teaching approaches, interpersonal relationships, stated learning outcomes, and specified learning targets in developing skills and instilling values among students that positively impact society.

I believe that education is theocentric because I see God as the source of all knowledge and wisdom. God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit play an active role in the educational process. God the Father revealed himself first to humanity by His creative act, showing His power of reasoning and orderliness. Christ came to restore the image of God in man, which was mired by sin, to give new life to all who accept him as Lord and Savior. The Holy Spirit is a tutor who empowers and guides His children. As a Christian educator, my task of educating others is based upon the fact that God is the source of all knowledge. Therefore, I must work in humility and glorify him for counting me worthy to be among those He will use to transform people's lives. To me, education is both informative and transformative. Therefore, I will dedicate my time to prepare adequately before teaching my students to give valuable and relevant information to their area of interest. I want to encourage my students to read outside what I give them to develop a lifelong reading culture and continue to be relevant in their area of expertise. I will not act as a primary source of materials; instead, I will encourage them to search for knowledge and to apply it in different areas of need. In the aspect of transformation, I will focus on teaching students Christian values by exposing them to the truth in God's word, to discover the truth themselves, and to work according to the Lord's ways. As a Christian educator, I will serve as a model to my students through my lifestyle. Through the Holy Spirit's help, I will live my life conforming to Christian principles and values. Christian values will be highly upheld. Therefore, I will spend time teaching, praying, and rebuking in love when any of my students violate the standard of the Bible. My curriculum for study will be developed based on my general observation from past and present events. It must be something that will motivate student learning and help them overcome their inner struggles in life.

My teaching area is adult education in Christian higher ed institutions. As a Christian educator, I will integrate faith in my teaching profession. This implies

that I will incorporate biblical examples relevant to what is taught. Every class shall begin with a short Bible reflection and prayers before the commencement of any lecture. Subsequently, I will pay attention to the Holy Spirit's leading to see what to include in lessons. I will respect and treat students fairly and motivate them to learn. I see my students as human beings with great potential. Therefore, I must foster a personal relationship with them both in the classroom and outside the classroom. I will treat everyone equally with respect to their learning capacities. I will ensure that I work with individuals till they discover their potential. Notwithstanding, I will apply discipline to control unruly behavior. I will adopt different methods of teaching to meet the interests of diverse learners in the class. Students will freely express themselves in classroom discussions by sharing how a particular topic connects with their life experiences. Practical application of what they learned in the class will be highly encouraged; activities will be given to students outside the classroom to engage their minds and be critical thinkers for national development.

Education in National Unity

In the period just before independence, one major factor bound people together in opposition to colonial rule: nationalism. However, after achieving freedom, this common goal ceased to exist, affecting many countries and leading to internal division and ethnic hostilities. Education became the primary instrument of fostering national identity. Bray and Peter (1986) stated that education promotes horizontal integration in four main ways:

- *Curriculum development:* Curriculum developed to include language studies in which the three major languages—Igbo, Yoruba, and Hausa—are included in the school curriculum in Nigeria. Anyone who leaves their state of origin to study in another state must learn a new language. Formal education promotes a common language that permits communication between members of different ethnic groups. In Nigeria, the common language spoken in schools and official gatherings is English, while in Kenya, there are two common languages spoken: English and Kiswahili. Having a common language of education helps to bring unity and peace among ethnic groups.

- *Construction of institutions:* Educational institutions are constructed to accommodate pupils of different countries to interact with other ethnicities and religions. Conflict emerges when there are no common institutions. Institutions are open for employment for professionals. Christian educators can impact the lives of their students through their lifestyles and personal philosophies of education.
- *National service schemes:* The goal of Christian education is to develop skills and instill values that prepare students to build their nation. A national service scheme for graduates, either voluntary or compulsory, allows participants to perform community service outside their home area. In Nigeria, it is referred to as the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC). Every first degree graduate must serve in a state that is not their state of origin. The NYSC was formed after the civil war in Nigeria on the 22nd of May, 1973, to create ties among Nigerian youth, to promote unity among Muslims, Christians, and people of different ethnic groups. The government aims to unite the nation to work in harmony and be a strong and self-reliant nation, to build a dynamic economy and a land of bright and full opportunities for its citizens.
- *Educational imbalances:* The purpose of education was to give equal opportunity for all people to grow in knowledge and skills to build their nation. The system of education treats students equally. It discourages favoritism and discrimination of students irrespective of their ethnicity and religion. The teachers treat all students with love and respect. Every student is given an equal opportunity to be involved in an educational project where skills are developed. This fosters unity among people of different ethnicities and helps to build the economy of the nation.

Education in Improving National Economy

Christian education helps to develop skills and instill values that boosts the national economy. That is why Ajuzie linked education to Christian missionaries in the quote cited above (Ajuzie 2001, 48). Investment in Christian education can help improve the national economy because students learn morals that help to

sharpen their character and to be good citizens of their respective countries. Also, it develops their skills for innovation to grow the economy of the country. Development in Africa at large requires integration of Christian values in the educational system to improve holistic learning.

Conclusion

We live in a society where people use their skills and intelligence to destroy the nation's economy, oppress the poor, and steal from the nation's treasury to satisfy their very selves. Nkanseh stated that "Ethical decisions and choices are made based on our convictions about how we perceive God, the world, and ourselves. At the core of these convictions are our biblical, religious, social, moral, and cultural values that shape our character and behaviour" (Nkansah 2013, 9). Christian education integrates biblical principles to expose students to a rich learning experience where character is formed and developed to foster national unity and economic innovation.

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NEWS & OPINIONS

Trouble at Every Turn: Christian Anthropologists Ponder Sex/Gender

Jenell Paris

Jesus declared to his disciples, “In this world you will have trouble” (John 16:33, New International Version). Trouble is a theme throughout Scripture; God’s people suffer trouble, cause trouble, and seek God (or don’t) during times of trouble. In most regards, Christianity may not connect easily with Judith Butler’s philosophy, but she also sees the world as a place of trouble. In *Gender Trouble* she explicates ways that gender causes trouble, and not only because it is the site of problems including interpersonal and structural sexism, violence, misogyny and more. Taking a radical approach, going to the root, Butler “seeks to provoke critical examination of the basic vocabulary of the [feminist] movement of thought to which it belongs” (Butler 1999, vii). In her view, conceptual critique is a form of feminist self-criticism that supports the movement. It is often difficult to embrace self-criticism, or “immanent critique” (vii), because it may seem disloyal and likely feels unpleasant, but such foundational critique of the symbols we employ is precious and helpful.

Indeed, in reading the articles by Gil, Priest, and Rynkiewicz (this issue), I come away wondering whether these authors will have any friends left, once these essays are published! Their gift is a hard one to receive: immanent critique of both modern society and Christianity, an insider’s self-critique intended for growth, reform, and ultimately, movement toward the “life that truly is life” (1 Tim. 6:19, NIV). As anthropologists, they look at Christian life through a cultural lens, analyzing the social context of religious belief and practice, probing the generation of words, concepts, and frameworks. To political, national, or religious ideologues, this seems disloyal because the work does not bolster any side in a simplistic or total way, including even the Christian traditions of which the authors are committed members. In betraying

ideology, propaganda, and unquestioned assumptions, these essays express a higher loyalty and carve out a space for critical reflection that can ultimately be part of deepened discernment on the part of the willing reader, a capacity to notice what is good, pleasing, and perfect, in light of and while positioned in the midst of the patterns of this world (Rom. 12:1-2, NIV).

All three essays are about signs. Humans have instinct and physical strength, but neither match the power of symbol-making as a survival skill. Connecting with Max Weber who came before him, Clifford Geertz believed that “man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he has spun, and I take culture to be those webs” (Geertz 1973, 5). Theologically, symbol-making is an outstanding expression of the *imago Dei*; a distinctive way in which humans reflect their Creator. This is seen in the capacity and responsibility given to Adam, when God “brought [all the beasts and the birds] to the man to see what he would name them” (Gen. 2:19a, NIV). Humans are not told to overpower, outrun, or outsmart the animals, rather, to name them. God allows us to live with the consequences of our naming: “. . . whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name” (Gen. 2:19b, NIV).

This set of essays examines the work of Adam; that is, the ways in which humans name certain elements of creation in modern society: sex, sexuality, gender, marriage, and kinship. Gil explicates the conceptual conflation of sex and gender that instructs an inner, felt sense of gender to suppress the identity implications offered by the body’s biological sex. Priest uses a primary data set to explore competing sexual paradigms in American higher education, showing that traditional sexual ethics are increasingly cast as a mean-spirited outlier in a world that has shifted to a consent-based ethic of freedom and choice. He turns to

ethnology to justify the notion that the concept of marriage as between a man and a woman and with strong concern for biological and social reproduction is actually the ethnological prototype and is still recognized as such in anthropological definitions of marriage. Rynkiewicz looks at that part of life that Americans label “homosexual” or, more expansively and less precisely, “LGBTQ+.” He warns of poorly contextualized Christianity, when American Christians reify extant cultural concepts by taking their own concepts to be obvious and universal and then use them in biblical, moral, and ecclesial applications without examination or awareness of their social construction. Christians are then ill-prepared to engage sex/gender matters in their own society or any other.

Readers may wonder when the authors will get down to it and stand with one of two sides in Christian discourse: does the Bible say homosexuality is a sin, or not? (This question no longer even points to the correct subject, which includes sexual identity, gender identity, fluidity, queerness, and a variety of nonconformities in the domain of life we call sex, gender, and sexuality, yet it is the word and the phrase still commonly used among Christians, so I use it for comprehension’s sake.) It is the nature of discourse to hold ideas and symbols in place, breaking new ground only with great effort and slow accommodation on the part of those immersed in a given symbolic universe. These articles do not eventually sort into expected binaries, rather, they take current biblical, theological, pastoral, and sociopolitical discourse as a trailhead and forge new paths. They elevate our sights above struggles for power between two existing sides: in fact, in their concern over the human as symbol-maker, they alert us to a survival threat. Symbol-making, or the capacity for social construction, is one of God’s great gifts to our species, a vital potential for expressing our nature as bearers of God’s image. Are we exercising it amiss over crucial matters related to selfhood, identity, reproduction, embodiment, marriage, and family? Do our symbols point to that which we intend them to, or do they direct our gaze and our minds awry? And to what consequence?

These essays point out incompleteness and error in both secular and sacred realms. As Christian anthropologists, the authors use a participant-observation stance to move in and out of both realms, leaning on lived experience, scholarly literature, and religious and spiritual insight to speak from the insider-outsider vantage point endemic to anthropologists and to missionaries. Insider to modern society, but outsider

insofar as religious identity sets them apart. Insider to the church, but outsider insofar as scholarly commitments and disciplines shape a distinctive mode of thought and communication. Insider to lived experiences of sex, gender, and family, but outsider insofar as multiplicity of sex/gender labels and identities make it impossible for any one person to experience the world from within all vantage points.

I will identify and explore the four sex/gender troubles raised by these essays: epistemological, conceptual, ethical, and ecclesial. My response concludes by questioning how this fine body of work can inspire us all, as Christian scholars, to contribute to the church’s understanding of and striving toward holiness.

Epistemological Trouble

Sex/gender is a site of contestation including even the means by which one may enter conversations on the topic. One could dismiss this set of articles because all the authors are men, because it includes no self-identified LGBTQ+ author, because all authors are Christians, because authorial voice is not grounded in lived experience of non-dominant identity, or because the articles do not put forward an expansive range of religious and non-religious perspectives. The authors certainly speak from a Christian perspective grounded in theology and Christian service, and the influence of historical subjectivity (the modern West) in particular is implicit, but personal subjectivity is not often called upon for epistemological authority. In the main, the epistemology of these articles rests on anthropology’s traditionally scientific approach: empiricism and a shared body of methods, modes of analysis, and theory, with analysis and discussion shaped by Christian commitment. Scientific epistemology is often disregarded in public discourse, despite its promise to broaden the field of inclusion by allowing all voices to speak from common rationality and empirical evidence. In a sense, the epistemology of anthropology is at odds with our society’s elevation of identity-based knowledge, because the premise of fieldwork is to elevate the lived experiences of others. Ideally practicing reflexivity, the anthropologist holds their own perspective lightly in order to deeply understand and carefully represent the perspective of others. In a way that does not appease current identity-based epistemological demands but that resonates with the basic approach of anthropology, these articles do take lived experience seriously, the lived experience of the

peoples and cultures which the anthropologists have lived, served, and studied.

Demonstrated by centuries of wrestling over how to connect religion and science, it is clear that the human quest to know is not organized into strict compartments. As Gil notes, humans develop knowledge with rationality, intuition, bias, empirical data, religious tradition, cultural norms, and other influences, all operating at the same time. It is difficult, perhaps impossible, to fully see the paradigms surrounding a quest for knowledge; easier to see them in historical perspective (Kuhn 1970). In these articles, faith and science are at play simultaneously, and in the subject they treat, two other epistemologies intertwine. In analyzing extant knowledge of gender identity and gender variance, the American Psychological Association describes a divide between academic knowledge and activist knowledge (American Psychological Association 2009). In looking at nonbinary gender specifically, the APA describes an almost total lack of research, because this and other identity labels are proliferating more rapidly than scientists are able to locate and study each group of people. Academic epistemologies value data and theory, generating empirical knowledge linked to ongoing scholarly conversation, which by definition is relatively slow and not immediately linked to sociopolitical applications. In contrast, activist epistemologies value lived experience, and without scientific methodologies and peer review processes, rapidly generate knowledge that is closely linked to sociopolitical goals and quick action. Increasingly, activist and scientific knowledge are merged in anthropology; the subfield of public anthropology embraces this epistemological fusion for the sake of applying anthropology to social issues. Understanding the processes and values of these two epistemologies, and the problems and promise of their hybrid forms, is vital for understanding sex/gender issues and conflicts, just as understanding the same about science and religion is vital for appreciating the modern faith integration endeavor.

Methodological and epistemological trouble underlies all other troubles. What do we know about sex/gender, how do we know, and when ideas conflict, which knowledge prevails (and which knowers) and why? Gil encourages fidelity to biology, a seeking of the real by looking at the created order in the biological realm. There is an epistemological humility—submission, even—in this approach, expecting cultural constructs to bend in light of what is really there in nature. By extension, this requires trust in scientific

biologists to describe what is and to correct their errors over time. In taking an ethnological approach, Rynkiewicz encourages fidelity to empirical reality, looking across cultures for generalizations or even universals in how humans reckon sexuality and identity. This requires a kind of trust or humility as well, trusting fellow humans across all time and space to offer insights (not templates) in how to name and interpret shared elements of human reality. Priest shares with Rynkiewicz an ethnological approach and with Gil a priority on biology, and Priest also generates a data set and interprets it.

Accepting knowledge because of the knower's lived experience is one kind of epistemology. It carries potential for inclusion and for cultivating empathy and an expanded sense of the human experience. It carries dangers too, which arise in far fewer than all or even most instances, such as unaware acquiescence to the discursive norms of a single social context due simply to the use of language, and also problems related to charisma, truthfulness, and self-deception. These authors do not ask us to extend trust or to exercise critical awareness in this direction, but they do ask the reader to trust and exercise critical awareness toward empirical knowledge generated by credentialed scientific experts. This carries potential for harmony with reason and science, but also carries dangers of error, unacknowledged bias, or obliviousness toward the paradigms that elevate or denigrate certain questions and areas of exploration. Similarly, these are not endemic problems of every or even most scientific explorations, but they do prevent an idolizing of a single methodology as an unimpeded highway to reality and truth.

A second frustration may arise for church audiences who expect Christian engagement with sex/gender to focus on biblical interpretation, moral assessment, or pastoral advice. Christian engagement with sex/gender has certain established pathways, most of which are lined on either side with affirmation (progressive or revisionist) and negation (conservative or traditionalist). These articles serve neither side entirely, nor do they fit exactly with predictable outcomes such as pastoral advice or biblical or moral verdicts. With ethnological and biological insights framed with anthropological theory and interpreted in Christian perspective, they offer insights and frameworks that can benefit biblical interpretation, moral assessment, and pastoral advice, but not by simply joining a side or offering a quick list of how-tos.

Better than dismissing or elevating this set of articles because of limits in the diversity of author identities or because the arguments presented do not provide weapons to any side of extant ecclesial divides is to notice and explore the epistemological trouble that extends far beyond this discussion to the entire sex/gender complex as a site of cultural negotiation and conflict. This set of articles has a certain purpose, for Christian anthropologists to dialogue within the confluence of their discipline and religion. In meeting that *telos*, it does not achieve other ends. Noticing the epistemological and methodological frameworks that are privileged or dismissed in a social setting is vital for understanding others, assessing knowledge, and speaking such that one may be heard.

Conceptual Trouble

Our authors join many scholars in probing the subject itself: just what, exactly, are we talking about when we speak of gender, sex, sexuality, heterosexuality and homosexuality, LGBTQ+, marriage, and other words related to these topics? Gil's concern is the conflation of gender and sex, with inner sense of gender identity obliterating (or promising to obliterate) the meaning and influence of sexual biology on human selfhood and identity. Rynkiewich appeals to ethnology in questioning whether western societies, and western Christians, have encoded a category error in concepts such as "gay", "homosexual", and by extension, "heterosexual." Priest looks at the concept of marriage, though his argument will be addressed more in the next section.

The human work of naming creation has real consequences: "whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name" (Gen. 2:19b, NIV). Anthropologists have documented many examples of misnaming, for example, taxonomies that name Black persons as closer to apes than to their fellow humans (Jones 2012; Smedley 2017[1993]). Gil might point to biological reality as evidence that human error can have great social consequence but it cannot become truth; biology is still real, whether we recognize it or not. Rynkiewich makes a similar point with ethnological evidence, offering examples of how error can become cultural norm, with profound influence on human life courses and relationships. The same could be pointed out for things that go unsaid, human experiences for which societies do not develop words.

Over two decades ago, sociologist Edward Laumann asked a similar question: When we speak of

homosexuality, what are we talking about? (Homosexuality was the word used at the time.) In the mid-1990s, some argued that homosexuality was exceedingly rare, an outlier, while others said at least 10% of the population was gay. Laumann and his colleagues looked for population-level data and pointed out the obvious: prevalence depends greatly on definition (Laumann, Gagnon, Michael and Michaels 1994). Anthropologists and sociologists of religion engage this issue in long-standing methodological challenges in studying Christians and in comparing studies of Christians, as sample inclusion by self-identification, measures of extrinsic or intrinsic religiosity, measures of theological agreement, and others yield very different numbers. Laumann identified three key components of a measure of homosexuality: same-sex behavior, same-sex feelings, and same-sex identity. Should sociologists count individuals who fit with one of those dimension, two, or all three? Prevalence rates will vary accordingly, and sample selection becomes nearly impossible if one is measuring, for example, those with same-sex feelings but no behaviors and no identity affiliation. Others have probed even these definitions, considering, for example, what exactly constitutes attraction, arousal, orientation, or erotic feeling (Baumeister 2000; Herdt 1982). This connects closely with Rynkiewich's example of the "Sambia." Sociologist Stephen O. Murray looked at all available ethnographic evidence of same-sex acts, including the Sambia and dozens of other cultures, and concluded that while same-sex behavior is quite common across cultures, homosexuality is exceedingly rare (Murray 2002). He categorized same-sex acts as being part of age-graded relations (rituals that masculinize boys are an example), profession-based, gender-based, and relations between relative social equals (what people in today's western societies and others call homosexual, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and more). Murray was a gay scholar hoping to argue that because homosexuality was found around the world, it should be normalized in American society. Instead, he made the case that homosexuality is rare, meaning that in light of ethnology, same-sex acts are not typically socially organized and recognized as emotionally meaningful connections between people of relatively similar age in an arrangement that replaces opposite-sex, procreative marriage.

Such are the webs of significance we ourselves have spun. Progressives may see this issue as objectifying LGBTQ+ persons with a gaze of suspicion, examining the terms and the question of their existence, and

traditionalists may perceive needless deconstruction that obscures moral clarity and offers confusion to people in need of guidance. Gil and Rynkiewicz (also Butler, Laumann, and Murray) provide vital critical thought, pointing out what can go wrong when we get it wrong, when our webs of significance—the social constructions of a given context—offer names, labels, meanings, and values that set people in pathways of self-understanding, identity formation, and life course development that lead toward problematic personal states or social conditions. We may name amiss, fail to name, misperceive prevalence, or, as Gil points out, wrongly narrow the scope of incoming information. Doing theology within “argumentative territory” is dangerous, and Gil encourages us to listen to God’s creation in every way it may speak to us: culture, learning, experiences, Scripture, and biology.

Rynkiewicz’s warning turns the missiological gaze back on western Christians, warning them of poorly contextualized Christianity. Doing theology within frameworks already shaped by “American culture wars” predetermines the pathways and conclusions that theology may explore. Both Gil and Rynkiewicz encourage expansive listening to biology, tradition, and cultures of the world, in a pursuit of truth. This message is threatening for those working within a “culture wars” framework, in which further pursuit of truth is a distraction from entrenching and advancing existing viewpoints and agendas.

I wish Rynkiewicz had explored that which we refer to as heterosexuality as much as that which we refer to homosexuality. In moralizing categories that haven’t received critical scrutiny, Christians often embed their own identities with morally privileged categories in ways that may seem to provide some measure of moral absolution, but this relief may be illusory as the category itself invites other kinds of trouble. I cannot write here in merely scientific ways, with appeals to reason and empirical data because my insights stem also from experience. My experience isn’t shared with all others who affiliate with the category “heterosexual,” of course, which is part of the problem with the category. So I shift voice in this section, demonstrating the multithreaded epistemology that is always at play in these matters.

When required to signal identity with words, for example in introductions in a group conversation, I say “straight” or “heterosexual,” but I see this as a sociopolitical identifier that acknowledges a kind of privilege at play in the conversation. When time and interest allows, I explain that I would rather choose

“unlabeled,” because while assessing inner feelings with respect to their object of desire is important (my culture has socialized me to understand myself in this way), it is not my leading guide for self-understanding or everyday life; my sexuality is also structured by a religious vow that I made over twenty years ago to be married to one man. Defining myself in terms of categorical erotic attraction seems both immodest and bizarre. Immodest, because in thought, deed, and feeling, my sexual life doesn’t extend to include categories of persons because it is vowed to just one person. Speculating or ruminating about these categorical possibilities as a means of identity exploration is contrary to the religious vow with which I promised to both express and constrain my sexuality in commitment to one man and to the children who may (or may not) issue from our union. Bizarre, because I’m not able to even imagine attraction to men, categorically; my imagination extends only so far, and I cannot meaningfully consider a personal bond to a 10th century medieval knight, a 19th century Kwakiutl chief, or a modern Hadza man. Also strange, to frame desire as existing almost entirely prior to and separate from the object or subject of its longing. Butler and other feminists since the 1960s have pointed out the immature phallocentrism in modern sexual identity constructs that have subsumed a more contextual and relational notion of personhood and desire. Desire-based identity constructs share this dimension of category error, and when they are conflated with morality, the potential for self-aggrandizement and self-deception expands along with the excessive categorical breadth.

The religious marriage vow also shapes my identity in ways contrary to modern identity constructs, also part of the reason I write in the first person. Simplistic notions of finding “identity in Christ” can ask for the impossible, a denial or repression of one’s culture in favor of living only from a seemingly a-cultural religion. Some people cannot remain in marriage, despite the sincerity of the vow they made, due to gender and sexual imperatives, others craft very particular kinds of marriage, and others, like me, are able to accept the identity and behavioral implications of a marital vow even though they sometimes cause suffering and constraint. Christians in all these categories live from the language and patterns of socialization in which they were raised or in which they live, including the ways in which sexuality and gender identity are reckoned. In sum, in my mind, my sense of sexual identity in Christian terms is “married,” and in American terms is

“unlabeled.” I realize this is unsatisfying and easily perceived as disrespectful in contexts focused on social privilege, so in those settings I call myself heterosexual in order to signal my willingness to participate on the only available grounds.

There is a profound spiritual invitation in this trouble: to trust that what God made is really there, and that we can seek and draw near to the Real, trusting that it will not undo us or those we love, and in that place of trust and nearness we may do Adam’s work—naming creation—with care and humility. Cultivating willingness to lean into this work is the most serious challenge raised and left unresolved by all three articles. A rational argument about category error will not gain traction if people (and their loved ones) whose lives are given words and meaning with those categories see their society as a place of danger rather than of safety. Taking biology seriously involves exploring what we know about ourselves before and without words, a tender vulnerability of knowing and being known before and without asserting power with symbols. We tend to protect ourselves instead with both secular and theological words that assert fixed knowledge rather than receiving knowledge that comes from places we cannot control or know fully. Self-protection is rational in its own way, in the face of survival threats perceived and/or actual, though it blocks other venues for rational exploration and expression. The work called for by our authors, then, is not simply intellectual, rational, or scholarly. Both the work and the capacity to approach it is deeply spiritual, as trust in the “I AM” is more necessary even than theological or moral propriety in sheltering unflinching exploration of the individual “I am.”

Ethical Trouble

Priest inspects the social construction of ethical systems, showing that accepted designations of prototypes and outliers do not necessarily reflect empirical reality. This argument resonates with foundational ideas about social constructionism (Berger and Luckman 1991[1867]; Kuhn 1970). In a given context, a paradigm structures and holds in place assumptions that make certain questions, views, and areas of interest particularly compelling. Accordingly, some ethical views are more palatable and even obvious, while others are repugnant and even “outrageous.” This may or may not associate with the actual truth of the ethics, whether they point to Truth, Goodness, or Reality, or whether they have empirical

validity; rather, it simply reflects how a given ethical stance or code comports with the reigning paradigm. Foucault would argue that this is the nature of knowledge—there is no truth, only regimes of truth (Foucault 1980). If this premise were accepted, Priest’s argument could be like a string dangled before a cat: we could endlessly explore ways that humans working within power regimes have granted prestige and privilege to some constructs of right and wrong over others by granting social rewards and inflicting punishments. In contrast, taking a Christian critical realist view on ethics, we may posit that humans do not capture truth totally or perfectly, but we can explore empirical reality (including both ethnology and biology), reason, personal experience, religious tradition, Scripture, and revelation in a never-ending quest with saints of all time and all people from all cultures, times, and places, trusting that we can determine not perfectly but sufficiently whether a given moral code is in step or out of step with the moral order of the universe (King 2018).

Priest shows that in our current paradigm, consent-based ethics are more appealing than traditional sexual ethics. Consent-based ethics harmonize with the U.S. Constitution and with the western legal tradition grounded in individualism, individual legal rights, and values of freedom, liberty and happiness, values that find their limits when harm is done to others. It is logical that an ethical view comporting with society’s power structure (government, law, and dominant cultural values) would receive privilege. In contrast, traditional Christian ethics do respect the principle of non-harm, but this is neither their entirety nor their grounding. In foundation, they are grounded in the character of God, which yields ethical codes in various societies described in Scripture (tribal, kingdom, minority group under empire) that are impossible to reduce to or explain solely in terms of modern legal principles. Thus, Christian ethics often overlap with western legal traditions, but in other cases, they appear outrageous.

Priest calls for proper identification of prototypes and outliers, but in our society such identifications are anything but empirical; they are power-laden in many ways. It is hard, then, to respond to Priest’s call for scholars across disciplines to “courageously prioritize a sustained commitment to faith-informed research and writing on sex and marriage” (p. 13). For most Christian scholars, this matter is simply too hot to handle, as Priest describes very well. Whether with data or pastoral encouragement, I’m doubtful that

scholars will take up this charge, with any scale, with the risk configuration of the current environment.

Surveying definitions of marriage in anthropology textbooks over many decades, Priest notes that anthropologists have always seen marriage as prototypically between a man and a woman, and that anthropologists have also always noticed marriage outliers. He makes the case that traditional Christian sexual ethics are not actually the outlier they are often portrayed to be. With respect to kinship, Priest concludes that “male-female marriage is a social and cultural formation grafted onto a biological reproductive template” (p. 22). He describes several important ethnographic cases such as “walking marriages” among the Moso in their traditional lives, and the custom of female husbands found in numerous African societies, arguing that while unfrequent marriage forms serve adaptive purposes in certain contexts, they are exceptions that do not alter the prototypical definition of marriage as between a man and a woman. While this makes good sense, I do wonder about scrutinizing two other aspects of a traditional sexual ethic in ethnological perspective. First, sex only within marriage seems less than predominant in both ideal and practice, with a sexual double standard often giving more opportunities, both legitimated and not, for sex before and outside of marriage for men more than for women. Second, the number of partners in a marriage seems highly variable across cultures, with many cultures allowing for polygamy (whether or not it is commonly practiced).

Looking at the same evidence, another point of focus might be on marriage as a social construct that is powerfully adaptive, serving as a vital part of kinship networks everywhere. Same-sex marriage is a relatively new adaptation in modern societies, but it joins all other modern marriages in many shared features of cultural adaptation. In America, the law of coverture adapted the western custom of *pater familias*, allowing the husband to serve the family as its only legal person, thus preventing women from voting and from legal guardianship of their children. With removal of coverture laws, women gained rights of guardianship, enfranchisement, and land ownership. Removal of coverture laws seriously altered the nature of the bond within a nuclear family, making marriage a bond between two legal equals, not a protective structure headed by the man. In this example, new cultural norms flowing from the Democratic Revolution and the Enlightenment brought values such as liberty, individual rights, freedom, and perhaps happiness to

bear on kinship structures in profoundly influential ways. Similarly, as medical technology developed, contraception became available as a support for succeeding in modern educational and financial structures, delaying or avoiding childbirth in order to live well within a given educational, financial, and technological context.

All American marriages adapt to this context, and it is little wonder that a culture emphasizing individualism, choice, and happiness, and one in which people exercise significant discretion in reproduction, that same-sex marriage would become legally valid. Same-sex marriage in the modern world may be an outlier in the long view of history, but like ghost marriage, polyandry, “walking marriage,” *fa’afafine* in Samoa, *hijras* in India, *mahu* and others in Tahitian and other Polynesian society, and many other unfrequent sex, gender, and marriage constructs, it is an adaptation to certain contexts that demonstrates humans’ brilliant capacity to make symbols and lifeways that support survival. The advantages and disadvantages of adaptations can be complex, and of course, some practices are eventually deemed maladaptive, or become vestigial when contexts change. At the risk of oversimplifying a complex concern, I wonder whether it may be more fruitful for Christians to amplify the strengths of extant marriage forms, and other modern kinship structures such as blended families, childfree-by-choice families, and families comprised of fictive kin, rather than dwelling on the reasons why they are outliers, reasons that may not be very adjustable given the contexts that gave rise to them.

Norms and exceptions, or prototypes and outliers, are power-laden and it is difficult to engage these issues in a society marked by distrust (perhaps anomie is a better descriptor). If a person had a rare disease, for example, they may appreciate being labeled “outlier” because they trust their doctor and the social institution of medicine. In this case, being an outlier attracts helpful attention and healing resources. In the case of sexuality, gender nonconformity, or same-sex marriage, being an outlier may attract stigma, prejudice, discrimination, and even violence. Thus, pursuing equality through the abolition of norms, or strategic (non-empirical) identification of outliers, is a means of gaining power that can provide social safety (and possibly even social power, and at an extreme, political domination) that does not require social trust. The Bible portrays idealized politics in which strangers, foreigners, and other vulnerable persons and

groups can find safe haven. They may remain marginal, but included, or they may integrate and join the majority. Modern nation-states are not such safe havens, and not simply because they aren't securing human well-being through socialized welfare structures. By definition, modern nation-states require military power for self-protection; structurally, their trust is in warfare. Little wonder, then, that citizens use techniques and metaphors of war to interact with one another and with social institutions. Gil points this out clearly, in that seemingly simple introductions of basic vocabulary in conversations about sex/gender actually carry immense implications for understanding humans, connections between biology and culture, human relations, and sociopolitical norms and ideals. Conceptual struggles over gender, sexuality, sex, and marriage may be seen as an ideological dimension of the struggle for justice in the absence of social trust.

Ecclesial Trouble

Critiques of both Christians and the church are not hard to come by. Notably, the same critiques issue from within and without the church: too conservative, too liberal, wrong-headed, fear-based, irrational, politically irresponsible, homophobic, transphobic, misogynist, sexist, and/or willfully dumb. Critique often concludes with admonishment to commit more strongly to an existing set of social constructs, the symbolic universe created and upheld by conservatives, liberals, a certain denomination, or a certain political party. An anthropological perspective exposes the pattern of this tedium and diminishes the allure of warfare—joining an alliance and weaponizing one's symbols for the sake of gaining dominance—and lays plain the self-deception in seeing one's warfare as reform, or as pure-hearted.

Gil critiques Christians and churches, both those who wish to obliterate the sexual binary in an attempt to create social justice and those who wish to retain a rigid sexual dualism in an attempt to reign in a slippery slope. He recommends that Christians find new resources for understanding gender identity, and for developing practices of community and inclusion, in Jewish community life as described in rabbinical literature.

With many years of childhood and adult experience as missionaries between them, Rynkiewicz and Priest bring a vital insider-outsider vantage point in showing that American Christianity is as culturally situated as any other society's Christianity. All

Christians, not just those converted by western missionaries, must always discern appropriate contextualization, watching out for syncretism and concept error. Humans seek and know God and the good news of the Gospel from within a social context, thus eternal truths signified with language can only be approximations, not perfect "captures", of that which is prior to and beyond the human experience.

Adam's work of naming is never complete; as we name human anatomy, identities, and roles, cultivating an awareness of our cultural situatedness and its probable strengths and weaknesses is vital. Rynkiewicz points out that western Christians are likely to globalize their concepts, projecting local symbols onto the world. Priest warns of the irrationality of power dynamics that privilege some symbol sets by associating them with justice and goodness, and denigrate others as backward, revanchist, or mean-spirited. Gil warns of the tendency to strategically elevate either culture or biology in a quest for justice and human well-being, a quest misplaced from a desire to know the real, with trust that the real and the true will not undo us.

Discussion

I am tempted to ask the authors for advice or a "to do" list, because this dialogue leaves me restless for action. A list of quick tips might ease my restlessness, but only with a false promise of decisively dispatching with these important matters. Living at the juncture of the world's most poignant and pressing conundrums is our very place. Taking up these issues as opportunities for cultivating virtue and as contexts in which we can meet God and witness to His presence in the world is worthy work that won't be completed in our lifetimes.

In *The Presence of the Kingdom*, Ellul develops an argument that harmonizes with this set of articles, showing that Christian identity does not necessarily give a boost to social interpretation or right action. It's difficult to frame problems rightly, to name things appropriately, and we tend to default to existing frameworks, language, and ideologies. He joins our authors in seeing humans as symbol-makers but does not advise that we set about the work of repair, making the ideal symbolic universe in which humans may dwell. Instead, he says that humans are themselves a sign. It is good for people to do good works (such as scholarship) and pour out their energy in effort for others, but this "will have no meaning unless [they are] fulfilling the only mission with which [they have] been

charged by Jesus Christ, which is first of all *to be a sign*" (1989, 5). As living symbols, Christians symbolize that God is real and that He dwells among us. By living in the midst of the world's troubles, unable to resolve or sometimes to even interpret them rightly, Christians may wait "to see how God's will of preservation can act in this given situation" (1989, 19). Grounded in doctrines of creation and sin, Ellul sees Christians living fully in the world, fully experiencing the agonies and limitations of the human condition and the social contexts in which we find ourselves. It's an agony to realize that it is impossible for us to reform or perfect the world, yet we also cannot accept it as it is (1989, 9).

His solution is radical, going to the root: to be in touch with who we truly are and with who God is, and thereby live "the life that is truly life" (1 Tim. 6:19, NIV). Better than a morality of this, that, and the other, Ellul points to an ethic in which Christians live open-handed in the world and before God, seeking the Holy Spirit's guidance as to right and wrong in a given society, historical context, or situation (Ellul 1987). This requires cultivating a spirituality that empowers Christians to tolerate ambiguity, disappointment, self-critique and even colossal error not only within society but on the part of the church; to seek and bend to the Real, even when reality challenges our sense of identity, our well-intentioned efforts, or when it exposes the fact that our efforts were multi-intentioned; to witness not only with reason, data, and words, but with the demonstration of our mere (sheer!) being and living, not that we've got it right, for everyone else's sake, but that God is real, active, and good. Christians then take their place in the web of significance that is culture as signs pointing to the presence of God among humans, not as superior web-makers.

I conclude with a question for each author. For Gil, a question about power and possibility. In both LGBTQ+ safe spaces and in Christian churches, acceptance of definitions is sometimes an entry issue; that is, a person won't remain in conversations or relationships unless they accept certain definitions. In LGBTQ+ safe spaces, gender is a social construct grounded in inner feelings, not in biology. Here, sex and gender may be one and the same (both totally malleable) or totally separate (gender as entirely independent from biology). In conservative Christian churches, gender must be man or woman, grounded in God's creation of male and female. Here too, sex and gender may be one and the same (some even refuse the invention of the category of gender), or

separate but linked in one way that does not have exceptions (male is man, female is woman). Gil persuasively shows biology to assert influence in human development of a gendered sense of self. Progressives may neglect this influence, and conservatives may harden it, but in both cases, this is not simply a misunderstanding that can be corrected with education; rather, it is an act of power asserted against socializing agents, as a reclamation or preservation of social space and personal identity in a world experienced as oppositional. How can people trust biology, and by extension, trust the Real, in a world that isn't always on their side? How can we love what is real, seek what is true, with open hearts and hands, willing to receive what we learn and to change in light of it? There is a childlike quality to Gil's very sophisticated essay, a wonder and love of "what is" that many on both liberal and conservative ends of sex/gender struggles would find naïve, warning that to seek the real and the true, in the world such as it is, will not lead to our good. Using power to define reality in a manner best suited to our group, and to extend our understandings to other social groups and institutions as possible, seems a safer strategy. I wonder how people can move toward a love for the real and a quest for the truth, in a social context that treasures neither?

For Priest, a question about which questions matter most. I find it inconsistent to notice same-sex marriage as contrary to biology and ethnological norms without scrutinizing the same about the use of contraception to avoid or delay reproductive possibility, the nuclear family structure (which leave children dependent on only two adults, and each adult primarily on only one other), and other basic features of kinship in the modern world that most families rely on, including one-woman-one-man Christian couples who contain sex only to marriage. Some of these features are ethnological outliers that contain or redirect biological urgencies in order to promote survival and happiness in the only available social context. Marriage in western societies has already adapted to context: free choice marriage, dating, relative equality of social status and age between partners, dual earners, childcare via employment of strangers, access to contraception and divorce, involvement of scientific technology in reproduction and infant/maternal health, and an expectation of individual legal and constitutional rights. The result is Christian marriages that, while expressing fidelity to Christianity in certain ways, inevitably bear the imprint of their only available social/historical/cultural context, both to the advantage and detriment

of the partners and the children. Churches already focus more on supporting marriages and shoring up weaknesses borne of context (ease of divorce, difficulty of childcare, work-home strains) rather than critiquing cultural conformity or encouraging radical non-conformity. Same-sex marriage seems inevitable in a democratic context in which individuals have legal rights, in cultures that prize choice, freedom, and happiness (including the exercise of these values in identity formation), and in which biological reproduction and child-raising is not a universal expectation. In this light, might it be more prudent to accept legal marriage forms, including same-sex marriage, and bring resources and support in strengthening adaptive features and shoring up the maladaptive? As I consider how to engage the complexity of Priest's argument, this is the question that rises to the surface for me, and I wonder whether he sees this question, or another, as particularly urgent.

For Rynkiewich, a question about what missiological anthropologists have learned about polygamy that would apply to current issues of LGBTQ+, including same-sex marriage and gender identity. Rynkiewich writes an intriguing sentence: "The construction of male and female identities, and how that affects marriage and family life, is a long-standing missiological interest—perhaps last discussed under the guise of 'polygamy'" (p. 69). Why is polygamy in quotation marks, and why is it referred to as a guise? Unpacking that question may open up my broader area of curiosity, which is to explore what Christians in the United States could learn from societies in which polygamy, and third genders as well, are long-established and accepted elements of the society. The biblical text also offers many examples of God's people engaging differences in gender, sex, sexuality, and kinship in neighboring societies and within their own midst. It seems to me that American Christians could benefit from learning about how followers of Christ have understood and lived with these complexities in other contexts.

Conclusion

The sex/gender troubles of the present moment are novel and complex, but they are at the same time very old and familiar. The Genesis account portrays human nature, human limitation and sin, gender relations, and marriage, as endemic to the human condition. Adam and Eve sought right connection with God and with others in marriage, family, and society. They got some

of it right, some of it wrong, and ultimately found themselves dependent on God's grace for their very lives and those of their descendants. We are no different, taking up responsibility for naming creation, procreating, marrying and relating with kin, and constructing and reforming societies in which to do all of this and more. We get some of it right, some of it wrong, and ultimately find ourselves dependent on something greater than ourselves in the face of both our human brilliance and incapacity.

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NEWS & OPINIONS

Faith Integration as a Defensive Shield, Not a Conquering Sword: Clarification and Response to Questions and Critiques by Jenell Paris

Robert J. Priest

I want to thank Jenell Paris for reading and commenting on my article. Her task was a challenging one—to provide commentary simultaneously on three distinct articles by three separate authors on three related but discrete topics: a.) marriage, b.) biological sex and gender, and c.) same-sex sexuality. All authors (including Paris) are anthropologists, are Christians, and have served as professors for much of our lives in evangelical institutions.

My task in responding to Paris also has challenges, in part because Paris sometimes rightly discusses matters treated in one or both of the other papers, but not my own. While I am deeply interested in all these topics, I will concentrate on the issues I deem most pertinent to the focus of my article.

Clarifying Ambiguities

At times, Paris characterizes my arguments in ways that are not inaccurate, but which nonetheless introduce potential ambiguities as to my position. On other occasions, where Paris attempts to make broad generalizations about all three essays, and sometimes when commenting on my specific contribution, she does not appear to have accurately understood my thinking. Of course, when a top scholar fails to grasp one's ideas accurately, it is possibly because of ambiguities or lack of clarity in the original article—

which means that others might well similarly misunderstand. Thus, I am pleased to have the opportunity to clarify my arguments and respond to the substantive questions and critiques posed by Paris.

Critiquing Christianity?

Paris indicates that the three articles provide “critique” of “Christianity.” While I have often critiqued how Christians in different times and places have erred consequentially,¹ I have never understood myself to be critiquing either the truth of Scripture or the Christian faith. Thus, to avoid ambiguity, I prefer to avoid wording implying that I critique “Christianity.” To the extent that my article critiques Christians, it critiques them for being insufficiently Christian. Each evangelical institution where Paris, Gil, Rynkiewich, and I have taught affirms the authority of Scripture and the biblical teaching that sex belongs only in marriage (understood biblically as a cross-sex union). I believe this correctly represents what Scripture requires of faithful Christians. My criticism is not with these stated commitments but with the relative failure by those who share such faith commitments to prioritize the intellectual work needed to work out the appropriate implications of these stated convictions through our professional scholarly work.

¹ On realities as diverse as race (Priest 2007b; Priest and Priest 2007; Priest and Nieves 2007a; Priest and Nieves 2007b), witchcraft (Priest 2009; 2015a; 2015b; 2018a; 2019; 2020a; 2020b), “recovered memories” (Priest and Cordill 2012; 2014), Bible translation (Priest 2011; 2020a), or short-term missions (2007a; 2008; 2010a; 2010b).

Defending Tradition?

When Paris describes the three authors as “committed members” of “Christian traditions” and then summarizes me as contrasting “traditional sexual ethics” with “consent-based ethics,” this wording might lead readers to understand my argument in ways I do not intend. It is, of course, perfectly appropriate to refer to me as in a different Christian tradition than a Roman Catholic believer, for example. I do use “tradition” in my article in this way. But this wording might also be interpreted to the effect that “tradition” functions as an authority in my argument. It does not. Some Christians do, of course, appeal to extra-biblical ecclesiastical tradition as the basis of religious truth claims.² However, along with most evangelical Christians, I understand only Scripture (*sola scriptura*) as an authoritative source of religious truth. Similarly, most institutions that articulate an ethic of sex only in male-female marriage ground their ethic in Scripture. When they sometimes appeal to Christian historical understandings, this history is nearly always framed as a confirmatory witness to the clarity of biblical teaching rather than as an independent source of authority. And among the faculty I surveyed, those who agreed “the Bible is without error in what it affirms” were the most likely to endorse this ethic. I did not use the phrase “traditional sexual ethics” in my survey or my article and did not portray myself or those I studied as committed to “traditional sexual ethics.” The faith-based ethic I considered was the ethic formally affirmed and verbalized in scores of institutional statements, as shown in the appendix of my article, an ethic understood as reflecting biblical teaching.

What are the Competing Paradigms?

When Paris summarizes me as comparing the appeal of “consent-based ethics” and “traditional sexual ethics,” she somewhat mischaracterizes my argument on both sides. On one side, I had identified in university statements a sexual ethic of “mere consent”—with temporary consent at any given moment for any given sexual act with any given person(s) as the “solitary” center of sexual ethics. On the other side, I had identified a faith-based ethic of sex only in covenant marriage (with marriage understood as a cross-sex union). Here consent

involves a sexually exclusive long-term covenant commitment to another person. I summarized the work of anthropologist Joseph Henrich (2020), who demonstrated that while a wide variety of traditional kinship and marriage practices do routinely violate consent, Christianity historically played a decisive role in combatting such tradition-based violations and insisting on consent. In short, it is not “traditional sexual ethics” that I defended or have any wish to defend. And it is a peculiar subspecies of consent that I critiqued.

And when Paris then argues that “consent-based ethics” are more “in harmony” with American legal and political institutions and values (including the “U.S. Constitution”) than the alternative paradigm, I find myself puzzled by what she means. Given one possible interpretation of the argument, I would wish to argue she is wrong. It is not clearly the case that our ideologies of sexual consent are all that congruent with other aspects of our society. Consider American no-fault divorce law, practiced in every state and mandated as the only form of divorce permitted in many states. Under the current logic of mere consent, either partner in a marriage can, at will and without cause, revoke marital commitments and dissolve the marriage—with no adverse consequences for being the party that unilaterally violates prior stated commitments. By contrast, in our society, young adults who take loans with an agreement to repay them have no such option of unilaterally abrogating a prior commitment. Indeed, I cannot think of any other arena in our society where a law-abiding reasonably good moral adult who lives by their publicly articulated commitments to another party, with no fault shown or even asserted, can nonetheless have state representatives (judges, police, social workers) coercively intervene against them (to remove them from their home, adjudicate its sale, distribute the assets, and tell them when they may see their children, and under what conditions), all in service of the wishes of the party that unilaterally broke with prior commitments, and with no adverse consequences to that party for renouncing previous commitments made in a legally recognized ceremony with the ritual form of a covenant.

Nor is it clearly the case that the U.S. Constitution, democracy, and values of freedom conflict with Christian values. At the very core of biblical

² For example, Roman Catholic beliefs that Mary lived a life without personal and original sin and that pastors must be unmarried celibates are not derived from any clear biblical teaching, but simply from later ecclesiastical pronouncements understood as official church doctrine.

understandings of conversion and faith lies voluntary and uncoerced consent. Thus, countless American Christians have delighted in the U.S. Constitution and political system for protecting uncoerced consent. Consider the award-winning and already classic article “The Missionary Roots of Liberal Democracy,” by Robert Woodberry (2012), which upended dominant political science theories. This article demonstrated statistically that the historically distributed presence of conversionist Protestant missionaries best predicted the globally distributed development of stable democracies with religious liberty, mass education, a free press, a wealth of voluntary organizations, and legal protections for non-whites in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Conversionist Protestant missionaries believed that genuine conversion required uncoerced consent. Precisely because of their commitment to uncoerced consent, these missionaries played a crucial role in the global emergence of liberal democracies worldwide.

But perhaps I’ve misunderstood Paris. As I read her warnings about ‘power’ and of ‘weaponizing one’s symbols for the sake of gaining dominance,’ it strikes me that perhaps Paris is less objecting to my intended argument than she is responding to a misperception of my intent—perhaps due to insufficient clarity on my part. That is, maybe she thinks I am wishing to propose that Christians who affirm the paradigm of no-sex-outside-of-marriage (with marriage understood as an opposite-sex union) should be lobbying to make this ethical paradigm the legally mandated paradigm for all Americans. And of course, if this were my intent, it would be reasonable for her to ask if this goal was compatible with the U.S. Constitution, democracy, and freedom. If this was her reading of my article, let me clarify that this was not my intent. For me, this is neither a desirable nor achievable goal. I suppose I did not repudiate this goal with sufficient clarity, in part perhaps from a misplaced assumption that no one would assume such a goal was even possible in current America, given the governing scripts of our sex-saturated culture. It is not merely a modest subset of “sexual minorities” that disapproves of the historic Christian understanding of sexual ethics, but the majority of Americans—at least as evidenced by the work of the symbol-manipulating classes of our society. Virtually no scripts in contemporary American novels, TV, or movies feature admired characters reserving

sex only for marriage.³ Most unmarried students in American universities are sexually active, as are most students in American public high schools (Kann et al., 2016). Indeed, sexual abstinence for unmarried post-pubescent teens or adults is frequently mocked, as students from evangelical or conservative Catholic homes quickly learn. Sexuality scholars themselves recognize that an ethic restricting sex to marriage is “untenable” in all but a small subset of religious colleges (e.g., Monto and Carey 2014, 614).

Culture Wars and the Logic of “Outliers”?

Paris warns about the “allure of warfare,” about the dangers of engaging others through the “techniques and metaphors of warfare,” and of “weaponizing one’s symbols for the sake of gaining dominance.” She suggests—if I understand her correctly—that my use of the concept of “outlier” is “power-laden” and might lend itself to weaponizing effect, contributing to “stigma, prejudice, discrimination, and even violence” towards various sexual minorities. She suggests that while strangers and foreigners might be considered outliers, the “Bible portrays idealized polities” that include and integrate all such vulnerable persons into societal safe havens.

I have already clarified that my article did not aim to impose Christian views of sex and marriage on society. The goal was not “gaining dominance.” But if not, why did I frame much of my argument in anthropological terms rather than purely religious ones? And why did my article focus specifically on marriage as a cross-sex union, which is where I first raise the matter of “outliers”? And why have many religious colleges only recently revised their formal statements on sexual ethics to specify an understanding of marriage as a conjugal union between husband and wife? While I do not believe Paris accurately characterizes my discussion of the “outlier” logic or my intent in its use, I am grateful to her for raising an issue that merits further clarification and nuance. And, given the seriousness of Paris’s framing of the matter, a sustained response is needed.

Over decades American laws have evolved to permit or even protect the rights of citizens to act in ways that others religiously disapprove on such matters as pornography use and consumption, mate-poaching

³ With some exceptions for historical period pieces.

behavior,⁴ and unilateral no-fault divorce. But such laws did not require religious institutions and actors to endorse or support those legally permitted actions. Freedom both to act and to disapprove of such actions were both protected. Various such laws arguably had adverse outcomes for society. But they did not threaten religious liberty. And while the Supreme Court decision *Roe v. Wade* (1973) might naturally have threatened religious freedom, other laws with strong bipartisan support immediately clarified that a woman's "right" to an abortion did not entail the requirement that any particular person or institution (medical doctor, nurse, hospital, taxpayer) cooperate in the performance of abortions. Again, citizens were granted rights to act in religiously disapproved ways but without requiring other parties (religious or otherwise) to endorse, support, or participate in that action.

But the Supreme Court decision *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015) on same-sex marriage, according to the four dissenting justices, adopted a legal logic that fundamentally threatened religious liberty. It provided no countervailing protections. In some respects, as I've argued elsewhere (Priest 2018b, 28),

Obergefell v. Hodges has similarities to the 1983 Supreme Court decision *Bob Jones University v. United States*, which ruled that religious justifications could not be used to violate the rights of racial minorities. In effect, the *Bob Jones* decision differentiated good religion from bad in the eyes of the government, providing conditions under which the government could disregard its normal constitutionally articulated commitment to religious neutrality, and Bob Jones University lost its tax-exempt status. And yet the *Bob Jones* decision was not experienced by religious America as a significant threat for the simple reason that America's mainstream Christian traditions (Roman Catholic, evangelical Protestant, mainline Protestant, and black Protestant) rather uniformly agreed that Bob Jones's stance constituted "bad religion" and lacked biblical warrant. By contrast, *Obergefell* drew a line between good religion and bad, not by framing a small outlier as bad but rather the majority of American religious institutions.⁵ Furthermore, the notion that people come in naturally-occurring biological types (races) that must be prevented from

mixing is a modern idea found nowhere in the Bible. Thus, even Christian communities committed fully to the authority of Scripture or the Magisterium found that the repudiation of such racial and eugenicist ideologies created no inherent difficulties for them in their commitment to Scripture or Magisterium. By contrast, from earliest Christian history, church leaders uniformly understood Scripture to teach that marriage is normatively between a woman and a man who practice sexual exclusivity and that all other sexual relationships, including same-sex sexual activities, are sinful.

Furthermore, while *Bob Jones University v. United States* required the repudiation of a modernist social construction ("race"), *Obergefell v. Hodges*, by contrast, embraced a modernist social construction, that of "sexual orientation" (2015: 3, 8, 13), as the basis for its repudiation of the received view of marriage as a male-female union. The Supreme Court, of course, could have employed the same pluralist logic as it had when protecting the rights of adherents of minority religions. That is, they could have acted to protect the rights of all parties equally to live out alternative visions of the good. Instead, they adopted the legal criterion used to repudiate race-based discrimination, where "immutability" (of phenotypic traits underpinning race categories such as hair texture or skin color) provided the legal criterion for establishing a protected "suspect class" status justifying strict scrutiny. Thus when the U.S. Supreme Court repeatedly insisted that "sexual orientations" are "immutable" (*Obergefell v. Hodges*, 2015: 4, 8), apparently based on "new" (11, 20), "enhanced" (23), and "better informed" (19) "insights" (11, 20) and "societal understandings" (19, 20, 23), it was explicitly framing previous marriage understandings, for legal purposes, as parallel to racist ideologies. And, racist ideologies merit no religious accommodations.

I did not write my article at the historical moment when our society was trying to decide whether to permit "same-sex marriage" and on what basis. Rather, I wrote it in a post-*Obergefell* era, where our society is debating whether or not to allow religious institutions (such as those reviewed in my article) to live out an alternative ethical vision of sex and marriage. In short, my concern with the rhetorical logic of something as

⁴ Intentionally attempting to seduce and sexually solicit already married individuals, an act that in many societies historically was an actionable legal offense.

⁵ I include congregations here, as well as the wide variety of other religious institutions—not institutions of higher education alone.

an “outlier” emerges analytically, not in the context of a power move by Christians against others, but of others against Christian liberty to articulate and live out their ethic in their own lives and religious institutions.

I don’t recall my article employing military metaphors. But since Paris raises the warfare metaphor, let me clarify my purpose using her metaphor, elaborated through two instruments of battle. I did not intend, in my article, to wield an aggressive sword coercively against the liberty of others but to forge a shield, towards the end of protecting the liberty of individuals and institutions wishing to operate with, and defend, an alternative, and biblically-based, vision of sex and marriage. As I argued, I do not believe a purely exegetical appeal to Scripture provides adequate foundations for a robust religious liberty appeal. For those who do not accept Scripture, a strictly biblical appeal does not counteract the charge that the viewpoint is an irrational extremist outlier, protecting no essential goods, serving only animus.

Thus my article demonstrated how an “outlier” logic was attributed to the historic Christian view of marriage and underpinned the sentiments of those wishing for the government to coercively act against individuals and institutions operating with historic Christian views. In rebuttal, I demonstrate that marriage as a cross-sex conjugal union is anything but an outlier. I argue that in the broad sweep of history, the new ethical sexual paradigm of mere consent, as articulated by the sexual consent architects of America’s elite universities, is the outlier. Furthermore, I make the case that the ethic of “mere consent” arguably does a poorer job protecting against consent violation than does the ethical paradigm articulated in the scores of religious universities I consider. Paris does not directly question the accuracy of my argument on either of the above points. Instead, she warns of other possible uses of “outlier” that diverge from my use of the concept. I have no interest in defending possible usages of the term other than the ones I use myself. And on my central points, Paris does not argue that I am wrong.

Epistemology

As an evangelical Christian who is an anthropologist, I believe Scripture provides normative teaching on how best to order our lives in the area of sexuality and marriage. But sexuality and marriage also exist in worlds of human interaction that anthropologists can directly study. Based on field research in

an Amazonian indigenous culture, my dissertation explored at length (134 pages) a dramatically different sexual culture from our own (Priest 1993, 354-487). I am not unusual. Anthropologists have done this worldwide, exploring radically different sexual cultures, such as those examined by Michael Rynkiewicz (2022). Among other observations, anthropologists have found that the modern notion of sexual orientation as biologically based and thus immutable and life-long fails to comport with, and account for, the same-sex sexual lifeways that existed in pre-colonial societies (Herdt 2018, 14, 58-61; 1999).

Sexuality is also inflected with taboos, anxieties, obsessions, secrecy, manipulative deceptions, impulses towards privacy, desires to present oneself in the best light possible, with psychological tendencies towards rationalization, denial, and projection—all of which complicate anyone’s ability to study such realities objectively. The truths humans willingly share with others are selective and sometimes outright lies. And human researchers are also fully human, finite, and inflected by subjective motivations themselves.

Margaret Mead’s bestseller *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928), featuring Samoan adolescent sexuality, made Mead the most famous anthropologist of her day. But a half-century later, Derek Freeman (1983; 1998), based on decades of research, made the compelling case that Mead had gotten her facts about Samoan sexuality almost entirely wrong. Her book had made its mark, not because of quality fieldwork and accurate information, but because its moral message was attractive to American readers.

Even the best anthropologists, with rich ethnographies based on high-quality data collection and written with theoretical sophistication, are selective in the truths they explore. Other analytic frames and prioritized collection of other sorts of data might yield different considerations. Consider the outstanding research of Gilbert Herdt on Sambia sexual lifeways, which Rynkiewicz (2022) reviews. Herdt passingly reports that Melanesian populations typically show a “marked imbalance of males over females at birth” and mentions two studies of Sambia births showing that more boys were born than girls (by a ratio of 120/100 and 100/70). Herdt acknowledges the possibility that demographic factors might be relevant to the centrality of same-sex sexuality for the Sambia but drops the matter after a comment to the effect that correlation does not equal causality (Herdt 1984: 57-58). Elsewhere, he mentions that the Sambia practiced “female infanticide” (Herdt 2006: 25). But he reports no

statistics on the frequency of female infanticide and how this further adversely impacted the ratio of males to females. No age and gender pyramid is ever given. We also learn that polygyny is idealized, with powerful and senior men acquiring multiple wives at the expense of weaker men (Herdt 2006, 25), collecting wives “in the manner of collecting possum pelts” (31). Sambia wives are unhappy when their husbands add another wife, initiating fights with “dreadful cursing and brawls” (1999, 79). In any case, no statistics on polygyny are provided, no analysis of how this marriage monopoly by older men skews the marriage market. We learn what the above demographic facts would lead us to expect: there is a marked age divide at marriage, with young girls even in infancy being betrothed to young men. But precise and numeric details are lacking.

My field research was with the Aguaruna of Peru, in which, like the Sambia, older married men historically had a polygynous monopoly on younger women. The Aguaruna stressed to young men the virtue of abstaining from sex with women as the route to power channeled in warfare. In mythic stories told to boys, heroes of the past allegedly waited until they were 35 to marry, with the great warrior Bikut achieving power through sexual abstinence. When an Aguaruna Bikut and a Huambisa Bikut simultaneously killed each other, observers reported, their foreskins were tight. They had remained sexually abstinent and pure. However, unlike Sambia polygynists in Herdt’s account, Aguaruna polygynists had to deal with young unmarried males regularly attempting adulterous liaisons with their wives. What the Sambia had, which the Aguaruna did not, was a highly scripted arena of same-sex sexuality for young men as an alternative sexual focus. Indeed, societies with harems and other polygynous monopolies on marriageable women seem rather frequently to also have a parallel development of same-sex sexual lifeways for young men not (yet) able to marry. My point here is not to make a definitive argument but to suggest simply that alternative research questions and approaches have the potential to uncover additional and countervailing considerations, even in settings where high-quality research already exists. The moral import of all this is an open question.

In short, while I love anthropology and believe it is possible through anthropological research to acquire many understandings of human realities, I do not generally believe that anthropology can provide adequate foundations for ethics. There are limits to our ability to infer and convincingly persuade others of

any binding normative *ought*, purely from empirical analysis of what *is*.

My epistemology in this article reflects the sequence of the article. I begin with a faith-based sexual ethical paradigm, as articulated in numerous formal statements by religious colleges and universities that affirm the integration of faith and learning. This paradigm emerges not from the study of anthropology but from the Christian belief that there is a good, loving, and all-wise God who wishes to be known and to provide guidance for our moral and spiritual lives. God does this in and through Scripture. And this includes moral guidelines for sex and marriage.

In the second section of my article, I explore additional survey evidence that the relevant paradigm is linked to Christian faith and confidence in the truth of Scripture. I also see evidence that a dominant objection to this ethic, and to feeling justified in seeking to apply governmental power against those affirming the ethic, is a belief that the ethic, especially the male-female marriage aspect, is extremist and irrational, an outlier in the world of reason and understanding.

But the Bible itself, in various passages, grounds this ethic in the very fabric of creation, and on occasion, implies that the truth of such an ethic is intuitively recognizable by all. If correct, it would not be surprising to discover this in worldwide patterns. Thus, as a subordinate and secondary step, I consider whether marriage as a male-female union is present the world over, and if so, consider what the contours of this institution suggest as to its central end. Here, I make a sort of natural law argument, although admittedly a weak one. I do not believe that the exposition I provide will naturally persuade everyone of the truth of the ethic, and certainly not that such an exposition provides adequate foundations to impose the ethic on everyone coercively. But in the context of a charge that the Christian ethic is an irrational extremist outlier, motivated by hate, I believe any honest assessment of the evidence should lead to the conclusion that the paradigm has a plausible logic with positive outcomes in view. I would hope this lays enhanced foundations for a favorable consideration of the overall truth claims of the Christian faith. I also hope that it influences people to support pluralist political structures that allow Christians and Christian universities legally to live out and defend their vision of the good, alongside the rights of others to live out and defend alternative visions.

Some issues that Paris raises for me seem to be grounded in a misconstrual of my epistemology. She

seems to feel that my argument should require me to object to birth control, for example, to be consistent. But I see nothing in Scripture requiring married couples to have as many children as possible or banning birth control. In this paper, I only defend ethical sexual ideals if I understand Scripture to teach them, and secondarily if worldwide cultural patterns coincide with such biblical teaching (about marriage as a cross-sex union, for example), and thirdly as an exposition of variable dynamics related to the core patterns. Thus a concern for paternity confidence likely occurs everywhere marriage historically existed, but the precise mechanisms associated with this varied. I nonetheless also explore variable cultural mechanisms (such as the *couvade*) intended to signal a concern for paternity confidence, even though any such specific cultural item was not universal.

Paris wonders why I do not further discuss the sexual double standard, which she implies is part of the package of the “traditional sexual ethic” she seems to see me defending. But as noted above, I have no allegiance to tradition. I do not believe Scripture requires a different sexual standard for men and women. But yes, even folk Catholic *machismo* cultures of Spain (Brandes 1980, 177-204; Gilmore 2017) and Colombia (Brusco 1995) exemplify a sexual double standard where women should reserve sex for marriage, but where men strive to exemplify sexual virility, not chastity. In Brusco’s analysis, Colombian women focus their attention on children and home, with men largely absent from the home with machismo status pursued in the street, the brothel, and the bar. But with conversion to evangelical Christianity and a new alignment with biblical teaching, men redirect towards marital chastity and the flourishing of their wife and children. In this feminist anthropologist’s telling of the story, evangelical conversion dramatically moved men away from the sexual double standard.

Paris seems to question the value of the “nuclear family structure”, which she says “leaves children dependent on only two adults, and each adult primarily on only one other.” In my article, I follow anthropologists like Claude Levi-Strauss and George Peter Murdock, who define “nuclear family” as comprised of husband and wife and their children, but where nothing in their definition or analysis requires that it be disembedded from other kin ties. My son, his wife, and two kids constitute a nuclear family. The fact that my wife and I also live in the same home does not count against them being a nuclear family, as defined by these anthropologists. And what my article showed, citing

anthropologists, is that children born to married parents, and married parents themselves, have, on average, more supportive social ties with a more extensive network of relatives than any family form that does not involve children raised by married parents.

Paris raises various other issues that genuinely merit further attention, but which time and space on this occasion no longer allow. I would wish to thank her for helping focus my attention on named issues that I will want to address in the future. I am deeply appreciative of her help on these matters.

Conclusion

Several years ago, after a month of interviewing pastors in Kinshasa about their ministries related to street children, the pastors invited me out to a restaurant, their treat. They wished to interview me—about the American church generally and my own church, specifically. Were we remaining faithful to Scripture in the area of sexual and marital ethics? I initially imagined they were primarily preoccupied with homosexuality. So in the next few days, as I did follow-up interviews with them, I focused my question on their own church’s ministries related to sex and marriage. I had already understood the pastors to say that in this poverty-stricken third largest city of Africa, the tens of thousands of street children to whom they ministered seldom came from intact homes but instead came from sexually promiscuous partnering and broken families. But now, I learned of special church programs and dedicated staff, entire committees even, assigned to guide, mentor, pray with, and chaperone all courtship relations of church members, to facilitate marital agreements with extended family, and to actively intervene and direct people into biblically approved marriages. No courtship could even begin until the pastor had approved. There was a level of supervised interventions one could not imagine in America. And pastors in poverty-stricken urban settings would tell me with deep satisfaction things like, “for years, our church has worked to ensure that our members have good marriages and practice good parenting. In the last ten years, under our ministry, every child born to any of our members was born to married parents. And these marriages have stayed together.” As I learned of their ministries, it became clear that homosexuality was not their preoccupation at a local level. Why then, I wondered were they disturbed about the American church and in relation to homosexuality? In my last interviews, it struck me.

These pastors had an entire biblical paradigm for sex and marriage which provided the life-changing foundation for ministry and guidance in the areas of sex and marriage. In their understanding, one cannot arbitrarily choose which parts of Scripture to observe—and still have a binding ethic with real transformative power. Thus, for them, the perception that American Christians were not clearly articulating and defending the entirety of biblical teaching was disturbing.

One section of my article considers whether a third ethical paradigm is possible, which retains biblical teaching on sex and marriage while modifying only the male-female specificity of the paradigm. As reported, I could find no evidence that a credible case for this possibility currently exists.

Christians must clarify and defend what Scripture actually teaches in every era, with different issues coming to the fore in different periods. Christology was clarified in response to Gnosticism. Soteriology in response to the sale of indulgences. And so on. In today's era, some of the most fundamental issues that we face involve theological anthropology in relation to such things as sexuality and marriage.

From Kinshasa to Chicago, no Christian community will successfully achieve the goal of social reproduction, of successfully transmitting its faith to the next generation, if its Christian leaders and scholars do not embrace a commitment to defending the goodness and wisdom of God on the very matters Scripture addresses clearly. And the most pressing issues of our day include especially sexuality and marriage.

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NEWS & OPINIONS

Double Trouble: Responding to Jenell Paris' Response, "Trouble at Every Turn"

Vincent E. Gil

Indeed, Indeed

Jenell Paris doesn't disappoint in situating our articles (Gil, Priest, Rynkiewich) within "masterful and engaging" prose;¹ with an analytic acumen of the sort she has already emboldened in her prior works, and which so effectively brings junctions (and more questions!) to the forefront. Thank you, Jenell, for spending the volume of time and mentation to move so expansively through our work, and bring in so much to also think about.

As a respondent to the respondent, I will mostly address Paris' response to my article, *Wither Sex? The Gender Takeover: A Position Paper*. Most specifically, and eventually, I'll try to concentrate on responding to "the final question" she poses to each contributing author individually.

I'll get to that: But first, some comments I deem necessary on her more general comments. If you've read my position paper and not just wandered into this piece, you may well recall its goal, which I reiterate briefly here: to distinguish what we lexically mean by "sex," and what we lexically mean by "gender," now that the two are erroneously treated as synonyms. While I try to "read individual corporeal contributions *back into* theories of the body and self" by illustrating from sources like neurobiology what the body contributions are to our self-ownership, I am by no means suggesting that fidelity to biology should only and always trump cultural influences on self-knowledge and identity. Both have their place. The big problem—as I've alluded in my position—is that

contemporary notions of *gender* have been given greater psychological valence on purpose, and thus of late are used to trump biological sex in importance.

Rescuing Trouble

In her section "Epistemological Trouble," Paris rightly alludes to the possibility of our articles being dismissed by *au courant* trends: because all of us are men; because none of us self-identify as LGBTQ+ authors; because it is presumed our authorial voice isn't grounded in any lived experience of non-dominant identities; or for not having epistemological authority save that which is culled from a scientific approach (which I garner means research and validation of facts, and not personal experience.) (Paris 2022, 84).

She thus makes a case for our rescue, by stating we (the authors) rest our knowledge bases on anthropology's gold standard: ethnography, ethnology, a traditionally scientific approach: empiricism, and a shared body of methods, modes of analysis, and theory (p. 84), since we do not use the personal, but do ask readers to trust empirically-generated knowledge. She goes on to state, "In a sense, the epistemology of anthropology is at odds with our society's elevation of identity-based knowledge, because the premise of fieldwork is to elevate the lived experience of others" while "the anthropologist holds their own perspective lightly to deeply understand and carefully represent the perspective of others" (p. 84). Such is, of course at odds with "activist epistemologies," which "value lived

¹ Meneses, Eloise. Comment on cover memo submitting Paris' response to us authors, so we could engage and comment back. Correspondence dated December 27, 2021.

experience, and without scientific methodologies and peer review, swiftly generate knowledge that is closely linked to sociopolitical goals and quick action” (p. 85). These are excellent distinctions and clarifications which, in the contemporary world we investigate, we need to keep in mind.

In rescuing our work and differentiating it from activist epistemologies, Paris makes room for what she describes (and we all have heard labeled) as “public anthropology”² which allows seepage of the individuated and non-empirical to mix with the empirical, developing what she labels as a “hybrid form” (p. 85) that then assumes to bring broader truths—if not more activist conclusions—to the table. Paris warns us (authors and readers alike) that “accepting knowledge because of the knower’s lived experience is one kind of epistemology” (p. 85). She is quick to note that while such carries *potential*, it also carries *dangers*: of limiting discursive norms; use of single social contexts; and of course, of self-deception (p. 85). I totally agree.

And yet, the trend of co-mingling what has traditionally been regarded as reliable methodology (the scientific and empirical) with lived experiences of “non-dominant identities”—the latter as a qualifier—is upheld today as what is needed for authorial voice to be valid and reliable.³ Thus, Paris rightfully notes that what we say may be critiqued, rejected in part or whole, since we do not claim any lived experience of non-dominant identities.

Addressing this trend first was not in the response I imagined, but I feel I should speak to it, since my position paper is all about challenging theories of self and gender that have no empirical grounding, but rather, rely on philosophies of self and self-experiences

while discrediting influences of the biological on self, body, and identity.

Double Trouble Now Begins

In her warning about hybridization, Paris also warns of “category errors” that come along with identity constructs and “the potential for self-aggrandizement and self-deception [which] expand along with the excessive categorical breadth” (p. 87). Yet the subjective embodiment of ‘truth’ that now seems needed to authenticate what is stated, dismisses the dangers Paris warns us about. The greater problematic is that the fundamental mode of knowledge production is not about *one’s self* or even the shared experience of a particular group; rather it is the overarching experience of many that coalesces and authorizes those experiences shared between and among members of a culture at large.

In this vein, let’s realize *meaning* is a public feature (Davidson 1984, 235), and the methods of science reflect on studied reality, so anyone can have an historical route back to confirm such data, no matter how temporal. Scientific authority may be perpetually questioned—it is legitimate and pertinent to question—but I am convinced that scientific authority (empiricism, evidence, method) should be redeemed today more than ever; certainly, held to a better standard than ‘validating’ empirical research via any one’s individuated experiences or claims, as is now the case.

It is now a common temptation to turn personal experiences into examples, generating “individual epistemologies,” that are now used to fact-check, even illustrate. Such pose dangers that runs deep. It is a shift

² Paris, p. 85. “Public anthropology” is not officially recognized as a subfield of the discipline, although since the early 2000’s and under the guidance of Robert Borofsky, it has been created as an application of anthropology to world issues, with a voice that extends beyond the “do no harm” paradigm (Website, Center for Public Anthropology/About). *The Center for Public Anthropology*, one of Borofsky’s creations, serves as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, and generates a dire critique of traditional anthropology. At once appearing academic, while contradicting and critiquing efforts of “traditional” anthropologist engaged in the public good, it does not shy away from subverting anthropological empiricism and advocating its own activist agenda and methods. It critiques what Applied Anthropology (which *is* a recognized venue in each subfield) and community development work has historically achieved despite many socio-political derailments world-wide.

³ Such is different from the ethnographic experience of fieldwork—a subjective experience in the field—where the anthropologist witnesses live those of another culture, “the other,” and attempts further objectivity through empirical data collection. Anthropological reflexivity by an ethnographer is a prominent means of transforming witnessed or participated social experiences in the field into anthropological knowledge. “Through this investment, the ethnographer arrives at an understanding not only of ‘culture’ or ‘society’, but more importantly of the processes by which cultures and societies are embodied in people, are reproduced, also transformed” (Hastrup and Hervik 1994, 1). The work of the anthropologist-ethnographer *does not require her to become the other*, or provide proof of such embodiment. Again, Hastrup and Hervik (1994, 2): “One of the targets of recent postmodernist criticism of anthropological practice has been the idea of realism, as expressed in the sustained and often sophisticated discussion of representation. With realism ‘gone’, it seems that we can only speak of ‘the empirical’ in quotation marks, forever distorted by our own concepts and subjective inclinations. However much the anthropologist is part of the reality studied, it is still real, and not her. Far from needing quotation marks that distantiate us from our object, the empirical needs direct engagement as a first step towards a generalized knowledge that englobes ourselves and the process of knowledge production.”

from explicit understanding to implicit knowing. While implicit knowing certainly has a place in “multiheaded epistemologies” about personhood, identity, and self (p. 87), individuated histories should only illustrate the personal and not the general. Paris rightly cautions us that in her slipping into first-person voice to illustrate, such isn’t to be taken as a reference for everyone’s experience (p. 87). She wants to underscore the categorical nature of our self-identifications as a means of deliberately focusing on the problematic: we have ever-expanding labels in the effort to rearrange our imaginary to be inclusive. What we wind up with is more categories, or a conflation of them, and more dissention.⁴

In my estimation, we need to exercise caution, since it’s easy to be driven by self-delineations to straddle that hybrid format. Paris’ resolve—highly personalized in this narrative—is to acknowledge her social privilege given the times we live in (i.e., the categories which she embodies: white, female, hetero, monogamously married, religious); to save herself from using self-labels whenever she can (again, those “categories,” because these are the very problem); and most profoundly, to encourage our trust in the “I AM” in “sheltering [our] unflinching exploration of the individual ‘I am’” (p. 88).

I have faith God can lead us Christian anthropologists into ethical explorations of personhood, and help us in the “tender vulnerability of knowing and being known before and without asserting power with

symbols” (p.88). And yet, that doesn’t change how much of *our own* “story” needs to be told nowadays to be regarded “authentic,” if not an authority. Paris mirrors the problem in her abrupt departure to first-person dialogue: Our disciplinary background and scientific experience are apparently not enough today. We must reveal our *self*. . . and illustrate through *our self-experiences*. . . given the “multithreaded epistemology that is always at play in these matters” (p. 87).⁵

My Double Trouble—Then We Get On

I’m tempted to explore this ‘first person narration’ in this response—since my position paper is all about categories of personhood.

To be “authentic” and have authorial voice, will I need to reveal a “lived experience of non-dominant identity” (p. 84). (since ‘nobody knows my truth unless I tell it’)? Would I qualify nowadays without telling; or does it require that you know the very nature of “my body, myself,”⁶ my immigrant, Hispanic+, non-native born and underprivileged American historical status? Is it then enough to be authorial *and* authoritative, “because my insights also stem from my experiences,” as Paris herself embodies in a part of her response? (p. 87).

Let’s be quick here, and get validating the ‘I am’ out of the way. *Please bear with me.*

I’m male. I’m heterosexual. I’m a “he/his/him.” That makes me heteronormative and cisgender. By

⁴ No better example exists today than the ever-expanding and inclusive LGBTQI+ acronym. Each representational letter is a signifier of a particularistic identity, now melded together *as if* all were equal, and the same in each other’s eyes; and of course, that of society’s. However, we know that is not the case; that each letter may in fact herald differences of being, identity, biology, sexual preferences, and political position—sometimes not just appositional, but outright oppositional. It is now the case that some lesbian groups disdain trans women and find their use of the term ‘woman’ as highjacked, generating not just verbal wars but political vitriol. See Julie Compton’s (2019) article “‘Pro-Lesbian’ or ‘Trans-Exclusionary’? Old Animosity Boil into Public View.” *NBC News*, January 14. Retrieved at <https://www.nbcnews.com/feature/nbc-out/pro-lesbian-or-trans-exclusionary-old-animosity-boil-public-view-n958456>.

⁵ Paris’ efforts in “voice shifting” to demonstrate “*the multithreaded epistemology that is always at play in these matters*” (to mean exemplifying categorical language issues present in all three articles via her personalized referencing), nevertheless raises the ongoing debate in anthropology on subjectivity, challenging the distinction between subjectivity and objectivity by using self-experience—even when acknowledged as non-normative, or used as example. While it may be adequate to illustrate in this way the complexity of present-day epistemological, categorical problems in the lived experience of persons, the technique is hardly adequate to provide the logical ground on which to *further argue* how frequent any personal problematic is in a particular cultural context; or to settle aspects of the culture or society that “troubles” the issues with “excessive categorical breath.” Paris’ ultimate resolve is to frame our work as a “profound spiritual invitation,” and places the hope of such work in terms of “Adam’s work of naming creation with care and humility.” (I wasn’t there to hear Adam categorizing the animal kingdom; but if we are to be literalists here, then let me state for the record and from substantive research dealing with ‘categories’, that Adam probably bemoaned a lot in this profound process of categorization.) The larger question of how a hostile society—a “place of danger” with variegated peoples—can explore each other’s categories without a war, is left for me to answer. I try, later in this response. A more comprehensive answer is in my 2021 title.

⁶ Apologies to the Boston Women’s Health Book Collective and lead author Judy Norsigian for a ‘take’ on their now impressive classic, *Our Bodies, Ourselves* (1961/2011). Forget for a moment I’ve spent 38 years as a clinical sexual counselor to straight and LGBTQ+ populations. For some that alone doesn’t permit me an “authentic voice.”

many accounts, I'm white.⁷ These labels today, in and of themselves, make me privileged. However, by other accounts—those that conflate race and ethnicity—I'm not really white: I'm Hispanic. Maybe Black. Maybe Native of the Americas. None of these, however, reveal current requirements that can move me from “privilege” to a status of someone who *can relate* to “the other” of many formats; and I dare say, “*or Be the other.*”

Let's really begin: My first foray into the U.S. and N.Y.C. was at age 6, on a ‘green card’ with my parents, from Cuba (not from Castro, not just yet); with no family funds, no English to understand. We lived in a one-room (not one bedroom) flat with a shared bathroom down a Victorian hall in a Victorian-era brownstone turned rent-a-room.

And then troubles began. I went to a grade school where I was a “*Spic*”; where my English efforts were constantly ridiculed; and where my parents on Back to School Nights had to rely on me to translate to the teacher in faltering English. New York City wasn't kind in those days to Hispanics. Most were relegated to service jobs and factories; and their children considered part of the litter that infected the streets in tenements on the Upper West Side. Cuba? Where's *that*, if not the playground for rich Americans from southeastern states All these knew was *Tropicana* the night club, and Mojitos. (*Lucy and Desi* were just beginning their own invention.)

Trouble: By age 7 I had developed hypothyroidism, a condition that bloated my weight beyond control, so that by the time I was in 6th grade (12) I was “*Fatso, Fatso 2x4, can't fit through the classroom door!*” Here was a body abnormal, a person socio-politically considered an *alien*, in a city where *Spics* were those that cleaned your toilets, did your Deli's dishes, or worked in your factories. Being poor didn't help. Broken English didn't help. Growing up morbidly obese didn't help, either. When none of us progressed, we returned to Cuba, not foreseeing it was on the verge of a Revolution. By then I was 14.

Seven months on, Revolution happened. We escaped the latter part of that year and returned to New York City, penniless. Again, we lived in a one-room flat, this time a basement so dank it never felt dry. That year—am now 15—I finally got treatment for my thyroid, paid for by the Federal Refugee Assistance Act, and magic happened.

Over eight months I shed the weight, worked the muscles, and got a new body, the one I had hoped for. I could peel off my tight T-undershirts in the summer (ones I always wore under any shirt), and not have man-boobs to be ashamed of. I could sunbathe shirtless in Central Park (a subway token away) and not feel embarrassingly obese. The sun, I recall, felt especially good on my (white?) skin, now on an average teen's body not worth a second look.

Trouble: Then at 16, my father deserted Mom and I, and without telling, went back to Cuba to try and get his parents out. I had to quit high-school, get a job, eventually finish a GED with a prayer and three more years. (We never heard from Dad again.)

Today we talk about intersectionality as if its troubles were only recently discovered; as if those of privilege because of how they look, or what sexual and racial favoritism prevails, never seemed to have brought them harm.

But that's not my story. My story is one of knowing numerous intersections: of poverty, morbid obesity, body dysmorphia, gynecomastia, other-categorizations, put-downs, anti-Hispanic rage, familial disruptions, language and culture loss—what those of ethnic and gender variances also know: Double Trouble!

I *can* relate to being in a body that's not what you want. I *do know* what it's like to be conflicted, *soma to mind*. I *have* experienced inappropriate categorizations, labels, of self, of identity, of being. I understood well “a hostile world” during childhood. And yet, it is this history that made me determined, passionate, compassionate; and when I gained Christ in my life at 17, it made me want more education to reach others with the salve I now knew was available. I was in the USA! For the dispossessed, anything seemed possible if one tried hard enough.

What *Is* Authoritative, Authorial Voice? Double Trouble

Now that my history is “out,” I question whether if knowing my history adds anything to my authoritative, authorial voice, earned through an MA, PhD, two post-docs; professoring and undertaking granted research for decades; training as a clinical sexologist and counseling straight, gay, and all in-between-the-

⁷ Ancestry.com processed my DNA recently. I have quite a European mix: 58% Spanish; 22% Portuguese; 13% French; 1% Sardinian-Italian; also 2% Ethiopian and Eritrean; 2% Carib Indian; 2% Mesoamerican Indian. Am I “white”? Am I “Hispanic”? Am I “Black” (what percentage qualifies?), or am I “Native of the Americas” (that 4% Indian)?

acronym for 38 years.⁸ Wouldn't these in themselves "move me" from naïve—even just a little bit—enough to suspend some judgment and hear what I say? Or is it that "because my insights also stem from my experience" is now the necessary predicate to validate commentary on any multiheaded epistemology?

Carl Rhodes (2020), channeling Emmanuel Levinas (works from 1961–1998) comments on the "self of reflexivity" (in his chapter 3, 42–44). "Reflexivity has demanded ways of doing research which reflect back on themselves [i.e. the authors/researchers] . . . most especially through methodological elaboration and confession. Such forms of 'reflecting back' in their writing are a meta-commentary on their own worth, together with attestation to their own powers of self-awareness" (42). In many cases—per Rhodes—there is a clear acknowledgement of the author's role in the construction of meaning via the inclusion of the researcher in the subject matter he or she is trying to understand or elucidate (42). In so doing, "Each researcher is now not just out to research other people, but to supplement this with looking inwards, and 'studying himself or herself' to create a 'reflexive dialogue,' to attain some sense of authenticity through awareness of his or her own experiences or biases" (42).

I agree with Rhodes that there is a "deep irony" in this use of reflexivity: The irony stems from "questioning the authorial authority to know (i.e. to say what is said)," while at the same time proposing the self-authority of the researcher to self-present in their writing offers some self-revelation that un-conceals "what is the real goings on" behind the "artifice of the argument" (43).

Again, Rhodes (rather than me): "This problematization works against its own ethos when reflexivity is responded to from a position that researchers can and should 'reveal' themselves in their research, 'make their assumptions explicit,' 'expose their situated nature,' 'uncover [the] taken-for-granted . . .' (42–43, italics in the quote itself). All such appears to Rhodes—and I agree—as efforts at narrative construction based

on one's own discursive rules and conventions rather than following empirical rules of research and reporting. The assumption is that by exposing him or herself, the author is "visible through personal disclosure" (43). And this is supposed to add that authenticity which corroborates authorial authority. Paris rightly points to activist writings favoring this trend in their writings, and in narrating sex/gender epistemologies (p. 85).

We can't settle this debate here, but I can certainly underscore how problematized the situation of authorial voice has become, when one can be so easily dismissed, as Paris notes, if one does not self-refer, self-validate through self-revelation and fit the contemporary criteria for what is authorial and authoritative. "When reflexivity means that the researcher feels required to add their own meta-commentary about themselves in their work, there is a significant *danger* [rightly echoed in your response, Jenell!] of questioning rather than enhancing the authorial authority that spurred the turn to reflexivity in the first place" (Rhodes 2020, 44).

How is all this affecting anthropological research and writing? What ethical questions are raised when 'truth' is no longer equated with empirical production and representation? What ethical limits should there be between the still distinct notions of self and other on which much of anthropological research is founded, and which is so crucial for sex and gender research? I'm fearful that the type of reflexivity we are discussing will inevitably be codified into practice, displacing the "scientific" moniker we anthropologists of sundry sub-disciplines have worked so hard to establish. Researcher-educator Trifonas leaves us with this to ponder:

To expose our discourse to the questioning of the other, not by devolving it into a rhetoric of self-autonomy, but by welcoming its resistance to a dialogue of the Self to the *selfsame*, is to open oneself to the play of learning, through queries and objections that empty the subject and enrich its heteronomy. (Trifonas 1999, 185)

⁸ By way of information, as a trained clinical sexologist I don't "do" "reparative therapy"; nor do I presume to venture outside the person's own ideological/religious beliefs. In sum, I work with individuals and seek to help them achieve wholeness and stasis with their sexual self and in their sexual expressions. If they are Christians who struggle with the integration of their faith and sexuality, and want my assistance, I then become an *accompagnateur* in the road to spiritual and sexual wholeness in Christ. Ultimately, I work with clients collaboratively to achieve goals that are worthy of their person, their faith, and which bring no harm to self or others. Being a medical anthropologist and by postdoc training also a clinical epidemiologist of sexual diseases, I leverage my assistance internationally and mix in reaching others for Christ wherever I've been in the world, clinics, hospitals, or villages.

Situating the *Other* Double Trouble: Answering Paris' "One Question"

In asking me her "one question," Paris delineates those groups impacted by this 'gender moment' which are important in my position paper's discussion: those in LGBTQ+ safe spaces; those in conservative Christian churches; those in progressive churches and spaces. All are engaged in the assertion of their power as socializing agents; all experience the world of the other as different from theirs, if not oppositional. And all seem to relate to the Real (her capitalization) "hesitantly, with faltering trust." She thus asks me (again quoted here for reference), "How can people move toward a love for the real and a quest for the truth, in a social context that treasures neither?" (p. 91).

I won't turn to my personal experiences in this effort to respond. I turn instead to my recently published work (which is also reviewed in this edition of the *OKH Journal*), *A Christian's Guide through the Gender Revolution* (2021); and Miroslav Volf's opus, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (2019 [1996]). On the latter, no one has attempted a better answer to Paris' question (even before she asked it here) than Volf. And yes—there's a lot of anthropology in both tomes!

The Oppositional World

Let's start with "a social context that treasures neither." Paris is correct, the world remains today a hostile place. In his Foreword to my work, New Testament theologian Jerry Camery-Hoggatt notes,

Almost every moment of cultural and historical significance has had contentions underscored more than its agreements, but the present moment has seen unprecedented contentions, and comes at a moment in time where life is difficult on many fronts, with social changes increasing in both variety and complexity. How much more so today, when media floods us, and the biting and sniping feels often enough like vapid opinionating. The problem is that much of it only reinforces what we already

believe, in the process blinding us to any truths that may be articulated on the other side. (Camery-Hoggatt 2021, xiii)

Faith and culture theologian Miroslav Volf, writing two+ decades earlier about the complexities of life in a fractured world, demonstrated the multiple ways in which "exclusion of the other" perpetuates a desperate cycle of violence. This violence is expertly analyzed in anthropologist Robert B. Edgerton's work *Sick Societies* (1992). The disturbing cultural reality these works bring to the surface is that *otherness*—the simple fact of being different in some way—comes to be defined as an evil on its own.⁹ Volf, re-editing his volume for the contemporary situation in 2019, again underscores a 21st century of resurgent and clashing identities. Drawing on critiques and contrasts between Nietzsche and Foucault, he writes,

[Nietzsche and Foucault] . . . rightly draw attention to the fact that the "moral" and "civilized" self all too often rests on the exclusion of what it construes as the "immoral" and "barbarous" other. The other side of the history of inclusion is a history of exclusion. The very space in which inclusion celebrates its triumph echoes with the mocking laughter of victorious exclusion. (Volf 1996, 63)

In situating the problematic, another element to realize is the following: There is a "shadow narrative" at work which generates a deep longing for inclusion, what Volf labels a "radical kind of inclusion" (1996, 62). Such then creates "binary divisions," "coercive assignments," and a kind of power imbued in "normalization" (p. 62). And so, "A consistent drive toward inclusion seeks to level all the boundaries that divide and to neutralize all outside powers that form and shape the self" (p. 63). Political scientist and sociologist Alan Wolfe notes that,

. . . the essence of this approach is to question the presumed boundaries between groups: of signifiers, people, species, or texts. What appears at first glance to be a difference is discovered to be little more than a distinction rooted in power, or a move in a rhetorical game. (Wolfe 1992, 310)

⁹ Edgerton's argument reminds me of Nancy Scheper-Hughes' *Death Without Weeping* (1992), which also tackles the myths and juxtapositions between fabled beliefs about our societies, and the hard truths ethnography brings to the forefront *about our societies*. Both Volf and Edgerton suggest we've become adept at the promotion of maladaptive, hostile, and dysfunctional relationships. Has the church been caught up in such "tribulations"? It wouldn't be the first time (see 1 Corinthians for examples)!

Inclusion, by its very nature, tries to neutralize all boundaries outside that which is believed to be true; boundaries that divide, but also that form and shape the self.¹⁰ However, differentiation is an epistemological fact in all living things; and boundaries, albeit many human-labeled and culture-specified ones, serve presumed purpose in noting distinctions. Volf cites as example: God, separating light from darkness, dry land from the wet; and from humans, “Adam’s naming of animals,” lineages/descendants, tribes. Volf again argues,

Intelligent struggle against exclusion also demands categories and normative criteria that enable us to distinguish between repressive identities and practices that should be subverted, and non-repressive ones that should be affirmed. “No boundaries” means not only “no intelligent agency,” but in the end, “no life itself.” . . . The absence of boundaries creates non-order, and non-order is not the end of exclusion, but the end of life. (Volf 1996, 174)

Gender Divisions

Volf, speaking about gender identities, also states,

If the content of gender identity has no transcendent grounding, no divine blueprint, on what is it rooted? The similarity with animals gives us a clue. For what human beings share with animals is the sexual body—a body that carries indelible marks of belonging to either male or female sex. Sometimes the marks are mixed (Fausto-Sterling 1995). But bodily ambiguities are arguably the exception that prove the rule. Men’s and women’s gender identities [and I must interrupt and add, “and intersex ones”] are rooted in the specificity of their distinct sexed bodies. Note that I speak of the sexed body as the root rather than the content of gender identity. This is because by stressing the importance of the sexed body, I do not intend simply to discard the distinction between “sex” as a biological category (genes, hormones,

external and internal genitalia, etc.) and “gender” as a social one (learned characteristics, personality traits, behavioral patterns, etc.) that has become so prominent in recent decades. (Volf 1996, 174)¹¹ [Bracketed comment mine.]

Moreover,

There is no way to simply read off the content of gender identity from the sexed body. All such readings are specific cultural interpretations. The sexed body is the root of gender differences that are themselves always socially interpreted, negotiated, and re-negotiated. (Volf 1996, 175)

Volf’s comments deeply resonate with what I’ve written in the position paper. My arguments against gender activists’ interpretations of the lexical and experiential outweighing if not *denormalizing, putting out of play* physical/biological contributions to body and identity (e.g., Judith Butler’s work, which I so often refute), is exactly the point of Volf’s last quote above. Butler’s “reinscription” of gender to the detriment of the sexed body as a lived experience—good, bad, wanted, disowned—is, as I’ve stated in the paper, oxymoronic word play. (Again, don’t confuse the terms *gender* and *sex*. Please re-read my position if the difference is still not clear.)

To sum the “situating the situation” here, let’s underscore that the world remains a hostile place for human differences to survive without contestations. When these do, they seek to monologically construct and affirm selves; in the West, tendered by a very Western postcolonial habitus and the cultural ease of individuation. Today also, sans reference to biological facts (or “categories”), and more readily based on constituted personal experiences. As well, culturally trending now is to proffer the exclusion of those who don’t side with one’s/or/one’s group identifier(s). Seeking to erase bounded conceptions, that is “reinscribe” the imaginary to be free of boundaries, we end up generating power struggles and rhetorical games, exclusions vs. generating inclusion and

¹⁰ Take for example the expanding term *transgender*, or *trans*, now seen as “inclusive.” Originally and just a few years ago, the term *transgender* indicated a particular and rather exclusive category—those that were hormonally and/or surgically reassigned to the (binary) other sex. Like adding more initials to the LGBT acronym to insure “neutralization of all boundaries,” contemporary lexical categories continue to attempt expansive inclusion while becoming a rhetorical game of catch-up for users and included alike. It only confounds meanings, and widens divisions between the “us” and the “them.”

¹¹ Regarding gender, all Volf quotes are references to his 1996 (original) edition. Unfortunately, in revising and updating the edition (2019), Volf felt Chapter 4, on gender identity, needed more time to be edited/commented on than he had available, to examine the explosion of work now in the field. This chapter was thus *omitted* from the 2019 edition of his work.

freedoms—all with more labels. All of this seems especially relevant to gender and gender identity in contemporary Western society, producing not only the ‘gender moment’, but the “gender revolution.”

The Big Question Isn’t How, but *Who*

Jenell Paris states of my position piece,

There is a childlike quality to Gil’s very sophisticated essay, a wonder and love of ‘what is’ that many on both liberal and conservative ends of sex/gender struggles would find naïve, warning that to seek the real and the true, in the world such as it is, will not lead to our good. (p. 91)

“In the world such as it is” I learned to look beyond the present, discovered means and ways, and found hope and resurrection. Will I really be read as the naïve outlier—unless I unwrap the personal to legitimate that the ‘what is’ can become the ‘what can be?’¹² (Don’t answer yet!)

In my position paper, I obviously do not follow what Paris proposes in her response as a possibly “safer strategy” than speaking as I do, ways that in her view may cause *trouble*.¹³ She proposes my “Using power to define reality in a manner best suited to our group, and to extend our understanding to other social groups and institutions as possible” (p. 91). (I gather she recommends this strategy because it seems to Paris that empirical and truthful language has eminently failed to challenge the positions of groups she mentions: those in LGBTQ+ safe spaces; those in

conservative Christian churches; and those in progressive churches and spaces.)

Let’s leave aside and undefined what is meant by “power” and “reality” . . . as well as the “as possible” in her suggestion . . . and get to the meat of the proposal.

Trouble: Isn’t that which Paris proposes what the Christian church has been doing for centuries, with miserable failures? Using *power* (particularistic biblical interpretations, “theological authority”) to define *their reality* (socially constructed in ways that nearly guarantee sexual/gender exclusions), in a manner best suited to *their group*? (On all this, several good critiques come to mind. See the footnote.¹⁴) To my point, Teri Merrick sums it up beautifully:

Is there reason for thinking that the [authorial] sources my Christian communities use promulgate hermeneutic injustice? The answer is yes. Space does not permit me to adduce all the evidence showing that women and others . . . have been victims of structural identity prejudice throughout church history. . . . Evidence of structural prejudice against women and those who fail to conform to the hierarchically ordered sex and gender binary is so strong that it forces the question, “Why does biblical religion that sees every person as created in God’s image so easily become a sponsor of human rights violations in the area of sex and gender?” (Merrick 2020, 99.)

Trouble: Isn’t “hermeneutic injustice” also what gender activists are now doing with *their reality*, and getting whiplash for it? Consult the work of Ryan T. Anderson (2017).

¹² A truly humbling moment was receiving Mike Rynkiewicz’s pre-publication comments of my piece for this journal issue, and his statement, “Let me say first off that the paper is a tour de force on the issue of how gender and sex (biological) relate in today’s debates. I appreciate the science and clarification.” (Personal correspondence, December 17, 2021.) Mike has known nothing personal or historical about me (till this piece). He validates an authorial voice from the “science and clarifications” I provide—not from my “lived experience of non-dominant identity,” or “because my insights also come from my [personal] experiences.”

¹³ Both in my recent book (2021), and certainly in the position paper in this issue of *OKH Journal*, I propose a forward discussion of what is inherently a problem in contemporary gender renditions, and how such have concretized. I try to bring biology back into discussions and theories of body and self without disowning sociocultural variables. I openly acknowledge and support intersex born individuals, gender dysphoric persons, and the need to hear their voices. I plead for the Church to stop ignoring its Judaic heritage and their acceptance of varied gendered identities; the need to change out its paradigmatic binary-only schema for humans; and its necessity to correct binaristic theologies. Paris propose a “safer strategy” since all this may seem naïve (read ‘impossible to achieve’) to some on either side of the arguments.

¹⁴ Let’s start with Megan K. DeFranza’s meticulous scholarship in *Sex Differences in Christian Theology* (2015); Susannah Cornwall, *Sex and Uncertainty in the Body of Christ: Intersex Conditions and Christian Theology* (2010); Terri Merrick’s “Non-Deference to Religious Authority: Epistemic Arrogance or Injustice” (2020); Pope Francis (Jorge Mario Bergoglio), *The Name of God is Mercy* (2016); Christine Helmer, *Theology and the End of Doctrine* (2014); Branson Parler, “How Should Christians Navigate the Gender Revolution?” *Think Christian* (February 2017); and for fun, Nate Pyle, *Man Enough: How Jesus Redefines Manhood* (2015); M.D. Thompson, “A Theology of Gender and Gender Identity: A Report from the Sydney Diocesan Doctrine Commission” (2017); and Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (1978).

No-one can untie this Gordian knot of a rightful question Paris proposes in three to four paragraphs.¹⁵ So I ask more pointed ‘Who’ questions to the groups involved, to try and jump-start an answer: Who among you can be moved most readily by God’s spirit to venture into the compassion and care which Scriptures demand of those who follow Jesus Christ? Who in pastoral leadership can lead by example and embrace the struggle against falsehood, injustice, and violence involved in the “gender wars”? Who can use their distance from “the other” best, to gain perspective? And for Christian anthropologists reading this: Who among us can join the small chorus researching issues of contemporary sex/gender expressions, not only to enable anthropological-missional ends, but to garner insights the Church desperately needs today?

Certainly, I don’t wait for “people” in general to embrace change (we know better as anthropologists—remember Homer Barnett [1953]), or to be “moved” by the Holy Spirit. I also don’t wait for those outside Christian circles to want to change what has become a cultural movement, full of self-identifiers, and which provides adopters (especially Gen Z) with what feels as their ultimate liberation. Nor do I wait for the church to wake up, ‘all of a sudden’ to acknowledge the truth of intersex, gender dysphoria, variously recognized gender expressions in Judaism—even though questions these prompt are at our doorstep, and gender variance is in our pews.

But I do believe that “a conscientious religionist [anthropologist, here]” can and should display a selective distrust toward ecclesial authority, as Merrick suggests in the quoted work, but work to effect change. What I argue in my position paper relative to the church, Volf is all the more emphatic by quoting Nietzsche: “The judgment must begin, however, with the household of God. (1 Peter 4:17)—with the [religious] self and its own culture. Nietzsche pointed out that those who wish to make a new departure have ‘first of all to subdue tradition and the gods themselves’” (Volf 1996, 52). (Bracket mine for clarity.)

My aim here is to point the Christian finger at our idols, our false gods, turn our eyes toward an evangelical personality which demonstrates alterity, which can then listen to the great Second Commandment: “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt 22:39 NIV).

And who is my neighbor? Luke 10: The ones whom we need to understand. The ones to whom we owe our attention, our time, our engagement without hesitations or judgment. Ultimately, the ones we need to embrace. Can we live it out? Or, is it hopelessly naïve to ask this?

Rather than listening to me, hear what Camery-Hoggatt says:

Vince reminds us again and again that conversations about gender and identity need not be set in opposition; indeed, they can become cooperative projects in which we seek a third path. To do that, he insists that we begin by listening to the personal stories of the people who are directly impacted by these issues—those that are biologically intersex, who are troubled by sexual dysphoria, who may be at the crossroads of gender variance; or whose family lives are directly affected by these questions. To understand the issues, we first must encounter and genuinely try to understand the people concerned. This book is filled with cases, some of them deeply anguishing, many enmeshed in physical biology or the workings of the psyche, others involving issues of spirituality and the impact of these questions on their journey of faith. While it’s entirely possible to parse the issues theoretically and abstractly, we mustn’t stop there. As followers of Jesus, we’re asked by Vince to listen directly and carefully to the people who are directly impacted. It is the attention to the person that makes this book so useful for Christians. Here, Vince provides us a way that we, as Christians, can bridge this particular divide. Doing so requires us to be open to new knowledge. To paraphrase Eric Hoffer, “In times of radical change, it is the learners that inherit the earth.” (Camery-Hoggatt, “Foreword” in Gil 2021, xiv)

The central question mark is whether the church of Jesus Christ can once again look to itself in truth and humility, acknowledge and repair its biologically wrong views, uninformed theologies, and refrain from judgments. We should aright wrongs against people who are distinct so we don’t repeat history and respond incorrectly. If this sounds as if only directed to those in conservative Christian churches, let me be quick to add that those in progressive ones need to also eat some humble pie: Acts 10:34 ESV should be kept on every

¹⁵ I *do* ask a similar question, and devote three chapters (7, 8, and 9) in my recent 2021 publication to working out mutual conversations and understandings between gender groups and the church. In chapters 8 and 9, I detail recommendations for pastoral and church leadership on how to engage the ‘gender moment’; and in chapter 9, I extend that conversation to all those in the Christian faith.

Christian's sightline, "I now truly understand that God does not show favoritism."

To engage that kind of altruism, we must:

- Walk with our 'neighbor'—offer up a conversation with those of varied genders.
- Earnestly listen
- Show compassion (Prov 31:8-9)
- Be humble enough to correct our own misunderstandings
- Speak 'truth' only when we are well informed—information opens the mind of the humble (1 Peter 5:5-6)
- We can agree to disagree and still receive our 'neighbor'
- We can stand in opposition to bullying (and in this, include *negative persuasion*) (Gil 2021, 203-205)

To gender activists we should respond directly, and our response should sound something like this: 'I understand. We were once myopic. While I may not agree with you totally, I can agree to hear you and understand you, and not judge you. And I hope you can hear me and understand me, and not judge me either' (Gil 2021, 214). If we are to emulate Jesus, then we must find a compassionate middle where we can all stand. The Christian culture of humility and obedience, its death of self requisite demand it. Is it naïve to believe that we Christians should be the first to make the move?

How Can Christian Anthropologists Contribute to Answering "The Paris Question"?

Christian anthropologists can help encourage our religious communities to do better by serving a catalytic function. Our research and collaborations on sex and gender with scientists, theologians and philosophers can open greater dialogues. Researching objectively, scientifically, ethnographically, ethnologically, Christian church cultures and positions can reveal those "sick" trends that can then be addressed by applied anthropological means; by theologians willing to do this work (DeFranza again comes to mind); and by Christian philosophers in their arguments (Teri Merrick comes to mind here). Let's not forget anthropologists-missilogists who have already, like Robert Priest, Michael Rynkiewicz, Kersten Priest, Jenell Paris, Adam Kiš, Sherwood Lingenfelter, et al., begun tackling prickly questions of sexuality, gender;

even abuse and victimizations—Phillip Jenkins. These have not towed the "safe" line to get research done and confront "multiheaded epistemologies." I count many in this group as those Merrick labels "conscientious religionists," who also "display a selective mistrust towards ecclesial authority"—but do work to correct it. We need a legion, not a cadre willing to learn about, then embrace the work of sex and gender as it is rendered today. I know of no frontier in the human phenom more worthy to engage at present, especially given the turbulence we now live in and our need for clarity.

Is it naïve to ask Christian anthropologists to consider joining this work? I refuse to be safe by not asking: *If not us, then who? If not now, then when?*—Rep. John R. Lewis.

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NEWS & OPINIONS

Research in Progress

Michael A. Rynkiewich

I would like to thank Paris for playing the philosopher's role of surveying our particular descriptions of a rope, a tree, and a wall and discerning that there is an elephant in the room. The elephant is not sexuality or gender, but rather the nature of our knowledge of these types of things. The bottom line, for me, is that cultural paradigms (categories and explanations) concerning sexual identities and desires produce a wide range of beliefs and practices worldwide, and these are constantly changing. Yet, in one of those culture areas, the United States, people on multiple sides of the arguments continue to delude themselves that their local knowledge applies to a universal arena.

Our work is indeed a call for a time-out for all sides to exercise a bit of epistemological humility regarding Scripture and tradition, biology and culture, and the nature of community and communion.¹

Time and again, while both physically present and later through the Spirit, Jesus had to slow down his disciples who tended to misconstrue his meaning and succumb to the temptation of contentious name-calling debates. Jesus successfully resisted those temptations himself early on; for example, the temptation to conflate power with the control of others (Luke 4:1-13). However, after preaching love for one's enemies (Luke 6:27-38), Jesus had to rebuke the disciples who asked for permission to call down fire to consume a Samaritan village (Luke 9:51-56). When Jesus tried to explain his own role as the suffering servant, the disciples ignored him and began an argument about which of them was the greatest (Luke 9:44-48; Luke 22:14-24). When Jesus tried to use a metaphor to warn the disciples to be prepared, the disciples missed the

part about the preparation of prayer and instead produced two swords (Luke 22:35-38). Probably with a sigh, Jesus replied "*It is enough*," and then led them to the mountain where he asked them to "*pray that you may not come into the time of trial*" (Luke 22:39-40), which is what he meant in the first place. Peter impetuously boasted that he did not have to prepare with prayer, he was ready now to fight and die for Jesus. We know how that ended.

As Paris notes, we all show a respect for science and, in particular, the findings of anthropology and biology. Perhaps here is where the present mood of the country leads her to speculate that, after we publish, we will have no friends remaining, either on the right or the left (only two sides, how binary is our thinking). Few are the number of people today who still appreciate what the phrase 'research in progress' means, who understand that science is a process of constantly refining observations and analysis,² and who are able to live in the liminality of nuance and uncertainty. Friends come and go, but I have never been abandoned by validity, reliability, and generalizability.³

Such work can be uncomfortable, for the practitioner and for those who feel vulnerable when science reports its findings. Anti-vaxxers feel threatened with studies that show that vaccines work. Those constructing a sexual identity, or claiming no sexual identity, feel threatened with studies that show the influence of hormones in utero, before language. It is not the case that scientists are unaware of occasions for bias in their choices and in their work. We remind ourselves, and are reminded, constantly of that

¹ A whistle on the playing field for a time out that unfortunately may be just whistling in the dark.

² This refers to the bedrock of science: self-criticism, self-correction, and constantly building up the means of apprehending the world.

³ "... *validity* . . . the correspondence between what one thinks one is measuring and what one is really measuring. *Reliability* . . . the likelihood that a measure will repeatedly yield the same results. . . . *Generalizability* . . . the possibility that a study's outcomes based on a sample also will apply to the broader group from which the sample is drawn" (Trostle 2005, 76).

possibility, and we adjust accordingly, testing our models and practices through self-critique and repeated revised research projects. O'Reilly calls this process in anthropology: "iterative inductive" (2012, 30).

What is more worrisome to me is the decline in science training and understanding in America, that is, all the sciences in all segments of the population. For example, practitioners, like nurses and doctors, typically do not take a class in epidemiology in their training, and yet some, even some doctors who have made it to Congress, think that technical medical training makes them experts in epidemiology. There are experts out there,⁴ but they are often ignored or shouted down.

Paris asks about the polygamy discussion that has a long history in anthropology and missiology. Those are in the records and in the textbooks,⁵ but she is correct that they have not been fully mined for missiological insights. In my article, I presented a couple of ethnographic examples of sexual behavior linked to other issues beyond desire and self-realization. The relationship of sexual behavior to identity and culture also emerges in studies of polygamy, and therein lies the link to today's concerns. By 'guise', I only meant that one should look beyond the presenting symptoms to the underlying issues. In Scripture, it is not only Israel's neighbors but also the stories in Genesis that provide us with cases of first and second wives, maids who are also concubines, daughters-in-laws who become sexual partners,⁶ circumcision and its relationship to rape,⁷ menstrual practices used and abused,⁸ and even fidelity and adultery among the 'patriarchs and matriarchs' of Israel itself. That would open up a conversation about 'heterosexuality' beyond the limits of this publication, and others should certainly consider doing that.

Paris frames our 'conceptual critique' as part of the ancient process of 'naming'. I appreciate that; God's invitation to Adam to join God in creating was, to my mind, the beginning of culture. We name, says Paris

channeling Ellul, and then "we live with the consequences of our naming." This is similar to the claim by Berger and Luckmann that we create culture anew, then forget that we did so, thus conflating culture with reality in the end (1966).

That is what I mean by saying that the issue of heterosexuality-homosexuality is 'poorly contextualized'; so much so that American Christians, even conservative Christians, accept the terms (categories, names) of the debate, and in doing so, they have surrendered before they have even begun.

Paris is aware that this is not the place for a 'to do' list since such a list would lead only to "false promises." If our contributions are a 'gift', then we offer what we have. Our gift is 'conceptual critique' and a passion for the sciences we represent. Our gift is to present what the data reveal, so far, and not to attach strings to the package by selectively searching for support for someone's ideological or theological position. First, we do no harm.

Our 'to do' is to step back and reflect. We should revisit our scientific epistemology and findings until we have a better handle on biological processes and cultural concepts surrounding sexuality and identity. Likewise, we should revisit our biblical hermeneutics until we have a better handle on concepts and social relationships that emerge from the whole narrative. In the process, we should hold the two operations apart as long as possible so that science, culture, and theology may have the best chance to inform the other once we have the confidence that we know what we are talking about.

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⁴ For example, Michael Osterholm (University of Minnesota), Marc Lipsitch (Harvard), Larry Brilliant (WHO), Sunetra Gupta (Oxford), Jay Bhattacharya (Stanford), and Martin Kulldorf (Harvard).

⁵ For example, see Brian M. Howell and Janell Williams Paris, *Introducing Cultural Anthropology: A Christian Perspective* (2011).

⁶ The story of Tamar and Judah is strange, yet they both appear in the genealogy of Jesus (Genesis 38, Matthew 1:3).

⁷ The children of Israel 'weaponized' circumcision to disable the clan of the man who raped Dinah, and then executed them all (Genesis 34).

⁸ Remember that Rachel used menstruation customs to deflect her father Laban from searching where she was sitting (Genesis 31:34-35).

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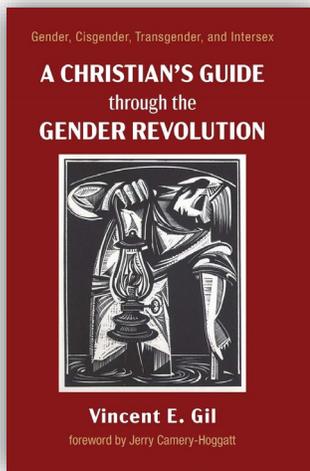
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BOOK REVIEW

A Christian's Guide through the Gender Revolution

By Vincent E. Gil

Reviewed by Dena Loder-Hurley



Eugene, OR: Cascade Books
2021

Vincent Gil walks with purpose into an area many Christians would rather avoid in his book, *A Christian's Guide Through the Gender Revolution*. He begins his book by defining the current moment, The “Now” of Gender, distinguishing between gender identity and sexual orientation, “who turns one on, or whether or not the Bible prohibits it” (1). From the beginning he clarifies that he is addressing questions of identity and gender as well as what—and who—determines and decides the answers. He utilizes Chapter Two to define and clarify the terms and concepts necessary to understand and engage in the current conversation.

After setting the stage, he invites the reader to understand the real heart of the matter: people. He states and restates his purpose: “. . . to ensure that those whom we refer to . . . remain clearly in our line of vision as persons. Persons who deserve our understanding, and more” (34). Those who have not

been personally touched by matters of gender identity, gender dysphoria, or intersex, either in their own lives or in the lives of those they love, may thoughtlessly approach the matter with the compassion and tenderness required to solve an algebraic equation. Gil paints the picture of the challenges and difficulties individuals and their loved ones often face.

Having humanized the conversation, Gil dives into deeper, more complex aspects of the conversation, using the language of Psalm 139:14 as a springboard: “. . . I am fearfully and wonderfully made.” He examines the Hebrew words and grammar, identifying the idiomatic intent and meaning, before examining biological realities and complexities that may surprise those who believe they already understand basic embryonic and fetal development. Fearfully and wonderfully made indeed. His intention is not to blur or confuse but rather to highlight and clarify a complexity that both exists and can result in post-birth uncertainty or ambiguity. Just because something may be statistically uncommon does not make it unnatural. “The effects of genetics and hormones can yield body morphologies that at times don’t conform to a binary model—at all” (83). Some will argue that a lack of conformity to the binary model is the result of living in a fallen world, and Gil addresses this argument specifically in Chapter Seven, Christianity and the Gender Crucible, revisiting the theology of gender.

Gil further humanizes the issues by recognizing beyond-the-norm parenting challenges when a child is intersex or has conflicts regarding their gender identity. He speaks both pastorally and clinically, encouraging parents to seek help rather than go it alone and then walking through different options and decisions available to them. He gives advantages and disadvantages as well as ramifications for the long term and explores different therapeutic approaches, including a chapter dedicated to the exploration of biological therapies. Ultimately, he advocates for time and therapy over a potentially rushed decision, a

suggestion that may be understood as controversial and even hostile in some settings.

Gil addresses clergy and church leadership, giving guidelines and resources. The first step in ministering effectively is to examine and identify any preconceptions, generalizations, and stereotypes a leader may have, especially as those may lead to prejudice and a posture of “rejecter first” rather than “one who listens and welcomes exploration,” open to walking alongside someone with gender conflicts (177). He reminds readers of the politics of caring, drawing on the example of Jesus who was derisively called “a friend to sinners.” Separate from doctrinal or theological positions, those leaders who “allow,” let alone care for, an individual or family to work through their issues or questions will experience criticism and judgment, the cost of caring.

Holding space for complexity and nuance while advocating for greater kindness, compassion, and care in the church’s response does not translate to an unwillingness to take a clear position. In articulating and clarifying these complexities, Gil also argues for a well-defined distinction between intersex and diagnosable gender-identity disorder and “a social movement of expressive individualism and self-representation” (194). He urges Christians to resist cultural ideologies which denigrate sex/gender distinctions and to encourage fellow believers in this struggle to allow Christ to influence their ideology (199). This distinction shapes Gil’s recommendation of a distinctly Christian response to “Transgender Activism,” distinguishing an ideology of radical self-expression and individualism from objectively diagnosable gender-identity conflicts. He draws on medical anthropology to classify much of today’s “gender rebellion” as a “culture-bound syndrome” (200).

A cursory glance of the book quickly reveals the broad and ambitious scope and may leave a potential reader questioning the feasibility of such an undertaking. Gil’s purpose is to create a resource that will equip the church with better answers for contemporary issues in service to parents and clergy who need it, addressing gender and identity through the distinctly Christian lens of mercy and reconciliation. He draws extensively on the work of other scholars throughout various disciplines, including theology, psychology, history, sociology, and more, resulting in a holistic approach that accomplishes the intended goal. In many respects, Gil does the work of an anthropologist, observing and

reporting on the current reality, often unknown and misunderstood, before placing it in the context of history by tracing the development and shifts of thought. He not only affirms the inherent worth and dignity of all people, but he also advocates for better treatment of those facing these questions, conflicts, and struggles personally. They are image bearers who deserve understanding as well as deference, the recognition that they need not defend their experience and reality nor is it patently sinful or wrong to have these questions, conflicts, or struggles.

Those seeking certainty in matters of gender identity will be disappointed. And skipping to the end will not reveal step-by-step instructions for “handling” questions or situations surrounding intersex or gender dysphoria. And that is not a weakness of the book. Rather than a playbook, he suggests a way of being and a way of thinking that will not only inform the current moment but could also prepare readers for the future, as the conversation continues and develops. He highlights and clarifies the complexity and nuance in a way that makes room for pursuing greater understanding and dialogue.

Rejecting a rigid either-this-or-that framework of extremes necessarily places Gil in the messy middle. He diligently clarifies the arguments and positions throughout the text and in footnotes which results in dense reading demanding the reader’s full attention. The messy middle will leave some readers complaining that he did not go far enough in this direction or that one. Still, having walked alongside individuals and families throughout his life, career, and ministry, Gil willingly steps into the minefield in service to those who had no other option.



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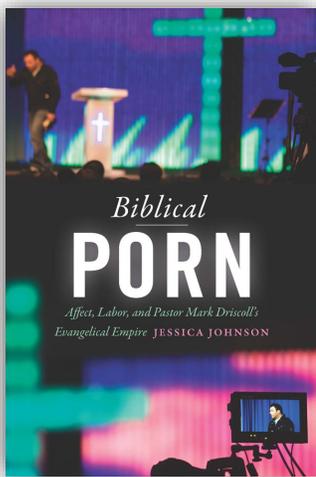
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BOOK REVIEW

Biblical Porn: Affect, Labor, and Pastor Mark Driscoll's Evangelical Empire

By Jessica Johnson

Reviewed by Patrick Bondy



Durham, NC: Duke University Press
2018

The rise and demise of the Mars Hill megachurch in the US Pacific Northwest is by this point well-known to many both inside and outside the Church. Mars Hill's financial practices, membership tactics, and ideologies of sex and gender have provoked strong reaction. While reactions to Mars Hill include leaving Christianity altogether, transitioning to a more liberal Christianity, or remaining within Reformed Christianity, people across these categories rightfully ask *how* Mars Hill happened.

Jessica Johnson, a self-described non-Christian and “feminist anthropologist” (20) makes the question of how Mars Hill happened central to her study (6). Johnson conducted research on Mars Hill over the course of a decade, though her fieldwork occurred primarily during the years 2006-2008 and 2014-2016 (13-15). In seeking a vocabulary to describe

experiences at Mars Hill, Johnson relies on concepts of affect and labor. She describes affect as “intersubjective intensities” such as shame, joy, paranoia, anger, and conviction (3-4). Conviction is perhaps the most important example of affect for Johnson, which she powerfully describes as “belief that feels like one’s own” (9).

Johnson uses the concept of affect alongside labor to describe the mechanics of Mars Hill. In doing so, she goes beyond both commonplace concepts of belief and charisma and established scholarly emphases on discourse and representation. Mars Hill, Johnson argues, operated by pastor Mark Driscoll propagating a narrative of divine exceptionalism that inspired members, small group leaders, deacons, camera-people, musicians, security officials, and other pastors to labor for the sake of the church. Their labor—investing time and energy into what seemed to be an incredible church—was an example of affect and a generator of more affect, too. Labor, affect, and Driscoll’s narrative powers interacted with each other to grow, grow, and grow the church. Eventually negative affects such as shame, paranoia, and distrust combine with the negative stories circulating online so that a critical mass of people no longer labored for Mars Hill. At this point Driscoll failed to control the narrative of the church, and it dissolved.

The main chapters of Johnson’s ethnography focus on different topics and technologies related to Mars Hill’s operations, including exorcisms in Chapter Two, militarized Christianity in Chapter Five and throughout, and multimedia marketing in Chapter Four. More than any of these, though, Johnson tells the story of Mars Hill through its content on sex and gender, which she calls “biblical porn” (7). The crux of Johnson’s provocative concept, also the book’s title, is the truth that opposites are highly similar. In explicitness of teaching, in circulation of talk

confessing sexual sin, in sky-high expectations of marital sexuality, and in celebration of hyper-masculinity, Mars Hill's anti-pornographic approach to Biblical sexuality was, in fact, pornographic. Pornographic—gratuitous and sexual, to define the term—teaching, confession, expectation, and celebration was the affect and labor that Driscoll cast a narrative net over in order to grow Mars Hill.

Johnson's arguments in the book are well-cited, strongly made, and of great importance. Besides this, at a methodological level, Johnson succeeds in going beyond representation and discourse. She does so first by providing a corporeal, body-centered description of human experience. She probes her from-the-gut laughter at a video of Driscoll's (4), the tears shed by women of Mars Hill in a confession meeting (127-8), and nuances of Driscoll's speech patterns when preaching (28-29). The inclusion of these non-discursive details is methodologically painstaking, but the pay-off is that Johnson demonstrates how conviction at Mars Hill operated in people's bodies, not just their minds.

Besides centering the body, Johnson highlights non-human actors and networks—an LED-powered stage that synced with the tone of Driscoll's preaching (116), an anonymized church forum that enabled offensive conversation (69-71), and web-based technology that allowed Mars Hill to have synced Q and A sessions across multiple church campuses (131-134). People laboured to make and maintain these technologies, which in turn distributed and produced the affect that motivated more people to labour for Mars Hill. For anyone looking to write about religious experience in a way that includes the human body, the material world, or both, Johnson's ethnography is exemplary.

While the depth and breadth of Johnson's knowledge is apparent throughout *Biblical Porn*, at one point she makes a mistake. Early on in the book, she writes that Driscoll "preached in the verse-by-verse style of systematic theology" (24). However, systematic theology does not typically engage with Scripture verse-by-verse. It seems Johnson means to say Driscoll favoured exegetical theology and therefore practiced expository preaching, which refers to preaching verse-by-verse through a portion of the Bible. Usually, an expository preacher preaches through a book of the Bible over multiple sermons. Indeed, Johnson cites sermon series by Driscoll on the Song of Solomon (111) and on Nehemiah (77-79).

One error in terminology does not undo what is a great ethnography on an important topic. Johnson produces a description of Mars Hill whose richness and detail depends on years of observant participation with an ethnographer's sensibilities. The book's vocabulary makes it less accessible than its premise and topic suggests—I recommend it for reading by upper-year undergraduates and graduates in social sciences, as well as by ministry leaders. Whether people in the church catch the finer points of affect theory or not, Johnson has something important for the Church to hear—explicit anti-pornographic content is pornographic. Therefore a church must do more than oppose the world; it must be different. Being different, rather than opposed, is only found in Christ.



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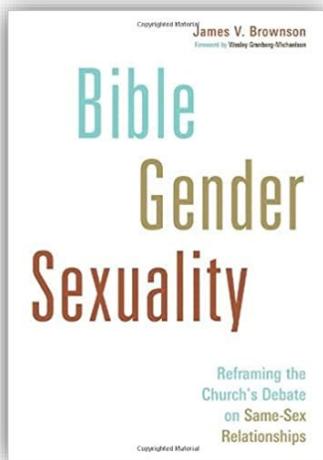
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BOOK REVIEW

Bible, Gender, Sexuality: Reframing the Church's Debate on Same-Sex Relationships

By James V. Brownson

Reviewed by Nakia Vongvirath



Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans
2013

After reading the Forward to this book, I was left with a sense of anticipation for what Brownson may have discovered, and I was willing to look at his findings with an open mind. But as I started to read, I realized quickly I was not going to agree with Brownson's book. Brownson is proposing we break with traditional ways of thinking about what the Bible says about same-sex relationships and look at those scriptures with new interpretations.

James Brownson supports the Revisionist Christian movement. Revisionists believe, according to Brownson, that the interpretations of the Bible are outdated and need to be revised, particularly the ones that pertain to same-sex relationships. He is focused on the issue of same-sex relationships because his own son came out to him and asked for his help and guidance. Brownson, being a Christian and wanting some answers to give his son, researched and wrote this

book. In my review of this book, I will address Brownson's argument and demonstrate why I disagree with it.

Brownson pits the beliefs of traditionalist Christians against revisionist Christians on what the biblical view of homosexuality is. He refers to a 'line in the sand', that traditionalist Christians draw with regard to same-sex relationships as being an abomination to God's plan for sexuality. But, "For revisionist Christians, however, this attempt to draw a 'line in the sand' is fundamentally misguided" (4). Brownson suggests that the rate of divorce, from the revisionist point of view, would greatly decrease if the Church would consecrate same-sex marriages. But traditionalists think, he says, same-sex relationships have the same problems as heterosexual couples, and sanctioning their marriages will do nothing to lower the divorce rate. As I was reading this the same thought went through my mind. Brownson had a judgmental tone in this paragraph implying traditional Christians only have contact with homosexuals who are deeply closeted. But I have spoken to homosexuals who are completely out, and they *do* have issues with fidelity, incompatibility, and separation. Their difficulties are the same as heterosexual couples.

Brownson plainly states this book is about disagreements over how Scripture is interpreted. His argument is based on the belief that the Bible is outdated on this issue. For example, he refers to when the New Testament was added to the Old Testament, nullifying some of the Old Testament laws. For example, Brownson points out that the New Testament cancels out many of the kosher laws of the Old Testament and because of that, Gentiles no longer have to follow them. But these instructions are to deepen our faith and relationship with God, not to make the Old Testament irrelevant. The New

Testament is a continuation of the Lord's story as found in the Old Testament.

Brownson used the term 'imagination' when referring to how Gentile Christians are to interpret the Bible. He states, ". . . imagination does not connote the conjuring up of images or beliefs that have no grounding in reality; rather, it refers here to the ability to see the deeper meanings and patterns that emerge in the context of cross-cultural engagements" (p.10). But the human imagination can err, along with human motives and behavior. We all learn as early as Sunday School, that we are to pray for the Holy Spirit to guide us in the correct interpretation of biblical passages. That way we can hope our interpretations come from God and not ourselves. Brownson compares the Scripture to the writings of Galileo in that Galileo's writings had to be reread to understand the sun and earth's rotation. But the two cannot be compared since Galileo was a mortal man and therefore, fallible. The Scriptures were written by men led by the Holy Spirit. A few sentences earlier Brownson states that the Holy Spirit is what leads you to understanding the Bible. Now, however, he is implying the Holy Spirit isn't needed to discern the patterns and meaning of the Scriptures. He says, "When the apostle James declared, 'It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us,' he was not elevating human wisdom to an equivalent status with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, but instead underscoring the way the Spirit works through these complex human processes of constructing patterns of discernment, meaning, and vision" (10) . . . thereby dismissing the Holy Spirit's direct work in our understanding. Without the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Christians are relying on themselves alone to interpret the Bible rather than on God.

Brownson spends a lot of time discussing Romans 1:24-27. In those Scriptures Paul is discussing what happens to a people who will not obey God. "Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves" (Romans 1:24). Brownson's argument is that these people were out of control and this Scripture does not include committed same-sex couples. But if you read the Scripture, it describes unclean acts, it does not speak of couples, committed or otherwise. It lays out plainly homosexual behaviors and the judgment of God on those who commit those behaviors. "Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them" (Romans 1:32). If you

read the entire chapter the reader will see this is not a Scripture that promotes same-sex couples, it is a warning from God: 'this is how you act if you do not have me!'

Brownson wrote this book in response to his son confessing to him and his wife that he was a homosexual. Through deliberation with his wife and others, Brownson turned to the Bible and received no help or comfort from it. He used the phrase, 'reimagine the Scripture' as it pertains to homosexuality, but the Scripture is not left to the human imagination. It appears Brownson did not allow God to show him the truths of the Word on this point. This book is an attempt to comfort himself and his family about his son's decision. Despite that, he invites scrutiny of this book to encourage the Church to discuss same-sex couples openly in a group setting. I cannot say this book is not interesting to read, but for a new Christian this mindset is dangerous. What makes it dangerous? Believing you can make the Bible say what you want it to say so it fits into your own personal world view, which pushes the Lord's will out and replaces it with your own.



Nakia Vongvirath graduated from Eastern University in 2021 with a master's degree in Theological and Cultural Anthropology. Her research interests are in social anthropology and linguistics. She wants to study what society's reactions are to social issues and the language used to communicate those reactions. She wants to be able to pursue these interests with a Christian frame of mind so as to show a Christian's perspective in her research.

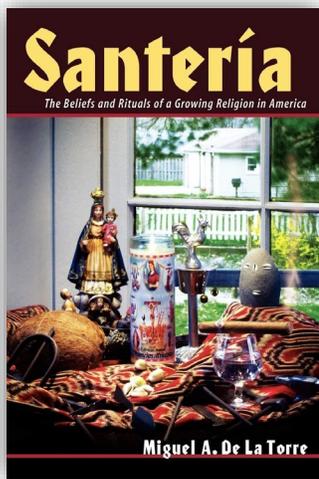
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BOOK REVIEW

Santería: The Beliefs and Rituals of a Growing Religion in America

By Miguel A. De La Torre

Reviewed by Anthony Kail



Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans
2004

Santería: The Beliefs and Rituals of a Growing Religion in America by Miguel A. De La Torre is a breath of fresh air in the contemporary study of Afro-Cuban Santería. There is very little literature available on this growing tradition that combines cultural, theological and experiential writing. Professor De La Torre brings a much-needed perspective on the religion as a former practitioner. He begins the text by advising readers that he is not in the business of condoning or condemning the religion but wishes to inform readers of the culture. This is a nice balance as he notes that many books on the topic are either written from a perspective that seeks to find errors with the theology of Santería, or are written by new converts who in some cases allow zeal to affect their research into the culture.

The historical development and complex culture of 'Regla de Ocha' commonly referred to as 'Santería' is frequently overshadowed in the West with images of animal sacrifices, trance possession and ethnocentric images promoted by television and movies. The religion originated from the Yoruba people of Southwestern Nigeria. As many Yoruba families were taken as slaves to regions like Cuba they were forced to give up their traditional approaches to healing and spirituality.

Africans from many regions including Nigeria, the Congo, and Dahomey were kidnapped and forced into slavery on plantations in Cuba. Colonialists forced many slaves to convert to Catholicism. As a means of keeping the indigenous traditions of Africa alive, many slaves practiced their traditions in secret under the guise of Catholic saints. Specific characteristics of saints contained elements seen in some of their indigenous deities known as Orishas. This syncretism was maintained in many communities as a means of spiritual survival.

The author brings readers into the religion by introducing some fundamental concepts of Santería. The concept of *aché* is explained as it is the primary energy that manifests from the realm of the Orishas. *Aché* gives life, power and protection. The cosmology of the Yoruba and the personalities of the Orishas are explained. This is very important as the personalities and characteristics of the Orishas affect many issues in the lives of practitioners from their personal spiritual directives to specific aesthetics in shrines and sacred spaces. The Orishas were once human beings and have many characteristics that are relatable to humanity including specific temperaments, favorite foods and favorite colors. The lives of the Orishas are traditionally recounted orally to practitioners through stories known as *Patakis*. These stories communicate topics including why a specific Orisha calls for specific

offerings and why specific artifacts are placed in sacred spaces. In his chapter, *The Orishas and their Legends*, the lives of the deities are presented with not only through traditional stories, but also with insights regarding their powers and relationships that come from an emic understanding of the culture through practice.

The chapter, *Rituals*, introduces readers to one of the most important aspects of the religion. As De La Torre remarks, “While many if not most of the religions can be understood in terms of their doctrines, Santería, having no central creed, has to be understood in terms of its rituals. It is a religion based on orthopraxis (right actions) not orthodoxy (right doctrine)” (102). As rituals are central to the practice of the religion, De La Torre walks readers through the initiations and ceremonies that take newcomers to the religion into the faith and ultimately into communion with their guardian Orisha.

Information on sacred artifacts of Santería including the sacred necklaces known as the *elekes*, the *Guerreros* or guardian Orishas, and the sacred stones known as the *otanes*, is thoroughly described for their aesthetic and spiritual significance. The author’s chapter, *Oracles*, is refreshing as it does not repeat many of the same criticisms of divination found in some texts about the religion but rather introduces readers to the various means by which practitioners seek wisdom from the Divine. The importance of the oracles cannot be stressed enough. While performing fieldwork among Santería communities in North America and Cuba, I have personally witnessed the significance of oracles in the customs, rituals and ceremonies. The use of oracles such as the coconut also known as *obi* is paramount in ceremonies where practitioners may use the oracle to ask the deities about accepting specific offerings, guidance in situations, and wisdom from the spiritual realm.

The author’s conclusion that the religion is to be understood as a way of life truly mirrors my personal journey to understanding regarding Santería. Many of the perceptions of the religion in North America look at it as one of the many choices among the buffet of American spirituality. Some devotees have claimed to read books and Internet websites in order to obtain guidance into the religion. The will and guidance of the Orishas is reduced to Youtube videos and mass-marketed paperbacks. In observing the lives of practitioners that have chosen to follow Santería through the ‘rules’ of the Orishas, the tenets of the tradition are connected to an historical lineage that can

be identified back to specific houses in Cuba and Africa where there is a very different approach.

Valuable insights into Santería’s perspective and worldview are found in the chapter entitled, *A Religion of Resistance*. It is here that De La Torre contrasts much of what is known in the academy with experience in the religion. He affirms that, “Regardless of how academics attempt to describe, codify and define Santería, in a real sense, it exists beyond the explication of scholars. Santería must be understood by way of the everyday” (190). In observing the practices and rituals of the religion it is tempting to lose sight of the presence of the religion in everyday life while noting the complex and intricate parts of the religion’s ceremonial life. The author closes the chapter with anthropological insights into the social functions of the religion as well as its role in the creation of community.

One of the highlights of the book that I consider valuable for anthropologists and those seeking to serve members of the Santería community is the author’s insight into the role that the religion plays in resisting oppression and empowering individuals promoting dignity and wellness in the lives of practitioners. The closing chapter, *An Emerging Religion within a Christian Environment*, looks at the variety of challenges that Santería faces in operating in North America. Challenges stemming from media depictions, legal challenges to the use of animal sacrifice, and encounters with Christianity are explained with contemporary examples. The author closes the text by posing thoughts about faith and Santería compatibility with Christianity and what he considers to be a changing religion.

After spending several years researching Santería, I can honestly say that this is one of the most important books about the religion I have read. The author’s insight as a former practitioner gives life to the sometimes ‘dry’ facts that are frequently repeated in many texts about the religion. His ability to take the reader on this journey while holding on to the railings of anthropological and theological concepts is a nice blend of these worlds. The book is not an anthropology book, theology book, or religious studies book. It contains elements of all three worlds while also keeping the attention of non-academic readers. After spending the last year with this much misunderstood religious community, I find myself burdened with the task of sharing the experiences of devotees whose stories need to be told. For there is a far greater depth of faith, integrity and complexity than we have been shown in the media. *Santería: The Beliefs and Rituals*

of a Growing Religion in America contains insights that not only resound with outside observers but also with members of the faith.



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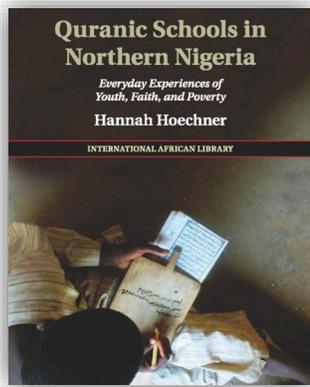
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BOOK REVIEW

Qur'anic Schools in Northern Nigeria: Everyday Experiences of Youth, Faith, and Poverty

By *Hannah Hoehner*

Reviewed by *Adriana Myland*



Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
2018

I commend Hannah Hoehner for her commitment to represent the almajirai of Kano and her excellent in-depth understanding of their experience in Qur'anic education. The almajirai derives from Arabic describing the pursuit of young boys and men who come into the urban areas to study the Qur'an under a religious teacher (1). Hoehner tackles a pervasive and longstanding issue that significantly affects Hausaland or the northern region of Nigeria. Above all, she turns our attention to the almajirai's narrative to understand their experience of faith, poverty, and reasons for this system of education that has incredibly negative stereotypes throughout Kano.

One of the main concerns for the almajiri education system is the assumed risks and vulnerabilities the boys endure. Often the almajirai fend for themselves begging on the street and must find support because they are indebted to their religious teacher (3). Hoehner clearly differentiates the educational options in Kano that include secular schooling often only available for the wealthy, or Islamiyya that combines teaching on religious practice and secular subjects, which is becoming the norm (72, 79). However, almajiri

education is accessible to the poorest, and by understanding how the almajirai make sense of who they are dispels the negative assumptions (4-5). Most significantly Hoehner helps restore the almajirai's sense of personhood by deciphering the Hausa standards of valuable character traits. A common trait, "hakuri," meaning patience, describes the upbringing of the young almajirai in their experience of extreme poverty while they pursue their search for knowledge (5). Although Hoehner does not examine the standardization or teachings of the almajiri education, she does illuminate the underlying emotional expressions and the almajirai's development of personhood. Hoehner draws much needed attention to this vulnerable population with emphasis on their "poverty-related shame," which is a pertinent issue in Hausaland (8).

Hoehner's uses creative methods to engage the almajirai and Hausa women through film and teaching English. However, I think the potential for growing challenging power dynamics or dependency by becoming an employer and patron for the almajirai is real and risky. I do relate to Hoehner's challenges as a single woman in Kano building trust with informants, but I disagree that the most "natural way of fitting [in]" involves creating a film. Although it is an effective medium to communicate a vital message, it does not depict the lived experience of the almajirai.

On the other hand, Hoehner effectively engages in the epistemological framework across the Muslim Hausa community in Kano about the almajirai. This clears the air by understanding the common misconceptions about this enormous group of young boys who are often seen on the streets begging. For example, society believes the almajirai are "backwards," and that they will prevent society from flourishing because they are most certainly engaged in radical Islamic groups such as Boko Haram (51, 53, 55). In contrast, Hoehner found if you are against the almajirai you may be accused of being a "bad Muslim" (64). This indicates a level of complexity, confusion,

and need for open intra-faith discussions among the Muslim community.

By focusing on the almajiri education system, Hoechner brings much to light. The inequality in educational options for boys in Kano emphasizes how much the almajirai are constantly “othered” (67). It is helpful that she elaborates on other demographics in Kano such as females who endure a different experience in Islamiyya and face more disparities in education (79). Further research could explore how women especially in purdah (seclusion or *matan kulle*) view the almajirai in a changing urban centre, since Hoechner found, “Having an ‘*almajiri* past’ did not seem to mark a man’s adult identity in any decisive way” (215). Surely the wives must be affected by the attitudes and personal development of the almajirai, perhaps the character of “*hakuri*” endures?

Hoechner’s observations about faith and the value of religious knowledge and the notion of a “high culture of Islam” is interesting (89, 193). Applying Pierre Bourdieu’s “habitus” is helpful to make sense of the layers of influence in the lives of the almajirai. For example, “*tarbiyya*” is how the Hausa would describe moral and social training of a child or the notion of “proper personhood” (113). I have observed *tarbiyya* in the lives of my informants’ children who attend Islamiyya, which humanizes the almajirai as they too endure similar training, striving to become acceptable in society and their faith community.

Another excellent observation Hoechner makes regards the intricacy of the patron-client relationships in the Hausa community. She notes this is very relevant to the lives of the almajirai, denoting the sense of “backwardness” they are often associated with (139). Hoechner explores the domestic work by the almajirai for the wealthy and how this closes the social gap or distance between these two seemingly opposite groups, emphasizing the vital role of patron-client relationships (124, 128).

The common traits the Hausa deem as acceptable expressions of personhood that Hoechner encounters among the almajirai include: *hakuri*, *tarbiyya*, and *kunya*, meaning shame, embarrassment, shyness, or sense of modesty. Hoechner points out that poverty is often concealed and she recognizes the Hausa characters or virtues that are acceptable, which raises an important question: how do the almajirai face dire poverty, yet maintain their sense of self (143, 144, 146)? This question humanizes the almajirai by acknowledging their sense of devotion and resilience because they work hard to maintain what the Hausa community deems as acceptable, pious, moral and evidence of devout Muslims who seek truth.

Next, Hoechner examines the future of the almajirai within spiritual services or what she calls the “prayer economy.” She observes what is considered

valuable or expected within their faith community and discovers that few of her informants’ desire to become Qur’anic teachers (198). The prospects for the almajirai are low and this emphasizes the systematic poverty in which the students often become entrapped (201). I think Hoechner’s language and description of the “prayer economy” and “prayer market” based on financial transactions misses the point (199). Although the embedded patron-client relations among the Hausa may influence their spiritual relationship, her choice of words downgrade the spiritual life of the almajirai and degrades their pursuit of truth.

Overall Hoechner’s representation of the almajirai brings clarity to this complex issue that touches every aspect of Hausaland. I appreciate Hoechner’s lament with the almajirai, and the space she gives them to voice their narrative within a bigger picture. She acknowledges the almajirai’s desire to maintain their sense of self, purpose, and dignity while honouring religion and saving face (223). The almajirai’s longing for survival, belonging, and fighting stigmas surrounding their poverty weigh heavier than their desire to change social hierarchies or systems (225). The almajirai’s poverty determines their enrolment in this educational system, but their longing for acceptance and pursuit of faith defines and shapes who they are. Perhaps the almajirai will influence the rest of the Hausa community to honour personhood beyond socioeconomic status and support their pursuit for truth as fellow Muslims.



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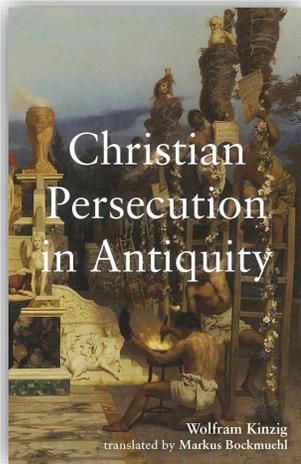
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BOOK REVIEW

Christian Persecution in Antiquity

By Wolfram Kinzig

Reviewed by Jacob Winn



Waco TX: Baylor University Press
2021

Overview

Wolfram Kinzig's book, *Christian Persecution in Antiquity*, translated into English by Markus Bockmuehl, offers the reader much to consider regarding the nature of the persecutions faced by the earliest members of the Christian Church. With a particular focus on the trials and tribulations undergone by Christians in the Roman Empire, Kinzig presents a nuanced picture of this fascinating time in the Church's history. I believe there is much for today's believers to learn about our collective past from the history recounted in this writing.

Kinzig's writing shows that the earliest persecutions faced by Christians came in the context of the infant Church existing as a sect within Second Temple Judaism. The teachings of Jesus separated the followers thereof from the larger Jewish community amid a time in which that community was faced with a very delicate situation regarding their relationship with

the Roman forces occupying their land. It is in this early portion of the book where Kinzig identifies the nature of Jesus as a man executed as a criminal, something which provoked difficulties with the Roman authorities (10). In this case, it served as an added motivation for the community at large to distance themselves from this condemned man and his followers. This led to Christianity further distinguishing itself from Second Temple Judaism. Later, Kinzig points out that Jesus was derided among the Romans as the "criminal founder" of the Christian religion (21).

Indeed, scandalous notions were attached to Christianity seemingly from the outset of the faith. Kinzig points out how Christians were "alleged to be an illegal secret society that subverted public life" (24). By categorizing Christians along such scandalous lines, Roman society of the time effectively painted Christians as dangerous agents in need of removal. This sort of propaganda was clearly effective.

Ultimately, Christians acknowledging the pre-eminence of Christ and Christ's lordship could never place their ultimate faith in loyalty to any worldly empire, including Rome. Their lives were living sacrifices to the Lord, so how could they possibly be expected to make sacrifices to the human emperor of Rome? This avoidance of sacrificing to the emperor had drastic consequences. Kinzig points out that, as the Romans saw it, the Christian "refusal of imperial sacrifice" meant that they "must be regarded as the Roman Empire's enemy" (24).

Kinzig also addresses the Emperor Nero's infamous persecution of Christians following the devastating fire of Rome in 64. The Christians were likely seen by Nero as easy scapegoats in the aftermath of the blaze, since they were "popularly despised for unspecified crimes" and faced charges of "hatred for humanity" (37). Nevertheless, the persecution that Nero brought was still somewhat localized, following the trend of the earliest persecutions of Christians.

During the second century, like the first, there were “no empire-wide persecutions,” merely the occasional “locally confined measures” (45). Sentences meted out to Christians in the Roman Empire varied and were not always that of death. Other possible sentences included exile with the confiscation of property, forced labor in mines or quarries, and (for Christian women) being forced into brothels (36). While not always facing certain death, the early Christians certainly faced a great number of horrific possibilities.

Kinzig also makes note of the difficult plight of Christian soldiers in the Roman army. For Roman soldiers who converted to Christianity, their subsequent refusal to participate in the cultic obligations of service in the army of pagan Rome could have “fatal consequences” (73). Christ’s teaching on nonviolence and compassion no doubt had a ripple effect in the lives of those early Christians who found themselves in the service of the Roman military.

Despite notable instances of persecution in parts of the empire throughout the first couple of centuries of the Church, wide-sweeping persecutions aimed at all Christians in the entire Roman Empire began under Emperor Decius in the middle of the third century (79). At that point, cultic obligations were mandated for all the empire’s inhabitants. The goal for the Romans was to achieve complete religious conformity throughout the empire (80). Christians who resisted these measures were frequently met with brutal treatment. Persecutions came and went under some subsequent emperors, before reaching their zenith in the time of Diocletian. The persecution that Christians faced under Diocletian and his fierce junior-emperor Galerius would be the “last and probably most severe persecution” that Christians faced under Roman rule (93). Galerius was even harsher toward Christians than Diocletian. Galerius saw Christians as “a danger to public welfare and a destabilizing factor to the empire” (96). This expansive persecution, set forth by several edicts, led to a multitude of tortures, book-burnings, and martyrdoms. This wave of persecution would continue on in force until Diocletian was retired and the dying Galerius at last “altered his strategic policy on religion” and issued 311’s “Edict of Toleration” (118). Even then, some persecution continued until the full ascension of Constantine to imperial power.

In his ninth chapter, Kinzig highlights some of the persecutions of Christians that were occurring outside of Roman territory in these first few centuries of the Church. This brief overview does well to showcase how these persecutions that are so widely associated

with the days of pagan Rome were also occurring elsewhere in the areas to which the early Church spread.

The tenth and final chapter of Kinzig’s book addresses the debate that raged after the persecutions has subsided regarding what to do about the Christians who had apostatized and later repented. This was a helpful conclusion to the book, discussing how the Church worked to move forward and make peace with all that they had been through in the prior years.

Reflection

To look at all the information contained in this writing through both an anthropological lens and the lens that I have as a believer in Christ, I am left with a number of insights.

One thing that stands out to me is just how heavily derided the early Christians were by Roman society at large. Many (though not all) Christians in today’s world have been born into a context that does not deride them as much for their Christian faith. So, for many of us today, reading about these experiences may lend us a new perspective on what life has looked like for many of our brothers and sisters from ages past.

Additionally, I find it interesting to look at how Christianity’s story in the Roman Empire was ultimately one of triumph. Even though it was darkest before the dawn, with some of the most ferocious waves of persecution occurring mere decades before Christianity’s mass acceptance, the Christian Church eventually triumphed in the Roman Empire, with all the last emperors of the Roman Empire and all the emperors of the Byzantine Empire (which carried Rome’s mantle into the Middle-Ages) being Christians. In a general sense, one could say that Christians effectively converted the Roman Empire itself.

Lastly, I would be remiss if I did not take the time to address the specific sacrifices of the Christian martyrs of Rome. While I have left out the myriad of specific stories of Christians who met their death violently at the hands of Roman persecutors, Kinzig details many of them in the writing. Each individual sacrifice was immensely precious to God and of great value to the spread of Christ’s Church. Without their sacrifices, who could say whether Rome would have ever widely embraced Christianity in the way that it eventually did? There is something to be said for the immeasurable value of martyr’s blood in furthering our faith to the ends of the earth. Jesus and the Apostles knew this quite well, as did the many Christians who

bravely faced death for their faith in antiquity and those who do so still today.



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The *On Knowing Humanity Journal*
is a publication of the On Knowing Humanity Research Project
<https://okhjournal.org/index.php/okhj>

and associated with the
Master of Arts degree in Theological and Cultural Anthropology
<https://www.eastern.edu/academics/graduate-programs/ma-theological-and-cultural-anthropology>

at Eastern University
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The journal was originally funded by the John Templeton Foundation.