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God Likes Sex: Conversations Integrating Spirituality and Sexuality

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

GOD LIKES SEX:
CONVERSATIONS INTEGRATING SPIRITUALITY AND SEXUALITY

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EPIGRAPH

I stake the future on the few humble and hearty lovers who seek God
passionately in the marvelous, messy world of the redeemed and related
realities that lie in front of our noses.

—William McNamara

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GLOSSARY

abuse. Abuse is unwanted, unsolicited experience, in which perpetrators use force, make threats, or take advantage of victims who are unable or unwilling to give consent.¹

Church. The Church refers to the large global community of Christians rather than a local congregation.

discipleship. Discipleship is an intentional relational process between a mentor and an individual, embracing the belief that a spiritually mature Christian man or woman may guide, inspire, encourage, and teach another individual how to become a devoted follower of Jesus Christ.

emergent adulthood. Emergent Adulthood is a developmental life stage, one which identifies individuals leaving the dependency stage of childhood and adolescence, while not having fully assumed the responsibilities associated with adulthood.²

hesed. *Hesed* is God's abiding, gentle, long-suffering, tender, everlasting love.³

hook-up. A "hook-up" is a social experience engaging in casual sexual behaviors or intercourse without a relational commitment.

purity. Purity, within dating relationships, is more than simply sexual abstinence; it means freedom from contamination, while also modeling innocence, modesty, goodness, righteousness, and integrity.

sexual ethics. Sexual Ethics are engagement with the beliefs, decisions, and obligations, both ethical and moral, that a group or individual accepts and follows, related to sexuality.

sexual integrity. Sexual Integrity can be defined as living out one's sexual life in the character and integrity which is congruent with one's spiritual beliefs and values.

¹ "Sexual Abuse," *apa.org*, accessed August 9, 2018, www.apa.org/sexualabuse/index.aspx.

² Jeffrey J. Arnett, "Emerging Adulthood: A Theory of Development From the Late Teens Through the Twenties," *American Psychologist*, 55 (2000): 469, <http://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.55.5.469>.

³ Charles A. Gallagher, *Embodied in Love: Sacramental Spirituality and Sexual Intimacy, a New Catholic Guide to Marriage* (New York: Crossroad, 1994), 87.

sexuality. Sexuality identifies individuals' innate capacity for sexual feelings, preferences, and behaviors.

spiritual disciplines. Spiritual Disciplines are “the effort to create some space in which God can act. Discipline means to prevent everything in your life from being filled up. Discipline means that somewhere you're not occupied, and certainly not preoccupied. In the spiritual life, discipline means to create that space in which something can happen that you hadn't planned or counted on.”⁴

spiritual dissonance. Spiritual Dissonance is a lack of agreement and consistency between one's spiritual beliefs, traditions, and practices.

spiritual formation. Spiritual formation is our continuing response to the reality of God's grace shaping us into the likeness of Jesus Christ, through the work of the Holy Spirit, in the community of faith, for the sake of the world.⁵

spirituality. Spirituality identifies one's intentional engagement with the image of God found at the core of his or her divinely created being.

⁴ Henri J. M. Nouwen, “From Solitude to Community to Ministry,” *Leadership Journal* 16, no. 2 (1995): 97, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/1995/spring/51280.html>.

⁵ Jeffrey P. Greenman and George Kalantzis, *Life in the Spirit: Spiritual Formation in Theological Perspective* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010), 24.

ABSTRACT

Throughout Christian history, the Church has provided inconsistent messages about the spiritual foundation for healthy sexuality. With avoidant messages of silence and shame around sexual topics from the Church, many emergent women separate their spirituality from their sexual lives, never considering scripture as a guideline for healthy sexuality. Emergent adult women, specifically those without strong spiritual foundations, are more likely to engage in unhealthy sexual behaviors which often leave them feeling alone and separate from God and spiritual community. Because popular culture does not support marriage as a moral requirement for a sexual relationship, present cultural messages advocate that these women seek multiple, premarital sexual partners before a relational commitment.

This dissertation seeks to address the relationship between unhealthy sexual behaviors and spiritual dissonance among emergent single women who grew up in the Church, through adolescence, and consider possible ways to address this problem. The accompanying artifact is a retreat guide titled, *God Likes Sex: Conversations Integrating Spirituality and Sexuality*, and is intended for use in various churches, universities, and at speaking events in which single emergent women may engage with teachings, small groups, and interactive dialogues related to healthy spirituality and sexuality. This dissertation considers various ways that sexual conversations and spiritual interventions for single, Christian, emergent women, may transition an unhealthy spirituality and sexuality into a lasting spiritual formation journey that ultimately produces healthy sexual behaviors.

SECTION 1: THE PROBLEM

Introduction

One way or another, our desires
form our spirits and direct our lives.
For good or bad, we are made in the
image of what we desire.
— David G. Benner

Sex is a challenging topic for the Church to discuss. As Christians try to ignore or diminish the power of sex, they are, in effect, repressing it. The Church turns away from sexual topics and remains silent on critical sexual debates relative to emergent adults,⁶ adopting denial as an unproductive strategy to deal with sexual conversations. For emergent Christian adults, who only have sexual conversations within current cultural viewpoints instead of from a spiritual basis, the Biblical perspective of sex is noticeably absent. God is not viewed as the designer and lover of sex; rather, he is viewed to be silent, angry, and disconnected from young adults and their sexual desires. According to psychologist Erik Erikson,

The stage of life crucial for the emergence of the integrated identity is the step from youth to maturity, the stage when the young woman, whatever her work career, relinquishes the care she received from her parental family in order to commit herself to the love of a stranger and to the care to be given to his and her offspring.⁷

⁶ *Emergent Adulthood* is a developmental life stage, one identifying individuals leaving the dependency stage of childhood and adolescence, while not having fully assumed the responsibilities associated with adulthood.

⁷ Erik H. Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1994), 265.

In spite of attempts to educate emergent women about sexual health and prepare them for sexuality in marriage, a recent study reveals that emergent women report minimal knowledge of sexual challenges and sexual experiences in marriage.⁸ This information is important, because the current efforts at providing sex education in the Church seem to be ineffective or nonexistent, based on the responses of the target audience.

Prominent ethicist, Marvin Ellison, states that the Church has no sexual credibility and must immediately seek to regain holy authority for sexual standards by: 1) acknowledging the significant gap that exists between official church teaching on sex and most people's lives; and 2) clarifying the theological and ethical mandate of scripture, especially related to sexuality.⁹ This gap between scriptural teachings on sex and congregants' understanding of sexuality from a spiritual perspective is not well-researched nor understood, but nevertheless, leads to unhealthy perspectives on sexuality. Religion is largely responsible for the current sexual excesses in our culture, due to its effective sexual repression.¹⁰ Present culture affirms sensuality, sexual exploration, and exploitation as marketable strategies to attract consumers. What culture once found sacred – sexual union in marriage – is now perceived to be confining, outdated, and in contrast to one's perceived personal freedom of choice. As the Church remains silent and disengaged regarding the present sexual struggles of our culture, emergent adults turn to

⁸ Amy Mahoney, "Is It Possible for Christian Women to Be Sexual?" *Women & Therapy* 31, no. 1 (2008): 99-100, <https://doi.org/10.1300/02703140802145250>.

⁹ Marvin M. Ellison, "Common Decency: A New Christian Sexual Ethics," in *Sexuality and the Sacred Sources for Theological Reflection*, ed. James B. Nelson and Sandra P. Longfellow, (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 236.

¹⁰ Rob Henderson, "'We Are Sexual Every Minute of Our Lives:' An Interview with Thomas Moore," *Psychological Perspectives* 58, no. 2 (2015): 174, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00332925.2015.1032027>.

peers and culture for sexual wisdom due to the absence of spiritual guidance. Reporting that only 50 percent of emerging adults maintaining consistency with their faith commitments and practice, and that 40 percent report a decline in faith engagement, author Christian Smith believes this demographic (eighteen to twenty five) to be “the least religious adults in the United States today.”¹¹ While this may be true, the Church may also be responsible for this deficit, due to its lack of engagement with issues relative to emergent adults, specifically sexuality from a spiritual perspective, and the inability to equip them with applicable skills and knowledge necessary to navigate our current sexualized culture from a spiritual context.

Sexuality encompasses the core of humanity, as evidenced by our culture’s view of body, gender, and human interactions within our present cultural context.¹² The innate human drive for connection is unique, in that it unites our sexuality and our spirituality as essential components for a healthy life. Sexuality and spirituality, terms better defined in later in these sections, are not often integrated in healthy ways and lead to “ravenous behaviors that destroy marriages and disgrace churches.”¹³ This dissertation considers various ways that sexual conversations and spiritual interventions for single, Christian, emergent women, may help transition an unhealthy spirituality and sexuality into a lasting spiritual formation journey that ultimately produces healthy sexual behaviors. An accompanying artifact in this dissertation presents a retreat guide for use in churches,

¹¹ Christian Smith, *Lost in Transition: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 102.

¹² Peter B. Anderson and Mal Morgan, “Spirituality and Sexuality: The Healthy Connection,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 33, no. 2 (1994): 116, <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02354531>.

¹³ Tara M. Owens, “Longing Bodies, Aching Souls: Letting God Reclaim Our Sexuality,” *Conversations* 9, no. 1 (2011): 37.

universities, and speaking events to engage with teachings, small groups, and interactive dialogues related to healthy spirituality and sexuality. Healthy spirituality is defined throughout this dissertation as an intentional engagement with the image of God found at the core of one's divinely created being, through the holistic process of spiritual formation of all aspects within oneself, including sexuality. If the Church can become a place where there is an invitation for engagement with sexual and spiritual issues affecting emergent women, it will create an opportunity for development of internalized healthy spiritual identities, which ultimately produce healthy sexual behaviors.

The Story

Lisa identifies as a Christian, who attended church regularly as she grew up. Lisa is participating in hook-up¹⁴ dates throughout her college years, even though she is a leader of the student ministry and her sexual behavior is in violation of her ministry leader agreement. Because other Christians do not question her lifestyle, she is unconcerned with her sexual activity. Lisa never engaged in the spiritual formation process, nor did she know about discipleship or accountability relationships offered in her student ministry. After graduation, Lisa is unhappy with her new job, has no close friendships, and recently experienced her second pregnancy scare. She is not engaging in resources that will foster spiritual growth and feels isolated without understanding why. Lisa does not connect her inner sense of emptiness and risky sexual behaviors with spiritual disengagement.

¹⁴ *Hook-up* is a social experience engaging in casual sexual behaviors or intercourse without a relational commitment.

The above story is indicative of the spiritual and sexual disintegration of many emergent, single, Christian women. How does spirituality influence healthy sexual behaviors, defined as celibacy and purity, for single Christian emergent adult women?¹⁵ Taylor et al. report that by age twenty, 75 percent of Americans engage in premarital sex, with many of these experiences outside of a committed relationship, with that number increasing to 90 percent by age thirty.¹⁶ These results show that the cultural norm for emergent adults is to engage in sexual behaviors prior to marriage. The Church does not affirm such sexual behavior, yet the Church also refuses to address it openly.

The Problem

Hypothesis

My hypothesis is that healthy sexuality results from spiritual integration, connecting one's purity to more than one's physical virginity. Sexuality and spirituality are intertwined for emergent adults, whether or not they desire to prioritize religion or spirituality in this life phase. This is reflected in their desires for closeness and connection that comes from intimate relationships with God and others.¹⁷

¹⁵ Gary Smalley, "A Renewed Virginity," *The Life.com*, The Smalley Institute, Accessed January 2, 2019, <https://thelife.com/a-renewed-virginity>.

¹⁶ Alan C. Taylor, Damon L. Rappleyea, Xiangming Fang, and Dylan Cannon. "Emerging Adults' Perceptions of Acceptable Behaviors Prior To Forming a Committed, Dating Relationship," *Journal of Adult Development* 20, no. 4 (Dec 2013): 175, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10804-013-9169-3>.

¹⁷ Debra Hirsch, *Redeeming Sex: Naked Conversations about Sexuality and Spirituality* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2015), 23.

The drive for connecting us links our sexuality and our spirituality in a way that is unique among the dimensions of health. Often our desire to find sexual connectedness involves beliefs and behaviors that are part of our spiritual self. Sexual ecstasy may in fact accompany spiritual ecstasy and both may involve orgasmic release, but neither requires it.¹⁸

Without a strong spiritual foundation, emergent women flounder in their desire to maintain healthy sexual and spiritual lives. Individuals who become sexually active are shown to be more likely to have decreased attendance at religious services from adolescence to early adulthood.¹⁹ Simply changing outer behaviors may not create inner heart change, or lead someone closer to God, or result in spiritual growth and sexual wholeness. “A sign of true maturity is the ability to postpone immediate gratification for long-term gain.”²⁰ As internal sanctification occurs through spiritual disciplines, external behaviors are often confirmed in life transformation, revealing the inner character of men and women.

Definitions

Emergent Women.

Emerging adulthood, that transitional phase from adolescence to adulthood, typically identified as between the ages of eighteen and twenty-nine, may be described as a time of self-focus, due to lack of relational commitments rather than selfishness,

¹⁸ Anderson and Morgan, 118.

¹⁹ Sara A. Vasilenko and Eva S. Lefkowitz, “Changes in Religiosity after First Intercourse in the Transition to Adulthood,” *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* 6, no. 4 (2014): 313, <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0037472>.

²⁰ Douglas Rosenau and Michael Todd Wilson, *Soul Virgins: Redefining Single Sexuality* (Atlanta, GA: Sexual Wholeness Resources, 2012), 202.

interdependence and relational maturity.²¹ Emergent women occupy the fertile life soil that is crucial for morality development and increasing openness to life transformation and interpersonal reorganization.²² A well-developed moral identity challenges individuals to act in ways, in agreement with their own moral beliefs, that will also benefit the welfare and rights of others.²³

Female emergent adults desire connection, and yet they may experience challenges with their identity formation due to inadequate formational influences, ones lacking substance, so instead of self-regulation they seek other individuals to fulfill their needs. As emergent women transition through conclusion of the identity formation stage of life, they experience increasing levels of metacognition, planning, and abstract thinking than at earlier life stages, which allows for more complex interaction with religious and spiritual issues; for females in the brain maturation process, the pre-frontal cortex is not fully developed until approximately age 25.²⁴ Healthy emergent women adults live lifestyles of encouragement, affirmation, and integrity. They are young adults

²¹ Don-Ha Lee and Miriam L. Charter, "Spiritual Formation and Personal Identity Formation of Korean Adolescents Studying in the United States as Unaccompanied Minors," Dissertation, *Dissertation Abstracts International Section A: Humanities and Social Sciences*, (2014), 53.

²² Sam A. Hardy and Daniel Lapsley. "Identity Formation and Moral Development in Emerging Adulthood," in *Flourishing in Emerging Adulthood: Positive Development During the Third Decade of Life*, ed. Laura M. Padilla-Walker and Larry J. Nelson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017):15.

²³ David T. Hartman, "Moral Orientation and Meaning: Morality and Life Satisfaction in Emerging Adults." *Counseling et Spiritualité* 34, no. 1 (2015): 18.

²⁴ Carolyn McNamara Barry, and Mona M. Abo-Zena, "Emerging Adults' Religious and Spiritual Development," *Emerging Adults' Religiousness and Spirituality* (2014): 23.

who are willing to learn and are becoming increasingly self-aware, self-preserving, self-affirming, self-fulfilling, and autonomous.²⁵

Key success indicators for emergent women, those desiring to form healthy spiritual identities, include their engagement with their single sexualities, demonstrated ability to take responsibility for their personal well-being, individual pursuit of total life health and wholeness, and decision-making capability for their own life choices.²⁶

Emergent women are impacted by cultural, relational, and spiritual influences that may hinder their desire for marriage. As culture and the Church create messages about feminine sexuality that impact female identity development, emergent women receive negative messages about themselves and their sexuality.²⁷ Emergent women often grow up hearing the message that they can be spiritual, but they cannot be both spiritual and sexual simultaneously, and they must sacrifice one for the other.²⁸

As emergent women move through the developmental phase in which the prefrontal cortex rapidly develops, allowing for more abstract thought about religious

²⁵ Ulas Kaplan, and Terrence Tivnan, "Moral Motivation Based on Multiple Developmental Structures: An Exploration of Cognitive and Emotional Dynamics," *The Journal of Genetic Psychology* 175, no. 3 (2014): 196.

²⁶ John R. Landgraf, *Singling, a New Way to Live the Single Life* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990).

²⁷ R. R. Ruether, "Women, Sexuality, Ecology, and the Church," *Conscience* 14, no. 1-2 (1993): 6, PubMed Catalog.

²⁸ Amy Mahoney, "A Qualitative Study of the Ways Women Socialized in Western Christian Culture Experience the Challenges of Conflict Between Their Sexuality and Spirituality," 65, no. 5-B (2004): 91, Dissertation Abstracts International: Section B: The Sciences and Engineering.

topics; these changes in brain development, independence, and education, emergent adults seem to increase religiosity rather than decrease it.²⁹

Emergent individuals can “more deeply contemplate the existence of God, and cognitively grasp many of the theologically, spiritually, philosophically, and epistemologically complex readings and ideas that are espoused by organized religious doctrine, scholarly theological and philosophical writings, and by spiritual leaders.”³⁰ Because emergent adults reach the developmental milestone that allows further cognitive insight and contemplation into existential topics while they also engage in their newfound personal freedom away from families of origin, spiritual growth may occur as a result of broader social influences.³¹ Researcher Reymann references a developmental theory of women’s spirituality, analyzing the relationship between female spiritual development and interpersonal relationships, which proposes that greater religious engagement may increase emergent women’s spiritual growth.³² This idea is important because the Church can increase the opportunity for healthy spiritual and sexual development among emergent females by religious engagement around relative topics and teachings, such as sexuality from a scriptural perspective, through conversations and intentional relationships. Alternatively, wounded or distorted views of sexuality may actually hinder

²⁹ Taylor et al., 173.

³⁰ Barry and Abo-Zena, 23.

³¹ Francois de Salignac de La Mothe-Fenelon and Halcyon C. Backhouse, *Christian Perfection* (London, UK: Hodder and Stoughton, 1990), 107.

³² Linda S. Reymann, “Exploratory Study of Spiritual Development and Psychosocial Growth in College Students as Emerging Adults,” (2010): 105, Dissertation Abstracts International Section A: Humanities and Social Sciences.

spiritual development for emergent women, leaving them potentially unable to experience healthy sexuality, spirituality, and emotionality.³³

Sexuality

Sexuality is a powerful force within human nature that drives us toward life, affection, wholeness, and connection, in relating to community, friendships, family, and God.³⁴ Sexuality is an integral aspect of human development, “as a holistic expression of our body-self, sexuality is a source of our capacity for relationship, intimacy, passion, and emotional and erotic connection for transcendence.”³⁵

Sexuality is an invitation for intimacy with others, as demonstrated by our innate human desire to connect, reach out, touch, and embrace others through our emotions, intellect, and physicality. Desire drives sexual development, as one vulnerably risks self-discovery and being known.³⁶ Sexuality is the reflective activity of wrestling with self, others, and sociocultural tradition, expressing identity and a form of communication in day-to-day interactions with others.³⁷ Sexuality also includes our general sexual desire

³³ Mahoney, “Qualitative Study,” 7-8.

³⁴ Patricia C. Hathaway, “Sexuality and the Spiritual Life,” *Seminary Journal* 19, no. 2 (2013): 33. EBSCOHost.

³⁵ Constance M. Bowles, “Integrating Sexuality and Spirituality: A Case Study of Shalom Mountain Retreat and Study Center Leadership,” (Dissertation, 2011), 66, ProQuest.

³⁶ Carla A. Grosch-Miller, “Fifty Shades of Grace: The Crafting of Sexual Wisdom,” *Theology & Sexuality* 20, no. 3 (September 2014): 194, <https://doi.org/10.1179/1355835815Z.00000000049>.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 190.

and gender makeup, both masculine and feminine.³⁸ One's sexuality, both gender and desires, permeates everything about one's life and relationships.

Sex is an inherently spiritual experience of the soul. Sexuality imitates the innate desire of spirituality to connect beyond us. Sexuality is a powerful force within human nature that drives us toward life, affection, wholeness, and connection, in relating to community, friendships, family, and God.³⁹ When we are living as whole persons, our sexuality and spirituality are inextricably intertwined.

Spirituality

Spirituality is an internal attribute of humans who desire to have a personal relationship to larger transcendent realities, such as the universe or God.⁴⁰ Healthy spirituality is recognized in daily responses to people, circumstances, and experiences within our ordinary lives. Our spirituality is the intentional engagement with our spiritual core. Our spirituality, whether healthy or unhealthy, impacts all of our relationships, with ourselves, others, and God.⁴¹ Healthy spirituality allows individuals to live whole lives, as they joyfully embrace present circumstances without anxiety for the future.

A unique aspect of Christian spirituality is God's invitation for unhindered relationship when one accepts the holy gift of salvation, love, and redemption of God. Our ability to interact with people in healthy ways directly correlates to our personal

³⁸ Rosenau and Wilson, 12.

³⁹ Hathaway, 33.

⁴⁰ Reymann, 103.

⁴¹ Melannie Svoboda, *Traits of a Healthy Spirituality* (Bangalore, India: Asian Trading Corp., 1998), 5.

ability and willingness to receive freely from God. Christian spirituality is a life-long process of choosing to view reality with the mind of Jesus Christ, forming a foundation for a basic outlook on life. The heart of spirituality and discipleship is about the family of God, the Body of Christ, breaking free from the sinful patterns of the past to live fully a life of love that God designed for all.⁴²

Challenges

Church

Historical Teachings. The Church as a whole is believed to have negative impact on Christians' understanding of sexuality, focusing more on desire repression and covering our bodies than on the holy gift of sexual intimacy.⁴³ Ambrose, a Church leader of the fourth century, affirmed celibacy and asserted that virginity offered a unique opportunity for a purer form of spirituality. While Ambrose encouraged married priests to cease all sexual contact with their spouses, Jerome (also a fourth century leader) stepped out further with negative teaching on sexuality, as he denounced sexual behaviors and desires because he correlated sex with sin. Jerome referenced Mary, the mother of Jesus, as evidence for his sex-negative stance, claiming that her virgin birth led him to believe that she maintained life-long virginity to avoid willful sin.⁴⁴

Saint Augustine, a third foundational church father, felt trapped by sexual desires and his sexual promiscuity. From childhood, Augustine learned that all sexuality was evil

⁴² Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* (Nashville, TN: Zondervan, 2015), 96.

⁴³ Owens, 37.

⁴⁴ Hirsch, 34-35.

and to be avoided. Augustine viewed sex and marriage as inferior choices to celibate life, which allowed him freedom to focus solely on God.⁴⁵ Augustine personally struggled with sexual desires and behaviors until mid-life, resulting in his conflicted view of the relationship between sex and pleasure. Augustine concluded, from his meditation and scripture study, that sin originated through the sexual act. He interpreted that marital sex was sinless only if it was done for the purpose of procreation, and that pleasurable experiences in sex were the sinful components that should be suppressed and avoided.⁴⁶

Throughout history, religious groups promoted chastity while sexuality and passion were ignored. According to Henderson, “Religion takes the role of the policeman, guarding us as we experiment with our sexuality.”⁴⁷ Even when sex was permitted for reproduction needs, the concept of pleasure derived from sex was questionable at best.⁴⁸

Female Sexuality. Women socialized in Western Christian culture, grew up with these mixed messages about female sexuality, some encouraging them to be spiritual but not sexual and others defining her identity as only wife, mother, and caretaker of others.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Jay Wood, “What Would Augustine Say?” *Christian History* 19, no. 3 (2000): 37, <https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/magazine/article/what-would-augustine-say>.

⁴⁶ Hirsch, 34-35.

⁴⁷ Henderson, 186-187.

⁴⁸ Julie A. Collins, “Virginity Lost and Found,” *America* 184, no. 17 (May 21, 2001): 19, <https://www.americamagazine.org/issue/313/article/virginity-lost-and-found>.

⁴⁹ Mahoney, “Is it Possible,” 72

A young woman's identity is already defined in her kind of attractiveness and in the selective nature of her search for the man by whom she wishes to be sought. Womanhood arrives when attractiveness and experience have succeeded in selecting what is to be admitted to the welcome of the "inner space" (womb and vagina) for keeps.⁵⁰

Patriarchal domination over a woman's person, instead of being perceived as sinful, was proclaimed to be God's will and as an appropriate punishment for the sin of perceived female resiliency. Augustine denied that women possessed the image of God in them,⁵¹ and regarded them as more sexual and less rational than men, disordered symbols of human nature, in desperate need of control. These types of mindsets either prevented full development for female sexuality or vilified it.⁵²

Thomas Aquinas added a biological argument to this view of women, perceiving females as lesser humanity and viewed them as defective. Because of fear of the erotic power of a feminine sexuality, patriarchal Christian tradition responded by cultivating the belief that female bodies are sinful and need to be rejected and possibly even tortured to attain higher levels of spiritual achievement.⁵³

Culture

Mixed Messages. Sexual abstinence before marriage is no longer the standard for romantic relationships, even within the Church. Whether Christian or agnostic, single or in a relationship, young adults are engaging in various sexual behaviors prior to marriage.

⁵⁰ Erikson, 283.

⁵¹ Ruether, 6.

⁵² Martyn Percy, *Intimate Affairs: Spirituality and Sexuality in Perspective* (London, UK: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1997), 91.

⁵³ Cheryl A. Kirk-Duggan, *Women and Christianity* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger/ABCCLIO, 2010), 171.

According to researchers Barry and Abo-Zena, 84 percent of emergent adults will have sex with peers.⁵⁴ Approximately one-half to two-thirds of emerging adults in the United States live with a romantic partner before marriage, creating a significant shift from historical family dynamics where the norm for most individuals was marriage.⁵⁵ No longer are young adults waiting to have sex until they are in committed marital relationships, even with risks of sexually transmitted diseases and unplanned pregnancies.

Emergent Women

Gender Roles: Women are socialized to maintain connection with others, making them more likely to approach identity development through connectedness.⁵⁶ Women have been uniquely affected by cultural norms over history, particularly within the context of marriage, often viewed as acquired property with valuable contributions for their homes. Although women have greater freedom in modern culture, they are still combating traditional female stereotypes, which may limit them vocationally to household management and child-rearing duties. Even women in the workforce, those individuals bringing home significant financial contributions to their families, may still be expected to cook, clean, and provide primary sources of emotional, spiritual, and relational nurturance for their families.

⁵⁴ Barry and Abo-Zena, 24.

⁵⁵ Setran, 167.

⁵⁶ Jerika C. Norona, Teresa M. Preddy, and Deborah P. Welsh, "How Gender Shapes Emerging Adulthood," in *The Oxford Handbook of Emerging Adulthood*, ed. Jeffrey J. Arnett (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2016), 64.

Vulnerability. An obstacle to healthy spirituality and sexuality is the unwillingness of individuals to be vulnerable. Guardedness creates loneliness. Miller confirms that we experience increased life satisfaction when we live as authentic people, leaving behind our facades, interacting with others as our true selves.⁵⁷ “Vulnerability may be the precondition for both union and procreation: without a willingness to be vulnerable, to be exposed, to be wounded, there can be no union.”⁵⁸ The nakedness of being sexual, emotional, physical, and spiritual, and the surrender of control to another creates increased opportunities for vulnerability and also wounding. In addition, individuals often carry internal wounds from childhood, resulting in feelings of embarrassment, shame, and guilt.⁵⁹ The presence of unresolved internal pain may prevent an emergent woman from engaging in healthy vulnerability.

Sexuality

Abstinence. For emergent Christian single women, one of life’s greatest obstacles may be the allotted season of waiting for a marriage relationship, because of the temptation to get ahead of the timetable of God’s plan rather than trust his timing. Within church history, the teaching about sexuality was that premarital sex was forbidden, but after marriage, sex was then a desirable gift from God for a husband and wife. Celibacy

⁵⁷ Daniel M. Ogilvie, “The Undesired Self: A Neglected Variable in Personality Research,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 52, no. 2 (1987): 380, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.52.2.379>.

⁵⁸ Karen Lebacqz, “Appropriate Vulnerability,” in *Sexuality and the Sacred Sources for Theological Reflection*, ed. James B. Nelson and Sandra P. Longfellow (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 259.

⁵⁹ Brené Brown, *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead* (New York: Gotham Books, 2012), 196.

was the only sexual option for unmarried congregants and most clergy.⁶⁰ This sexual segregation is important considering lack of historical modeling for healthy dating within a patriarchal, religious society. History paints the potential portrait of emergent women, ones unmarried at the cultural norm for marital eligibility, who may have to choose celibacy rather than maintain a continued hope for marriage. Emergent women remain in a conflicted position, caught between present culture's acceptance of sexual promiscuity and the church's singular stance of abstinence for the unmarried demographic.⁶¹

Eighty percent of Christian emergent women are not virgins when they get married.⁶² It is clear that teaching from the Church about abstinence before marriage and healthy sexuality from a spiritual perspective might have been misunderstood, misrepresented, or ignored. As emergent adults leave families of origin, they are exposed to influences that may contradict their family values and religious teachings, such as substance abuse and non-marital sex.⁶³ Only approximately six percent of 18 to 23-year-olds, who are in dating relationships, are sexually abstinent.⁶⁴ What is the Church's role in instructing them about scripture and providing guidance and encouragement as they restore congruency between their spiritual identity and sexual behaviors? Despite the

⁶⁰ Richard Price, "Celibacy and Free Love in Early Christianity," *Theology & Sexuality* 12, no. 2 (January 2006): 122, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1355835806061426>.

⁶¹ Marilize E. Tukker, "Where Sexuality and Spirituality Meet: An Assessment of Christian Teaching on Sexuality and Marriage in Relation to the Reality of 21st Century Moral Norms," *HTS Theological Studies* 69, no. 1 (2013): 5, <https://hts.org.za/index.php/hts/article/view/1343/3825>.

⁶² Sarah Bessey, "Damaged Goods," SarahBessey.com, last modified March 24, 2016, <http://sarahbessey.com/damaged-goods/>.

⁶³ Jeremy E. Uecker, Mark D. Regnerus, and Margaret L. Vaaler, "Losing My Religion: The Social Sources of Religious Decline in Early Adulthood," *Social Forces* 85, no. 4 (January 2007): 1668, <https://doi.org/10.1353/sof.2007.0083>.

⁶⁴ David P. Setran and Chris A. Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood: a Practical Theology for College and Young Adult Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 14, 169.

Church's stance of silence and avoidance, scripture emphasizes redemption, grace, and heart restoration over premarital sexual behaviors. This point is important because emergent women may not identify the Church as a safe, supportive environment to discuss sexual struggles, or believe that restoration is possible through the grace and redemption described in scripture. "Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow" (NIV).⁶⁵ Psalm 51:7 confirms that men and women can become unclean and be restored to purity and cleanness again through the sacrifice of Christ.

Guilt and Shame. Feelings of fear, guilt, and shame are often attached to sexuality, including many healthy, biological sexual urges. Some sexual behaviors, such as masturbation, are not mentioned in scripture. Because of this ambiguity and lack of theological teaching related to sexuality from the Church, some emergent Christian adults may experience feelings of shame and guilt if they engage in masturbatory behaviors. "Shame breeds fear. It crushes our tolerance for vulnerability, thereby killing engagement, innovation, creativity, production, and trust."⁶⁶ Shame compares and forces one's beliefs onto the beliefs and lifestyle choices of others. Churches, in addition to communities and culture, utilize shame to preserve cultural traditions and to fulfill legalistic religious requirements.⁶⁷ Due to the lack of engagement around sexual issues, sex education, and sexual ethics provided by the Church, sexuality and sexual behaviors have the opportunity to become innately attached to guilt, shame, and separation.

⁶⁵ Unless otherwise noted, all Biblical passages referenced are in the New International Version.

⁶⁶ Brown, 188.

⁶⁷ Tukker, 2.

Identity. Sexuality encompasses the way we view self-concept, gender, and spirituality, in addition to our bodies, emotions, culture, and interactions with others. The cultural environment, social influences, and faith community of one's formative years often impacts one's individual sexual filters. This dissertation intentionally avoids a stance on sexual identity but hopes for the Church to participate in conversations with emerging adults about differing viewpoints and scriptural interpretations related to sexuality and sexual identity. The ongoing debate about identity generally argues from a conservative perspective, asserting heterosexual sexual identity and covenant sexual intimacy for a married couple, man and woman, in opposition to a same-sex couple.

Historically, homosexuality has been considered morally wrong within the Church, a position still upheld today within the religious majority, including the Catholic Church, the Orthodox Church, and most Evangelical Protestant Churches. From the Western religious vantage point, the theological debate on homosexuality is divided by interpretation of evidence related to nature and scripture.⁶⁸ Conflicts occur when individuals desire to embrace both Christianity and homosexuality, because most Christian denominations consider them incompatible and perceive homosexuality to be in opposition to scripture.⁶⁹ Awareness of this conflict is important because it represents one reason for spiritual disengagement by some emergent adults, specifically emergent men and women who disagree with the Church's theological interpretation of scripture regarding homosexuality and also those who experience same sex orientation or identify

⁶⁸ Nasrudin Subhi and David Geelan, "When Christianity and Homosexuality Collide: Understanding the Potential Intrapersonal Conflict," *Journal of Homosexuality* 59, no. 10 (November 2012): 1384, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2012.724638>.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 1402.

as homosexual. Homosexual individuals, particularly those individuals who desire to live as religiously and spiritually engaged congregants, may experience difficulty, and ultimately isolation, when attempting to connect with traditional Christian organizations. For some individuals, disconnection between spirituality and sexuality creates distress cognitively, emotionally, and possibly behaviorally, due to resulting psychosocial and identity related challenges.⁷⁰ In a recent study, 80 percent of emergent adults with a non-heterosexual identity expressed the desire to engage with both Christianity and homosexuality, believing that both are important aspects of their lives, although they often feel pressure to completely renounce their spiritual identity.⁷¹

Much of the research focused on sexual identity development addresses a single gender or identity rather than the interconnections between sexual and spiritual development. According to leading psychologist Erik Erikson, spirituality is an essential for healthy identity formation, including sexuality.⁷² Researchers Charron, Malette, and Guindon focus primarily on four themes of sexual and spiritual development, which pertain to emergent adults as they move through their formation sexual and spiritual

⁷⁰ Tara M. Stoppa, Graciela Espinosa-Hernandez, and Meghan M. Gillen, "The Roles of Religiousness and Spirituality in the Sexual Lives of Heterosexual Emerging Adults," in *Emerging Adults' Religiousness and Spirituality* ed. Carolyn McNamara Barry and Mona M. Abo-Zena (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 196.

⁷¹ Subhi and Geelan, 1385.

⁷² William J. O'Malley, "Emergent Adults and Self-Esteem," *America* 164, no. 2 (January 19, 1991): 29, EBSCOHost.

identity processes.⁷³ The following model reveals how the development of sexual identity impacts spiritual identity:

Common Emerging Themes for Sexual and Spiritual Identification Process

Emerging Theme 1 - Self-Definition of Sexual Orientation

- Rejection of Binaries
 - Refusal of limiting concepts related to spirituality and sexuality, while allowing space for flexibility and growth.
- Innate Sexual Orientation: Sexual identity is innate and a gift of God.

Emerging Theme 2 - Self-Definition of Spirituality

- Value of Awareness
 - An awareness of the creation permitting one to reconnect with something greater than self, defined as a transcendent God.
- Spiritual Growth Process
 - Individuals have different ways of connecting to God, allowing for different perspectives about how to live in healthy spirituality.
- God Image and Relationship
 - Spiritual growth occurs when an individual chooses a pathway to God based on a healthy image of God from scripture.

Emerging Theme 3 - Gender Identity

- Choosing their Church
 - The choice to participate in a Church that shares one's beliefs.

Emerging Theme 4 – Fluid identity Negotiation Process

- Schism
 - Individuals' personal experiences of identity as contrasted with other's perceptions of them and their identity.

⁷³ Natalie Charron, Judith Malette, and Marilyn Guindon, "A Qualitative Study on the Experience of Bisexual Women of the Christian Faith," *Counseling and Spirituality* 33, no. 2 (2014): 94, <https://doi.org/10.2143/CS.33.2.3064584>

- Inclusivity
 - Individuals are welcomed during their identity formation process.
- Spiritual Validation of their Identity
 - The innate belief that one's identity is created by God, thus allowing for the emergence of integrated spiritual and sexual identities.
- Safe Space
 - A safe place for an emergent adult is a place to safely negotiate and integrate one's spiritual and sexual identities.
- Fluidity
 - Maintaining the capacity for change.⁷⁴

If emergent adults are unable to safely engage in their sexual identity processes, along with their spiritual identity development, within the Church community, then they will likely seek secular sources for wisdom and support. The debate about homosexuality challenges the Church to demonstrate if it truly is a place of grace, love, and safety, then it will honor the holiness of intimacy and the sexual diversity represented in present culture.⁷⁵ Whether the Church agrees with this approach or not, it is influential for emergent adults and they may move away from spirituality if the Church does not create a safe space for them to work through their identity development.

Spirituality

Recent research reveals that 14 percent of emergent university students report weakened religious convictions during their college experience and less focus on religious practices such as church attendance, religious participation, spiritual

⁷⁴ Ibid., 94.

⁷⁵ Ellison, 237.

conversations, prayer, and meditation.⁷⁶ This information is significant because it indicates that inadequate spiritual development during their early formative years may lead to decreased engagement with religion and spirituality among emergent adults.

Emotional Health. Emotional health and spiritual maturity are undeniably enmeshed.⁷⁷ The hidden defect of the soul is not neediness, rather, the great problem of the heart is fallenness as a result of sin.⁷⁸ Instead of directly addressing the life challenges associated with singleness, emergent women may blame singleness for additional underlying emotional issues, such as 1) depression; 2) social anxiety; 3) phobias; and 4) unhealthy coping mechanisms.⁷⁹ In present culture, mental health clinicians are limited in their ability to provide spiritual interventions for psychological issues, due to restrictive ethical standards of practice. Mental health professionals must carefully navigate potential ethical pitfalls, in which psychotherapy could include pastoral care, spiritual direction, and theological guidance without having appropriate competency in these areas of expertise.⁸⁰

Suffering: One of the great instructors of God's mercy and deep wells of love is suffering. Jesus tells his disciples, "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the

⁷⁶ Uecker, 1670.

⁷⁷ Scazzero, 12.

⁷⁸ John Ortberg, *Soul Keeping: Caring for the Most Important Part of You* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 82.

⁷⁹ Mahoney, "Qualitative Study," 7-8.

⁸⁰ Thomas G. Plante, "Integrating Spirituality and Psychotherapy: Ethical Issues and Principles," *Psychology Today*, accessed September 23, 2018, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/sites/default/files/attachments/34033/jcparticle.pdf>.

world” (John 16:33). Followers of Jesus are destined to experience measures of suffering within their lifetimes. “Pain is the invitation for God to move in and replace our faltering strength with His.”⁸¹ In the solitary place of suffering, the soul is characterized by dryness, aloneness, even lostness, where any sense of dependence on the emotional life is stripped away.⁸² When these seasons come, individuals can either strengthen faith or derail their faith, primarily due to the associated pain, loss, and lack of understanding experienced within the enduring process of suffering. The great challenge for followers of Jesus is whether they will give in to the temptation, quit, and go back to perceived security or stand firm. By holding onto God in these dark moments, being still, listening for his voice, and seeking his comfort, then individuals invite God to use even crisis moments for their spiritual formation.⁸³

Summary

In a world that is increasingly sexualized through cultural influences, it is essential for the Church to break its silence and interact with emergent adults around the topics of healthy sexuality and spirituality. Sexuality was intended by God as a basic dimension of spirituality, one that would be neither incidental nor detrimental to our faith.⁸⁴ The dissociation between spirituality and sexuality is clearly confusing, revealing

⁸¹ Lysa TerKeurst, *Uninvited: Living Loved When You Feel Less Than, Left Out, and Lonely* (Nashville, TN: Nelson Books, 2016), 174.

⁸² Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: the Path to Spiritual Growth* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1988), 102.

⁸³ Scazzero, 124.

⁸⁴ Peter Black, “The Broken Wings of Eros: Christian Ethics and the Denial of Desire,” *Theological Studies* 64, no. 1 (2003): 121, <https://doi.org/10.1177/004056390306400102>.

mixed cultural messages. The Church's stance of silence and avoidance, results in spiritual disengagement by the emergent population. Emergent women fight to overcome historically enforced gender stereotypes, which hinder feminine sexuality development and marginalize societal roles for women. The existing fracture between our spirituality and our sexuality must be mended, so that the Church can live as "whole and holy, spiritual and sexual, human beings."⁸⁵ As discussed, emergent women receive messages related to sexuality and spirituality, intentionally and unintentionally, from both secular sources and the Church. Previous efforts from both culture and the Church created confusion for emergent adults regarding healthy ways to navigate sexuality as related to identity formation, relationships, single sexuality, sexual health, emotionality, and spirituality. In spite of these interventions, emergent adults continue to struggle in understanding how to integrate sexuality with spirituality in healthy ways. This dissertation suggests that the formation of healthy spiritual identities will influence sexual behaviors for emergent single women. The next section will examine how the Church and secular culture influence sexuality and spirituality through developmental influences, sociocultural influences and strategic influences. The third section will present a model and method for engaging single Christian emergent women in spiritually integrated sexual conversations.

⁸⁵ Lee Butler, "The Spirit Is Willing and the Flesh Is Too: Living Whole and Holy Lives Through Integrating Spirituality and Sexuality," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 30, no. 1 (February 2003): 36, EBSCOHost ATLA Serials.

SECTION 2:

OTHER PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

Introduction

Often emergent adults begin this life phase with fragmented preparation for responsible adult sexuality.⁸⁶ Perspectives about sexuality are formed for emergent adults from cultural and spiritual sources. Influential, direct cultural teachings related to sexuality are often inconsistent and may be indirectly interpreted through cultural norms, consumer trends, and the silence of the Church. This section will consider the ways that the Church and others have engaged with, or disengaged from, the topic of sexuality and the effects of these interactions on emergent adults.

Developmental Influences

In order to more comprehensively discern the effects of various messages impacting emergent adults related to sexuality and spirituality, this section on developmental influences offers grounding in the appropriate life processes that impact healthy development for emergent adults. Included in this sampling is a review of previous attempts to produce developmental processes, effectively leading to healthy emotionality, identity, and behaviors for emergent adults, though the literature reveals little quality evaluation of how developmental influences are uniformly taught and measured.

⁸⁶ Katherine R. Allen and Jada E. Brooks, “At the Intersection of Sexuality, Spirituality, and Gender: Young Adults’ Perceptions of Religious Beliefs in the Context of Sexuality Education,” *American Journal of Sexuality Education* 7, no. 4 (2012): 286, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15546128.2012.740859>.

Attachment Theory

Attachment Theory is grounded in spatial proximity, both literally and metaphorically, and is mediated by sight, sound, and touch. Attachment theory hypothesizes that children will feel good, warm, safe, and comforted when close, both emotionally and physically, to loved ones. In contrast, when they are far away from loved ones, they often experience anxiety, sadness, or loneliness.⁸⁷ Dr. Bernie Siegel, a pediatric and general surgeon and a cancer specialist, shares the effects that lack of nurture has on infants: “In a newborn intensive care unit, infants who are stroked several times a day gain weight 50 percent faster than infants who are not stroked.”⁸⁸ Attachment theory addresses the formation of developmental concepts about self and others, directly resulting from caregiver experiences throughout life, often affecting an individual’s interpersonal relationships, identity concept, and life function.⁸⁹ The attachment system describes the process for intimacy development between children and primary caregivers. Secure children learn to seek connection with caregivers for comfort in times of distress. Individuals with secure attachments are more likely to participate in consensual sexuality and mutually exclusive relationships rather than impulsive hook-ups.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Jeremy Holmes, *John Bowlby and Attachment Theory*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2014), 53.

⁸⁸ Bernie Siegel, “Raising Healthy Children,” *Mothering* 55 (Spring 1990): 28.

⁸⁹ Fuschia M. Sirois, Abigail Millings, and Jameson K. Hirsch, “Insecure Attachment Orientation and Well-being in Emerging Adults: The Roles of Perceived Social Support and Fatigue,” *Personality and Individual Differences* 101 (October 2016): 318, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2016.06.026>.

⁹⁰ M. Lynn Cooper, Mark Pioli, Ash Levitt, Amelia E. Talley, Lada Micheas, and Nancy L. Collins, “Attachment Styles, Sex Motives, and Sexual Behavior: Evidence for Gender-Specific Expressions of Attachment Dynamics,” in *Dynamics of Romantic Love: Attachment, Caregiving, and Sex*, eds. M. Mikulincer, and G. S. Goodman (New York: The Guilford Press, 2006), 248.

In contrast, neglected and abused children, as well as those without consistent care from parents or caretakers, are more likely to form insecure attachments. Insecure attachment typically leads to negative self-concept, low self-worth, and fear of rejection. Insecure attachment may also lead to feelings of mistrust, anxiety related to abandonment, and avoidance of intimacy.⁹¹ Within the female emergent adult population, anxiously attached women report: 1) increased hook-ups; 2) earlier age for first sexual experience; and 3) decreased engagement in sexually monogamous relationships when compared to securely attached emergent women.⁹² Without proper guidance and opportunities for healthy attachment, emergent adults struggle through identity formation development in adulthood due to their lack of emotional resources and healthy coping skills when encountering conflict and crisis.

Ethics

Faith-based. Because of religious silence related to sexuality, the Church is losing credibility with emergent adults.⁹³ Regarding sexuality, the Church should take action to reengage with emergent adults. The Church may begin to connect with the emergent population by acknowledging the deficit of spiritual teaching related to sexuality and clarifying the Church's stance on sexual issues, both theologically and ethically.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Sirois, Millings, and Hirsch, 318.

⁹² Cooper et al., 248.

⁹³ Ellison, 236.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 236.

Early patriarchal family systems, encouraged by the Church, considered sexuality sinful, and this view led to early marriage, hasty remarriage if widowed, and a focus on childbearing, with increased value assigned to numerous children, in spite of associated life-threatening risks. Barren or unmarried women faced potential abandonment by families, often leading to slavery or prostitution due to their diminished protection and legal rights.⁹⁵ Church fathers, such as St. Augustine, felt that sexual desire must be resisted to prevent the regression of humanity to animalistic levels, referencing the instinctive physical responses and loss of control associated with sexuality.⁹⁶ Based on this history, the Church continues to give mixed messages about the sacred purpose of sexuality and its acceptance among Christian traditions.

The New Testament offers grounds for a sexual ethic that 1) values marriage and procreation on one hand and celibacy on the other; 2) gives as much importance to internal attitudes and thoughts as to external actions; and 3) affirms a sacred symbolic meaning for sexual intercourse yet subordinates it as a value to other human values and finds in it a possibility for evil.⁹⁷

The Church has an opportunity to relay spiritual knowledge about sexuality and offer intentional engagement around sacred sexuality with emergent women. As the Church begins to engage in conversations with emergent adults related to Christian

⁹⁵ Carolyn Boher, "Where There Was Split and Violence, Let There Be Healing," *Daughters of Sarah* 22, no. 1 (1996): 21-22.

⁹⁶ Lisa Sowell Cahill, "Sexuality and Christian Ethics: How to Proceed," in *Sexuality and The Sacred Sources for Theological Reflection*, ed. James B. Nelson and Sandra P. Longfellow (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 20.

⁹⁷ Margaret A. Farley, "Sexual Ethics," in *Sexuality and the Sacred Sources for Theological Reflection*, ed. James B. Nelson and Sandra P. Longfellow (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 59.

sexual ethics, emergent women may discover the sacred significance of sexuality as the expression of holy and sacramental union of Christ with the Church.⁹⁸

Secular. The goal of emergent adulthood is to be capable of offering one's authentic self to another within the relationship of intimacy, partnership, and parenthood.⁹⁹ "The healthy self, like a novel, requires a theme or narrative thread, though it won't tie up all the loose ends in our lives, it still should offer conviction that life does tie together into a meaningful whole."¹⁰⁰ As emergent adults are increasingly influenced by external messages, such as cultural norms and media stereotypes, they become paralyzed with future life choices due to their decreasing narcissist characteristics and declining self-sufficiency.¹⁰¹

Morality is not simply a rigid structure of inhibition or a means of control. Morality powerfully plays a creative role in the complex workings of the soul. Morality at its best produces a deep and peaceful soul rest, while also making positive contributions to sexual pleasure. Healthy morality creates opportunities for greater connection and satisfaction in sexuality by reconciling long-lasting guilt, establishing an ethical lifestyle of relating to others, and a personal commitment to the continual pursuit

⁹⁸ Christopher West and George Weigel, *Theology of the Body Explained: a Commentary on John Paul II's "Gospel of the Body"* (Leominster, MA: Gracewing, 2014), 80.

⁹⁹ O'Malley, 29.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁰¹ Marjorie M. Buckner, and Michael G. Strawser, "'Me'llennials and the Paralysis of Choice: Reigniting the Purpose of Higher Education,'" *Communication Education* 65, no. 3 (2016): 362, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03634523.2016.1177845>.

of moral depth.¹⁰² Essential integration of communication and ethics, characteristics associated with developmental maturity, is frequently absent for many emergent adults who possess a finite, self-focused worldview as demonstrated by their insufficient levels of empathy necessary for learning from others with perspectives differing from their own.¹⁰³

According to human sexuality educator Roffman, emergent adults experience great harm when our culture refuses to differentiate between “universal values” widely accepted common ground that most adults expect to be upheld and applied by emergent adults, and “controversial value-laden issues,” which must be heard, engaged with, and understood by all individuals within a pluralistic democracy.¹⁰⁴ Roffman proposes that what the Church, and probably American culture, formerly considered universal values (and they possibly were up until the sexual revolution of the 1960’s,¹⁰⁵) are now the controversial value-laden issues of contemporary culture. This sexual revolution focused on the excesses of genital sexuality by highlighting the rigid patriarchal structures that dominated sexual practice over history. Conservative Christians engaged in the debate by affirming sexuality only within monogamous, heterosexual marriage, meanwhile feminist and homosexual writers confronted patriarchal structures of sexuality and the emphasis only on genital acts within sexuality. From the perspective of Stringer, an accomplished

¹⁰² Thomas Moore, *The Soul of Sex: Cultivating Life as an Act of Love* (London, UK: Bantam, 2003), 160.

¹⁰³ Paula S. Tompkins, “Teaching Communication to Emerging Adults,” *Communication Education* 65, no. 3 (2016): 368, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03634523.2016.1177847>.

¹⁰⁴ “Culture, Religion, and Sex Education,” *New York Times*, March 16, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/16/opinion/culture-religion-and-sex-education.html>.

¹⁰⁵ Lester A. Kirkendall, “Sexual Revolution: Myth or Reality?” *Religious Education* 61, no. 6, (1966): 411, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0034408660610602>.

writer sexually identifying as homosexual, this time period developed “a more holistic, all encompassing, just and relational approach to the question of ‘sexuality.’”¹⁰⁶ Although this viewpoint may be valid, associations between spirituality and sexuality remained unclear for single, emergent adults from the sexual revolution of the 1960’s through the present time.

Identity and Morality

Identity formation is not a random occurrence from a developmental perspective but is instead a rational process of relating to God, others, and ourselves.¹⁰⁷ “Identity development emerges out of the ideological, social, and spiritual context of religion, and that identity that transcends the self can promote a commitment that fosters both individual wellbeing and the good of society.”¹⁰⁸ Erik Erikson was a German psychologist who was heavily influenced by Sigmund Freud and his psychoanalytic theory.¹⁰⁹ Erikson created an eight-stage theory of identity and psychosocial development, which considers the impact of external factors, parents and society on

¹⁰⁶ Martin D. Stringer, “Expanding the Boundaries of Sex: An Exploration of Sexual Ethics after the Second Sexual Revolution,” *Theology & Sexuality* 7 (September 1997): 27, <https://doi.org/10.1177/135583589700400703>.

¹⁰⁷ Sam A. Hardy and Daniel Lapsley. “Identity Formation and Moral Development in Emerging Adulthood,” in *Flourishing in Emerging Adulthood: Positive Development During the Third Decade of Life*, ed. Laura M. Padilla-Walker and Larry J. Nelson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 18.

¹⁰⁸ Reymann, 3.

¹⁰⁹ “Erikson’s Stages of Development,” *Learning Theories*, July 23, 2014, <https://www.learning-theories.com/eriksons-stages-of-development.html>.

personality development from childhood to adulthood.¹¹⁰ According to Erikson's developmental theory, every individual passes through these eight interrelated stages over the course of his or her life span.¹¹¹ These stages of identify development include: 1) Trust versus Mistrust; 2) Autonomy versus Shame and Doubt; 3) Initiative versus Guilt; 4) Industry versus Inferiority; 5) Identity versus Role Confusion; 6) Intimacy versus Isolation; 7) Generativity versus Stagnation; and 8) Integrity versus Despair.¹¹²

According to Erikson, his stages reflect essential developmental crises that each person must face, and these often produce a spiritual way of living as a direct result of the individual's successful crisis resolution.¹¹³ "Each deliberation costs effort and suffering, losing something good in the hope of something far better."¹¹⁴ Developmental life crises invite men and women into greater achievement of inner, personal growth and self-awareness. Emergent adulthood marks a fertile period for crucial morality development as individuals become increasingly open to life transformation and interpersonal reorganization.¹¹⁵ A well-developed moral identity challenges individuals to act in ways

¹¹⁰ Suzanne E. Vogel-Scibilia, Kathryn McNulty, Beth Baxter, Steve Miller, Max Dine, and Frederick J. Frese, "The Recovery Process Utilizing Erikson's Stages of Human Development," *Community Mental Health Journal New York* 45, no. 6 (December 2009): 406, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10597-009-9189-4>.

¹¹¹ "Erikson's Stages of Development."

¹¹² Mary Ann Carter, "The Role of the Masculine and the Feminine in the Healthy Integration of Spirituality, Intimacy, and Individuation," (Dissertation, 1996), 84, Dissertation Abstracts International: Section B: The Sciences and Engineering.

¹¹³ Benner, 54.

¹¹⁴ O'Malley, 29.

¹¹⁵ Hardy and Lapsley, 15.

that are in agreement with their own moral beliefs that will also benefit the welfare and rights of others.¹¹⁶

Psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg spent almost 20 years studying human moral development, particularly during adolescence and emergent adulthood life stages. He led interviews with study participants to comprehend their reasoning and approaches, in order to understand decision-making and morality-determination processes that concluded choices as either right or wrong.¹¹⁷ Kohlberg's moral development theory is the forerunner for study of the life-span moral progression of an individual in the stages of moral development. Individuals engage in moral development at stage 1 and progress upwardly into moral maturity by stage, based on their readiness.¹¹⁸ This theory is important for emergent adults, as it clarifies an individual's maturation progress and the outcomes of his or her developmental influences.

The progression of morality and identity development often indicates a person's future life pattern: 1) well-developed moral identity is a crucial component of a purposeful life; 2) healthy moral identity positions one's life on a path to include well-being and integrity.¹¹⁹ Developmental deficits may be visible as an individual reaches the emergent adult life stage. Raising awareness of healthy developmental milestones may identify areas needing further instruction in necessary life skills in emergent adulthood,

¹¹⁶ David T. Hartman, "Moral Orientation and Meaning: Morality and Life Satisfaction in Emerging Adults." *Counseling et Spiritualité* 34, no. 1 (2015): 18.

¹¹⁷ Christine Olson, "Kohlberg's Moral Development Theory," *Schools: Studies in Education* 8, no.1 (Spring 2011): 125-126, JSTOR.

¹¹⁸ John A. Larson, "Applying Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development in Group Care Settings," *Child Welfare* 60, no. 10 (1981): 661, 664, ProQuest.

¹¹⁹ Hardy and Lapsley, 16.

which may lead to healthy choices in adulthood. The following table contrasts the two important developmental models, specifically ones designed by Erikson and by Kohlberg, which highlight life stage achievements essential for effective emergent adults' transition into the middle and late adulthood stages.

Table 2: Comparison by Ages of Erikson's Identity Crisis Stages and Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Development

Age:	Erikson Life Stage Identification	Erikson Life Stage Characteristics	Kohlberg Life Stage Identification	Kohlberg Life Stage Characteristics
0-1 years	<i>Infancy: First Year of Life, 0 - 18m Stage 1</i>	<i>Trust versus Mistrust: Is the world reliable? Will my needs be met?</i>	<i>Not Applicable</i>	<i>Not Applicable</i>
1-3 years	<i>Toddler: 18 mo-3 years Stage 2</i>	<i>Autonomy versus Shame and Doubt: Struggle for personal control. Understanding of separation from others.</i>	<i>Pre-moral/ Level 1: The child is responsive to cultural rules but sees these in terms of pleasant or unpleasant consequences of behavior and relates them to the power of authority figures. He follows the rules for the sake of self- interest.</i>	<i>Punishment- obedience orientation/ Stage 1 (early childhood): The child is oriented to obedience and punishment, with egocentric deference to authority figures and avoidance of unpleasantness for himself or herself.</i>
3-5 years	<i>Preschooler: 3 - 5 year Stage 3</i>	<i>Initiative versus Guilt: Concept of autonomy to pursue new tasks.</i>	<i>Pre-moral/ Level 2: The child is responsive to cultural rules but sees these in terms of pleasant or unpleasant consequences of behavior and relates them to the power of authority figures. He follows the rules for the sake of self- interest.</i>	<i>Instrumental- relativist orientation/ Stage 2 (late childhood): A naively egotistic orientation, with concern for one's own needs but with some awareness of the needs of others, a wish for egalitarianism and an orientation toward exchange and reciprocity.</i>
6-12 years	<i>School Age Child: 6 - 12 years Stage Four</i>	<i>Industry versus Inferiority: Acquire skills and interests. Build self- esteem.</i>	<i>Conventional Role Conformity/ Level 1: The child is now oriented toward maintaining the expectations of others close to him or her, as a value in its own right.</i>	<i>Interpersonal concordance or "good boy-nice girl" orientation/ Stage 3 (preadolescence): The orientation is to a good person in the eyes of others and in</i>

Age:	Erikson Life Stage Identification	Erikson Life Stage Characteristics	Kohlberg Life Stage Identification	Kohlberg Life Stage Characteristics
				one's own eyes, with a wish to please and help. Intentions of behavior are taken note of, and the moral perspective includes interactions with others.
<i>Adolescence</i>	<i>Adolescence: 12 to 18 Stage Five</i>	<i>Identity versus Role Confusion: Who am I? What are my values and self-concepts. Personal identity and adult role development</i>	<i>Conventional Role Conformity/ Level 2: The child is now oriented toward maintaining the expectations of others close to him or her, as a value in its own right.</i>	<i>Law and order orientation/ Stage 4 (Adolescence-adult): Moving toward the social order and its maintenance for its own sake, and to fulfilling agreed duties in conformity to authority.</i>
<i>Early Adulthood</i>	<i>Early Adulthood: 18 to 35 Stage 6</i>	<i>Intimacy versus Isolation: Engaging in intimate relationships; sharing life with a peer. Development of intimate relationships with peers.</i>	<i>Self-Accepted/ Level 1: The individual is now concerned with defining moral values and principles apart from the supporting authority.</i>	<i>Social-contract legalistic orientation/ Stage 5: This orientation is contractual and legalistic, with a sense of obligation to the law but also an acceptance that people can have a variety of different values and that their individual rights take precedence over the social contract.</i>
<i>Middle Adulthood</i>	<i>Middle Adulthood: 35 to 55 or 65 Stage 7</i>	<i>Generativity versus Stagnation: Is this all there is? Accomplishing meaningful goals in life.</i>	<i>Self-Accepted/ Level 2: The individual is now concerned with defining moral values and principles apart from the supporting authority.</i>	<i>Universal ethical-principle orientation/ Stage 6: This orientation is sociomoral one, with the recognition of valid universal ethical principles to which the person chooses to commit himself or herself.</i>

Age:	Erikson Life Stage Identification	Erikson Life Stage Characteristics	Kohlberg Life Stage Identification	Kohlberg Life Stage Characteristics
<i>Late Adulthood</i>	<i>55 or 65 until Death Stage 8</i>	<i>Integrity versus Despair: Looking back on the life that one has lived. Life review and addressing mortality.</i>	<i>Not Applicable</i>	<i>Not Applicable</i>

When emergent adults successfully navigate developmental stages, they enter adulthood with: 1) meaning and purpose; 2) self-efficacy; 3) subjective well-being; 4) gratitude; 5) mental health; and 6) a sense of personal identity.¹²⁰ In spite of these developmental models, barriers clearly remain, evident in emergent adults and their extended timelines for education, financial dependency on parents, job placement, and marriage.¹²¹

Sociocultural Influences

Female emergent adults desire connection, and yet they experience challenges to healthy identity formation due to inadequate healthy formational influences. The scarcity of healthy narratives for emergent women, from their families, culture, peers, and the Church, may encourage their self-regulation in stress or turning to others for necessary nurture and wisdom. Fenelon and Backhouse raise the possibility that spiritual growth and healthy lifestyle may result from broad exposure to social influences, especially for

¹²⁰ Hartman, 20.

¹²¹ Hardy and Lapsley, 19.

women who are highly involved in organized religious activities.¹²² This section will consider the varied influences, and their resulting impacts, that contribute to the sexuality, spirituality and identity formation processes for emergent women.

Family Influences

Healthy Parenting. Families of origin are believed to be the primary formational influencers of moral development in relation to context for sexual and romantic relationships for emergent adults. Familial relationships are a preventive factor for risky sexual behavior.¹²³ Parents are critical influences on children in the life stages of unborn babies, newborn babies, early childhood, will lingering impacts on the development of adolescents and emergent adults.¹²⁴ Research by Rachel Allison supports this stance with both: 1) social learning theory, which states that social norms for sexuality are constructed by family socialization; and 2) social control theory, which highlights the rigid structures of families in regulating sexual behaviors.¹²⁵ Parents are the direct socializing agents in religious socialization, especially since they socialize their children

¹²² Fenelon and Backhouse, 107.

¹²³ T. Kody Frey and Nicolas T. Tatum, "Hoverboards and 'Hovermoms': Helicopter Parents and Their Influence on Millennial Students' Rapport with Instructors," *Communication Education* 65, no. 3 (2016): 359, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03634523.2016.1177846>.

¹²⁴ Kamaldeep Bhui, "Life-course Psychiatry: Promoting Healthy Parenting, Childhoods, Treatment, and Living Space," *The British Journal Of Psychiatry: The Journal of Mental Science* 211, no.3 (September 2017): 188, <https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.211.3.188>.

¹²⁵ Rachel Allison, "Family Influences on Hooking Up and Dating Among Emerging Adults," *Sexuality & Culture* 20, no. 3 (September 2016): 446–447, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-016-9334-5>.

and actively guide them to participate in activities that reinforce the same values being taught at home.¹²⁶

Healthy parenting promotes social and emotional development in children.¹²⁷ When providing support, encouragement, and a safe environment for exploration of emotions, parents foster opportunities for development of healthy cognition, while encouraging positive narratives of life challenges and healthy emotional development. Recent findings promote positive parenting as a component of emotional health and wellbeing in emergent adults.¹²⁸ Secure parental attachment provides an early model of healthy relationships with reasonable expectations of oneself and others, with a perceived goal of positive interpersonal and intimate relationships in emergent adulthood.¹²⁹ Positive parental relationships provide opportunities in early development for emergent adults through: 1) healthy processing of life challenges and disappointments through emotional support; 2) encouragement to interpret events through a positive narrative; and 3) foster feelings of both autonomy and security, which lead to more comfort in identity exploration and commitment in emergent adulthood. Positive parental support, or *scaffolding*, provides direct structure for children to cognitively understand, reconstruct,

¹²⁶ Chien-Ti Lee, Laura M. Padilla-Walker, and Larry J. Nelson, "A Person-Centered Approach to Moral Motivations during Emerging Adulthood: Are All Forms of Other-Orientation Adaptive?" *Journal of Moral Education* 44, no. 1 (March 2015): 63, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057240.2014.1002460>.

¹²⁷ Hilary A. Marusak, Moriah E. Thomason, Kelsey Sala-Hamrick, Laura Crespo, and Christine A. Rabinak, "What's Parenting Got To Do With It: Emotional Autonomy and Brain and Behavioral Responses to Emotional Conflict in Children and Adolescents," *Developmental Science* 21, no. 4 (July 2018): 8, <https://doi.org/10.1111/desc.12605>.

¹²⁸ Tara M. Dumas, Heather Lawford, Thanh-Thanh Tieu, and Michael W. Pratt, "Positive Parenting in Adolescence and Its Relation to Low Point Narration and Identity Status in Emerging Adulthood: A Longitudinal Analysis," *Developmental Psychology* 45, no. 6 (November 2009): 1533, <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0017360>.

¹²⁹ Frey and Tatum, 359.

and resolve life's low points and lead to more independent functioning in emergent adulthood.¹³⁰

Dr. Bernie Siegel, shares his model for healthy parenting: 1) unconditional love just as one is; 2) discipline as a means of guidance instead of punishment; 3) parents transparency, admitting and accepting their imperfections as normal behavior; 4) awareness of adversity, acknowledgment of unavoidable difficulty, and suffering in life and ways to overcome them; 5) redirections are opportunities; 6) take time and wait, good things can result from challenges; 7) be one's true self, finding one's own life rather than the one someone else plans; and 8) miracle of life, strive for potential and one's healthiest, fullest life.¹³¹

Unhealthy Parenting. Parents face challenges as they attempt to navigate the delicate dance between boundaries and freedom in healthy ways for children, especially if they desire to produce developmental outcomes that will lead to healthy emergent adult identity. The difficulty lies in finding the balance between permissive, child-centered parenting and domineering, authoritative parenting in an attempt to avoid becoming a neglectful parent, helicopter parent, or over controlling parent.

Children often form insecure attachments to caregivers and struggle engaging in intimate relationships in emergent adulthood. Over-controlling parents may protect children from immediate social challenges and peer rejection, but their efforts often

¹³⁰ Ibid., 1539.

¹³¹ Siegel, 28-32.

produce limited development of the social and emotional autonomy needed for healthy interpersonal relationships in adulthood.¹³²

Popular culture affirms the “helicopter parent” relational model, where parents often hover, over protect, and are unwilling to view their adolescents as young adults. This parenting style shelters adolescents from other healthy formative influences and promotes developmental delays related to interdependence and prolonged attachment to parents as a primary source for emotional regulation.¹³³ Overly confident, “trophy kids,” are ones who feel like champions in need of a trophy. These behaviors are a result of the helicopter-parenting model, which produces emergent adults who have an unrealistic perception of their own abilities and professional skills including leadership, public speaking, and writing. Overbearing children are unable to take risks. As employers and vocational environments fail to affirm their perceived strengths through verbal affirmation and emotional support, as modeled by their families of origin, these emergent adults may respond with various means of overcompensation, affecting both personal and professional interactions. Trophy-kid emergent adults battle to escape their internal feelings associated with an innate “impostor” narrative, often noticeable in resulting decision-making paralysis and elimination of potential risks, even ones that could lead to growth.¹³⁴

¹³² Marusak, et al., 2.

¹³³ Frey and Tatum, 359.

¹³⁴ Kirstie McAllum, “Managing Impostor Syndrome Among the ‘Trophy Kids’: Creating Teaching Practices That Develop Independence in Millennial Students,” *Communication Education* 65, no. 3 (2016): 363-364, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03634523.2016.1177848>.

Media Influences

Current American culture encourages emergent adults to find validation from external sources, such as grades, competition, peers, vocation, and appearance.¹³⁵ These external reinforcements become primary sources for information and personal validation for emergent adults and significantly shape their worldviews.¹³⁶ Emergent adults are shedding the guilt and shame messages received from their families of origin and religious institutions about sex, modesty, and body image, as they embrace their sensual selves.¹³⁷ When denying the presence of healthy sexual desires, an individual's capacity for creativity and deep fulfillment is minimized. In present culture, emergent adults face varied media messages about sexuality. Emergent adults are more likely to recycle information from outside sources, such as the Internet and television, to form their own worldviews instead of perceiving their environments through the lenses of individual creativity.¹³⁸

Emergent adults constantly engage with cell phones, digital technology, and communication applications, constantly bombarding them with messages about culture, sexuality, and identity, lessening their abilities to communicate non-verbally and engage

¹³⁵ O'Malley, 30.

¹³⁶ Lilian Calles Barger, *Eve's Revenge: Women and a Spirituality of the Body* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2003), 134.

¹³⁷ Bowles, 13.

¹³⁸ Angela M. Hosek and Scott Titsworth, "Scripting Knowledge and Experiences for Millennial Students," *Communication Education* 65, no. 3 (2016): 357, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03634523.2016.1177844>.

in intimate relationships.¹³⁹ Television and movies praise a “double standard” for sexual behaviors, one where men are affirmed for insatiable sexual desires and women experience condemnation when engaging in similar behaviors. These conflicting messages can potentially create incompatible sexual expectations for emergent adults as they engage in sexual behaviors and intimate relationships.¹⁴⁰

Relational Influences

Community. Emergent adults experience positive outcomes, such as greater moral motivation, when engaged with community.¹⁴¹ Relational modeling does not affirm blind obedience to instruction; rather, healthy modeling encourages intentional relationships between adolescents, emergent adults, and elder adult populations, which are particularly beneficial in relation to cultural ritual processes.¹⁴² The beliefs and values passed on to children, adolescents, and emergent adults, from parents and other authority figures, are normally embraced without question, instead of being examined carefully before application. Because of this tendency toward unconditional acceptance of authoritative communal influences, the early adolescent stage can be derailed by

¹³⁹ Sherwyn P. Morreale and Constance M. Staley, “Millennial, Teaching and Learning, and the Elephant in the College Classroom,” *Communication Monographs* 83, no. 1 (March 2016): 371, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03634523.2016.1177842>.

¹⁴⁰ Hilary Gamble and Leslie R. Nelson, “Sex in College Relationships: The Role Television Plays in Emerging Adults’ Sexual Expectations in Relationships,” *Communication Monographs* 83, no. 1 (March 2016): 146, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03637751.2015.1049635>.

¹⁴¹ Chien-Ti Lee, et al., “A Person-Centered Approach,” 60.

¹⁴² Gina Magyar-Russell, Paul J. Deal, and Iain Tucker Brown, “Potential Benefits and Detriments of Religiousness and Spirituality to Emerging Adults,” in *Emerging Adults’ Religiousness and Spirituality* edited by Carolyn McNamara Barry and Mona M. Abo-Zena, 39-58 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 50.

experiences of disappointment and hypocrisy related to mentor figures within community.¹⁴³

Peers. Parents are the primary religious and spiritually formative influences for children, with peer relationships occupying a secondary role of influence until the individuals' adolescent stage and beyond.¹⁴⁴ As emergent adults leave their family homes, often to attend college, families of origin take on decreased roles in the emerging adults' process of identity formation and social development, as peers will now comprise the benchmark for normative emergent culture.¹⁴⁵ Emergent adults spend the majority of their social time with groups of friends, which can lead to conversations and behaviors that make restraint and sexual abstinence challenging.¹⁴⁶

Strategic Influences

Sex Education

Sex Education exists in a secular context in schools and from a spiritual context within some churches. School curricula highlight abstinence, safe sex, and health issues to engage adolescents with sexuality. Although a sampling of current faith-based curricula is acknowledged, the historical church and clergy often demonstrate attitudes of denial, avoidance, and silence, specifically around important topics for emergent adults,

¹⁴³ Chien-Ti Lee, et al., 59.

¹⁴⁴ Carolyn McNamara Barry and Jennifer L. Christofferson, "The Role of Peer Relationships in Emerging Adults: Religiousness and Spirituality," in *Emerging Adults' Religiousness and Spirituality* edited by Carolyn McNamara Barry and Mona M. Abo-Zena, 76-92 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 78.

¹⁴⁵ Allison, 447.

¹⁴⁶ Collins, 20.

such as masturbation, marriage, and celibacy. After reviewing these interventions designed to ultimately prepare emergent adults for sexuality, none of these proposed solutions seem to actually connect spirituality and sexuality. Although these efforts impact spirituality or sexuality, none effectively integrate spirituality and sexuality in ways that lead to healthy outcomes for emergent adults.

Faith-based. From the formation of Western Christianity, sexual silence links sex to sin and develops a destructive sex-negative morality that perpetuates feelings of guilt and shame related to human sexuality.¹⁴⁷ Because of the conveyance of disapproval resulting from the Church's silence related to sexual topics, Christianity is perceived to be repressive and joyless concerning sexuality.¹⁴⁸ These mindsets are validated by Church history, as religious leaders have consistently communicated messages of sex as a defiling and evil act, one useful only for procreation. These teachings pathologize sex and infer a Christian agenda to quench sexual desire.¹⁴⁹ "Threads of silence were woven into these women's consciousness within their Christian families of origin. Long after they left their families of origin and married, the threads of a sex-negative Christian morality continue to impact their sexual thoughts, feelings, and behavior."¹⁵⁰ Researcher Mahoney reports that nine of ten emergent women received no sex education at all and never discussed sex with parents or in their home environments. These emergent women believe that sexual silence fostered naïveté and unnecessary vulnerability for them as

¹⁴⁷ Mahoney, "Qualitative Study," 101.

¹⁴⁸ Setran, 92.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 172-173.

¹⁵⁰ Mahoney, "Qualitative Stud," 101.

adolescents who desired to uphold Christian moral values against normative cultural acceptance of adolescent sexual exploration.¹⁵¹

Many emerging adults describe church teaching as shallow and irrelevant, tied only weakly to their concerns and to the vexing intellectual and ethical questions of life. Teaching, therefore, must be deep. The church must be willing to teach the whole counsel of scripture and the particular doctrines of the faith.¹⁵²

Authors Turner and Stayton indicate a need for sexuality education to assist younger populations, both from faith and secular perspectives, as they consider stances on current social issues such as abortion, same-sex marriage, and stem cell research.¹⁵³ Different denominations of the Church are making attempts to educate and engage their congregants and community around topics related to sexuality. Some reflect historically affirmed viewpoints of scripture relating to sexuality and others are integrated with cultural perspectives regarding sexuality and social justice issues.

Insufficient research has been conducted on faith-based sex education programs, and no research has explored the kinds of sex education programs found in mainstream denominational churches in the United States such as *Created by God*, a program for 5th and 6th graders developed by the United Methodist Church, *Our Whole Lives*, a comprehensive sexuality education program for grades K through adult, developed by the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations, or *Sacred Choices*, a relationship

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 99-100.

¹⁵² Setran, 96.

¹⁵³ Yolanda Turner, and William Stayton, "The Twenty-First Century Challenges To Sexuality and Religion," *Journal of Religion and Health* 53, no. 2 (2012): 485, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-012-9652-3>.

and sexual ethics curriculum for middle and high school teens developed by the Union of Reform Judaism.¹⁵⁴

The United Church of Christ “holds that sexuality is a God-given gift” and creates safe environments for individuals to learn and engage with the sexual challenges facing them. Their goal is to promote universal dignity and justice for all people, while also emphasizing the importance of personal responsibility.¹⁵⁵ Their program, *Our Whole Lives* is a series of sexuality education for individuals in kindergarten through adults, considering relative sexual topics such as 1) values; 2) body image; 3) reproduction and sexual health; 4) contraception; 5) safe sex fantasy; 6) single sexuality behaviors; 7) sexual orientation; and 8) gender identity and equality.¹⁵⁶ *Breaking the Silence: In Times Like These*, a sex education program endorsed by Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice, empowers teens, parents, congregations, guardians, and clergy about available sexual options within a healthy lifestyle, such as grandparent guardians raising teenagers, STDs, teen pregnancy, and domestic violence.¹⁵⁷

Absent from the faith-based discussion of sexuality education is any mention of the needs for clergy education and training to help them address sexuality and spirituality within their ministry settings. Clergy may be trained in spirituality but the absence of an integrated model of sexual education for clergy remains. Helpful clergy education which

¹⁵⁴ Carol R. Freedman-Doan, Leanna Fortunato, Erin J. Henshaw, and Jacqueline M. Titus, “Faith-Based Sex Education Programs: What They Look Like and Who Uses Them,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 52 (2013): 249, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-011-9463-y>.

¹⁵⁵ “Sexuality Education,” *United Church of Christ Advocate for Justice*, accessed September 7, 2018, http://www.ucc.org/justice_sexuality-education.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Talise D. Moorer, “Breaking the Silence on Faith-Based Sex Ed,” *New York Amsterdam News* 94, no. 28 (July 10, 2003): 34.

addresses integrative sexuality and spirituality includes: (1) concepts for safe spaces in which to facilitate sexual conversations; and (2) methods for engaging congregants with scripture, addressing historical messages of the Church pertaining to sexuality, and listening attentively as the church community is invited to share their personal experiences related to sexuality.¹⁵⁸

Secular. Public school sex education programs have been historically controversial due to the ongoing argument for abstinence material, rather than a pro-contraceptive curriculum. Proponents of the contraceptive affirmative programs offer evidence that their programs reduce risks of pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, while their opponents charge that current programs promote premarital sex and abortions,¹⁵⁹ noting that many of these school programs provide condoms to students for easy access and reduction of embarrassment and contraceptive costs.¹⁶⁰ Abstinence advocates began to lobby for more conservative sexual education curricula in 1981, influenced by the Adolescent Family Life Act, President Clinton's public trial for sexual misconduct in 1999, and the affirmation of the Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act in

¹⁵⁸ Grosch-Miller, 193.

¹⁵⁹ Freedman-Doan, et al., 248.

¹⁶⁰ Lauren Maziarz, "Breaking Down the Administrative Barriers: Condom Availability in the School Setting," *NASN School Nurse* 33, no. 2 (March 2018): 112, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1942602X17747206>.

1996. Political campaigns of early 2000's also reflected a "passive revolution for abstinence."¹⁶¹

Present culture frequently disengages from sex education programs that combat social moral decay, embracing curricula which focuses on health and reproductive issues rather than historical moral standards and ethical norms. According to author and New York University education professor Jonathan Zimmerman,

Schools are central for deliberating the values we wish to transmit to our young. No credible research supports the claim that sex ed. makes young people more likely to engage in sex. But we don't have strong evidence that it consistently reduces teen pregnancy or venereal disease rates, either.¹⁶²

Wachter, president of Select Media, a sexual education company, argues that current curriculum includes effective teenage pregnancy prevention programs, which are designed to promote both abstinence and contraceptive use among sexually active adolescents.¹⁶³ Even so, the United States continues to report high rates of teenage public health issues, unplanned pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases among adolescents.¹⁶⁴

Currently only 14 percent of all public sex education programs incorporate material pertaining to contraception methods and sexually transmitted disease prevention.

¹⁶¹ Michelle Fine, and Sara McClelland, "Sexuality Education and Desire: Still Missing after All These Years." *Harvard Educational Review* 76, no. 3 (2006): 299, https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Sara_McClelland2/publication/261252434_Sexuality_Education_and_Desire_Still_Missing_After_All_These_Years/links/00b4953448bde58064000000/Sexuality-Education-and-Desire-Still-Missing-After-All-These-Years.pdf.

¹⁶² Jonathan Zimmerman, "The World's Problem With Sex Ed," *New York Times*, March 9, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/09/opinion/the-worlds-problem-with-sex-ed.html>.

¹⁶³ Beth Wachter, Letter to the Editor, *New York Times*, March 16, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/16/opinion/culture-religion-and-sex-education.html>.

¹⁶⁴ Maziarz, 110.

While abstinence-only and abstinence-centered programs are more numerous, representing 35 and 51 percent of all public school sexuality education programs respectively among programs that discuss safer sex and exclude contraception information.¹⁶⁵ Abstinence opponents consider conservative fear and morality-based sex education to also be flawed, suggesting that “learning about sex in our society is learning about guilt; conversely, learning how to manage sexuality constitutes learning how to manage guilt.”¹⁶⁶ Because of ongoing conflict, sexual education is limited and minimized to only human sexual development and abstinence materials, even though little research exists to show that abstinence curriculum decreases risk of teen pregnancy, teen sexually transmitted diseases, and adolescent sexual behaviors.¹⁶⁷

Sexuality

The influences that help form emergent adults’ views of sexuality have been intentional and non-intentional, meaning that these messages form through societal messages and social norms, rather than specific biblical instruction on sexuality from Church. Although sexuality is not intentionally a strategic influencer of emergent women, it is a contextual factor, one grounded in socio-cultural messages, that influences their perspectives of sexual concepts such as celibacy, marriage, and masturbation. The Church simply does not address certain sexual topics like masturbation. Considering current perceptions of sexuality, ones relative to the emergent adult population, it seems

¹⁶⁵ Laina Bay-Cheng, “The Trouble of Teen Sex: The Construction of Adolescent Sexuality Through School-Based Sexuality Education,” *Sex Education* 3, no.1, (2003): 61, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1468181032000052162>.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 64-65.

¹⁶⁷ Freedman-Doan, et al., 248.

more likely that sexuality is defined through social contexts rather than spiritual contexts due to the lack of engagement from their spiritual community.

Celibacy. In early Church history, theologian Origin elevates celibacy as a higher form of sexual virtue in spiritual life.¹⁶⁸ Throughout Christianity, church traditions affirm celibacy as a desirable sacred lifestyle, more virtuous than appealing, emphasizing the piety of Jesus, the prophet Jeremiah, and Teresa de Avila.¹⁶⁹ Unfortunately, individuals in our current society equate this once-celebrated celibate lifestyle, which elevates the gift of singleness and denies basic sexual desires, with perpetual virginity, the rejection of being unmarried, and the potential reality of being unloved.¹⁷⁰

In a recent study by Alan Taylor et al., emergent adults reflected on their feelings about premarital sex, revealing that this topic is the primary concern for most male and female emergent participants.¹⁷¹ “I still wondered if the lingering shame I felt about my premarital sexual encounters had been instilled in me by a subculture that demands, especially for women, arbitrarily defined purity.”¹⁷² In present culture, single emergent adults have the capability to explore sexual options without perceiving the expectation of

¹⁶⁸ Hirsch, 34.

¹⁶⁹ Therese Shuler, “Celibacy and the Sacred,” *Daughters of Sarah* 22, no. 1 (1996): 44.

¹⁷⁰ Janie Gustafson, “Celibate Passion,” in *Sexuality and the Sacred Sources for Theological Reflection*, ed. James B. Nelson and Sandra P. Longfellow (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 277.

¹⁷¹ Taylor et al., 175.

¹⁷² Katherine Willis Pershey, “Fully Naked, Fully Known,” *Christian Century* 133, no. 20 (September 28, 2016): 22–25.

relational commitment.¹⁷³ Instead of following religious guidelines, most emergent adults utilize their newfound freedom from families of origin to experiment with romantic relationships and sexual experiences. In present culture, single emergent adults have the capability to explore sexual options without the expectation of relational commitment. Because emergent adults long for romance, partnership, and companionship, the search to find a committed partner and to form a meaningful romantic relationship is still a significant desire for celibate emergent adult singles.¹⁷⁴

Marriage. In scripture, God binds covenant lovers in marriage by *hesed*, which is God's abiding, gentle, long-suffering, tender, everlasting love.¹⁷⁵ Although monogamous marriages were considered the ideal in early church ethical standards, polygamy or concubines were also an option, to maximize opportunities for childbirth in barren marriages.¹⁷⁶ During the Victorian period, medical writers emphasized marital sexual intimacy as a way to enhance spirituality. The late nineteenth century social purity movement focused on the spirituality of marriage relationships, primarily due to increased focus on sexual pleasure with society's introduction of contraceptives and abortion to control family size.¹⁷⁷ In present culture, emergent adults are no longer expected to be married to have a sexual relationship. Emergent adults are not finding models within the Church for healthy spiritual and sexual life patterns for marriage.

¹⁷³ Shannon Claxton and Manfred Van Dulmen, "Casual Sexual Relationships and Experiences in Emerging Adulthood," in *Oxford Handbooks Online*, ed. Jeffrey J. Arnett (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 247, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199795574.013.002>.

¹⁷⁴ Alan C. Taylor et al., 175.

¹⁷⁵ Gallagher, 87.

¹⁷⁶ Farley, 55.

¹⁷⁷ Boher, 26.

Without spiritual messages, emergent adults form relational standards from influences found in their environments, ones affirming sexual promiscuity rather than covenant marriage.

Masturbation. Masturbation is unmentioned in scripture and often classified as questionable behavior in terms of scriptural permissiveness. Neither the Old Testament nor the New Testament offers specific instruction regarding the practice of masturbation. The act of masturbation falls into the grey area of sexual ethics for evangelicals, providing an opportunity for sin language and shame to be attached to masturbation for single, emergent Christian adults. This ambiguity leaves Christian emergent adults to personally discern a moral stance on masturbation, gleaning wisdom from culture or varied scriptures to determine the sin basis for masturbation. Christian emergent adults want to know whether masturbation is right or wrong, and if it is normal.¹⁷⁸ According to Catholic literature, masturbation is considered less grievous and offensive within the proposed sexual sins and is evidence of the complex relationship between sin and human sexuality. In the last paragraph of the *Catechism* treating the topic of masturbation, reference is made to ‘affective immaturity, force of acquired habit, conditions of anxiety, or other psychological or social factors that can lessen, if not even reduce to a minimum moral culpability.’¹⁷⁹

Masturbation provokes a theological debate that invites individuals and the Church into conversations about sexuality, historical traditions of Christianity related to

¹⁷⁸ Alex W. Kwee, and David C. Hoover, “Theologically Informed Education About Masturbation: A Male Sexual Health Perspective,” *Journal of Psychology & Theology* 36, no. 4 (2008): 259, <https://doi.org/10.1177/009164710803600402>.

¹⁷⁹ P. A. McGavin, “The Catechism on Sexuality: Interpreting the ‘Constant Tradition.’” *Australasian Catholic Record* 88, no. 2 (2011): 229, ProQuest Central.

sexuality, and scriptural study for context and further interpretation. Emergent men and women must individually determine whether or not they are for or against masturbation and other sexual behaviors. When emergent adults prioritize religion and increase their attendance at religious activities, they are found to feel increasingly guilty in relation to masturbatory practices, and yet, likelihood of premarital sexual intercourse and multiple sexual partners decreases.¹⁸⁰

“When we masturbate to visual stimuli (pornography) and/or mental visions or fantasies, we establish a powerfully reinforcing link between mental desire or lust and the natural high of orgasm.”¹⁸¹ Strauss discusses the possibility of “masturbating without sinning,” and finds some Christian leaders who believe masturbation to be a single person’s gift of sexuality from God, a way to release sexual tension without engaging in fornication. A study supporting Strauss reveals evidence of humanity’s innate ability to avoid fantasy in masturbatory practice and redirect reoccurring thoughts.¹⁸²

Christian emergent women, as with non-Christian women, struggle with hidden sexual desire. Even if a woman finds herself acting out in a specifically sexual way with pornography and masturbation, she can name the feelings of loneliness and shame that come from her behavior. At her core, she aches for love. Her human need for intimacy and connection stirs her soul.¹⁸³

¹⁸⁰ Stoppa, Espinosa-Hernandez, and Gillen, 189.

¹⁸¹ Gary H. Strauss, “Promoting 20/20 Vision: A Q & A Ministry to Undergraduates,” *Journal of Psychology & Theology* 30, no. 3 (2002): 231.

¹⁸² Ibid., 233.

¹⁸³ Marnie C. Ferree, *Making Advances: A Comprehensive Guide for Treating Female Sex and Love Addicts* (Royston, GA: Society for the Advancement of Sexual Health, 2012), 29.

Religious emergent women may risk vulnerability to feelings of guilt and shame resulting from single sexual behaviors, such as masturbation. As emergent women find safe places to share their sexual struggles, they have opportunities to change sexual behavior and experience into more meaningful sexual interactions and intimate relationships. Healthy female friendships and social connections may counteract associated feelings of shame and loneliness while offering necessary relational support needed to overcome compulsory masturbatory practices. The ongoing theological debate invites emergent adults to consider the act of masturbation as separate from the fallen heart condition and sinful nature, which separates them from God. It also offers a new perspective on masturbation as a remedy for healthy sexual needs, rather than only considering harsh and extreme consequences for masturbatory practices.

Spiritual Formation

The Church masks this emotionally complex issue, dividing spirit from sex and holiness from sexuality. The Church has opportunities to encourage spiritual development within emergent women through integrated sexuality and spirituality but instead it does nothing. Responses of apathy and silence, from the Church as related to sexuality, have vast repercussions and may affect culture as a whole. As a result, many emergent adults may avoid spirituality altogether, resulting in sexual behaviors that are incongruent with their former religious backgrounds. Eventually these single, emergent adults leave the Church, possibly due to feelings of shame and guilt from past sexual

experiences.¹⁸⁴ Rather than simple denial, perhaps church leaders do not recognize the connections between spirituality and sexuality. This consideration raised an important question for the Church: Is spiritual formation optimally approached through a compartmentalized framework or is it best engaged through a holistic approach, meaning physically, socially, emotionally, cognitively, and sexually, as one grows in a personal understanding of God? The next section will consider a holistic approach as an effective means of engagement in spiritual formation for single Christian emergent women.

Summary

Historically, Western Christianity demonstrated a dichotomous approach, basically dividing the topics of sexuality and spirituality, struggling to effectively integrate spirituality and sexuality.¹⁸⁵ The Church has an opportunity to reconcile with this population through modeling graciousness, honoring the creative goodness of sex, and the diversity of emergent sexual experiences.¹⁸⁶ Hirsh confirms “our sexuality is so interlaced with longing for and experience of spirituality that we cannot access one without somehow tapping into the other.”¹⁸⁷ Spiritual connectedness is what we are truly striving for as we express ourselves sexually. Rather than simply engaging with sex

¹⁸⁴ Carolyn M. Barry and Mona M. Abo-Zena, “The Experience of Meaning Making: The Role of Religiousness and Spirituality in Emerging Adults' Lives,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Emerging Adulthood*, ed. Jeffrey J. Arnett (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 631.

¹⁸⁵ Mahoney, “Qualitative Study,” 5.

¹⁸⁶ Ellison, 237.

¹⁸⁷ Hirsch, 23.

cognitively, healthy sexual connectedness is deeply experienced, as we surrender our soul's self protection to enter into authentic, holistic intimacy.¹⁸⁸

It is posited in this section that one's sexuality and sexual behaviors are normal aspects of human development and lifestyle, which can be influenced by external sources. None of the above secular or spiritual sources of influence or education have effectively addressed the integration of healthy sexuality and spirituality for emergent women. Emergent women are still experiencing disconnection from the Church in relation to their sexuality. Healthy spiritual identities will influence sexual behaviors. The spiritual formation journey, for emergent adults, must be taught intentionally, communicated clearly, and instructed specifically with respect to the purity and chastity aspects of a holy lifestyle. Emergent women would benefit from Christian sex education to combat the permissive sexual culture that they face as those seeking to live with congruent sexuality and spirituality. As we engage in conversations with emergent women, inviting them into a deeper relationship with God and engagement with scripture, God creates pathways for emotional healing and the potential for sexual integration.¹⁸⁹ Spirituality and sexuality are currently perceived in Christianity as separate and independent aspects of life, rather than considered to be intertwined means of unification that overcome isolation. The purpose of my dissertation is to consider ways to actively engage the Church in sexual conversations with emergent Christian women to create opportunities for spiritual formation. In section one I identified the challenge of emergent adult women as they try to reconcile their sexuality with their spirituality. In this section I have discussed gaps

¹⁸⁸ Anderson and Morgan, 117.

¹⁸⁹ Collins, 19.

found among the identified strategies designed to support healthy development, including integrative identity, sexuality, and spirituality, for emergent adults. The next section will consider ways to integrate healthy spirituality and sexuality, through intentional relationships, sexual education, and spiritual disciplines, and how it might lead to better outcomes in spiritual formation for engaging single Christian emergent women.

SECTION 3:

THESIS

Introduction

Find the door of your heart, you will discover
it is the door of the kingdom of God.
— John Chrysostom

Women have a unique capacity for community, allowing for beautiful interweaving between others and themselves. In recognizing their feminine sexuality within the image of God, women increase their threshold for healthy reciprocal relationships, extending beyond sexuality into all interpersonal interactions.¹⁹⁰ Mentoring, discipleship, lay counseling, and intentional friendships among women may operate as catalysts for exponential change in the ways that we view ourselves, our gifts, our senses of life purpose, and interactions with others. Within my counseling practice, I engage with hundreds of women battling inner voices of female comparison and self-hatred. Deeply imbedded lies about self-concept received from harmful environmental messages subtly whisper varied messages such as: 1) “You are not enough;” 2) “You are too much;” 3) “You are worthless;” 4) “You are unlovable;” and 5) “You are rejected.” If women experience freedom from unhealthy cognitive patterns, they could release cultural dependency for personal affirmation and identity formation. What if they looked to God for self-worth, believed and lived from his created value, discovered within themselves at their spiritual cores?

¹⁹⁰ Barger 134.

Healthy living prioritizes congruency and connection within essential aspects of life wellness. Seven primary components for health include: 1) physical, such as physiology, heredity, immunity, and strength; 2) emotional, such as self-esteem, stress-coping skills, and emotional expression; 3) spiritual, experiencing connectedness with God; 4) intellectual, valuing and clarifying information through a decision-making process; 5) sexual, involving gender and intimate connection with others; 6) social, building relationships, communication and conflict skills, and social awareness; and 7) cultural, making contributions to community by sharing skills and talents and embracing one's ethnic heritage.¹⁹¹ Skills fostering healthy self-concept may develop as emergent women journey through intentional processes to integrate sexuality and spirituality through spiritual formation.

The focus of my dissertation is to encourage active engagement, from the Church, with emergent Christian women, in spiritual formation through sexual conversations and integrated sex education. Healthy spiritual identities will influence sexual behaviors. Spiritual formation ushers individuals into the transformative process of Christlikeness, offering an opportunity for true character change resulting from intimate life in relationship with God. Changes occur from within. An incarnational lifestyle that is anchored in a healthy spirituality and integrated with healthy sexuality, engages emergent Christian women in the spiritual formation process.¹⁹² Rather than perpetuating the present culture's normative pattern of spiritual stagnancy, my desire is to see emergent

¹⁹¹ Anderson and Morgan, 116.

¹⁹² Nancy Bradley Warren, *The Embodied Word: Female Spiritualities, Contested Orthodoxies, and English Religious Cultures, 1350-1700* (Notre Dame, IN: U of Notre Dame Publishing, 2010), 29-30.

adults learn about a healthy lifestyle that includes both healthy spirituality and sexuality. The Church should take an intentional approach to integrating sexuality and spirituality, in place of the existing solution that simply hopes for a positive outcome from a random, culturally-driven model for education emergent women about sexuality. Through integrated resources and interpersonal connections, the Church can initiate emergent women in conversations and scriptural teaching about the connections of healthy spiritual growth and sexuality.

Definitions

Healthy Sexuality

Sexuality embodies the mysterious human need to reach out to others through both a physical and spiritual embrace. Healthy sexual drive is uniquely linked to spirituality, essentially born from the shared desire for sexual and spiritual connection. The desire for sexual connectedness originates from one's spirituality.¹⁹³ If sex is considered separate from holiness, one may also believe sex to be separate from his or her high spiritual aspirations. This mindset potentially leads an individual to a formational perspective of spirituality as a sexless mental engagement in dry, theological understanding, rather than a passionate engagement in the mysterious aspects of one's life.¹⁹⁴ Instead, sexuality is God's invitation for intimacy with others, as demonstrated by

¹⁹³ Ibid., 118.

¹⁹⁴ Moore, 142.

our innate human desire to connect, reach out, touch and embrace others through our emotions, intellect, and physicality.

Present culture wounds the concept of sexuality through the suppression of desire, recommending reconciliation of body and spirit through rediscovery of virtue and value of human eroticism.¹⁹⁵ Sex is an inherently spiritual experience of the soul, imitating the innate desire of spirituality to connect beyond us; desire drives sexual development, as one vulnerably risks self-discovery and being known.¹⁹⁶ Sexuality is a central aspect of being human throughout life and encompasses sex, gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy, and reproduction. Sexuality is experienced and expressed through our thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behavior, practices, roles, and relationships, although not all aspects are incorporated in normative life for many individuals. Sexuality is influenced by the interaction of biological, psychological, social, economic, political, cultural, ethical, legal, historical, religious, and spiritual factors, impacted by messages received about one's body, gender, sexual desire, and relational modeling over a life span.¹⁹⁷

Healthy sexuality gives life to another, bringing an aspect of healing and freedom founded in an environment of safety, acceptance, and celebration of one another. "To develop a theology of healthy sexuality, we are first recaptured by a vision of the God who permits, One who rejoices in us and in His creation."¹⁹⁸ The integration of sexuality

¹⁹⁵ Bowles, 71.

¹⁹⁶ Grosch-Miller, 194.

¹⁹⁷ Bowles, 63.

¹⁹⁸ Hirsch, 4.

and spirituality is a paradigm shift in the way individuals relate to his or her emotional, sexual, and spiritual needs, expanding current cultural models for relationship to accommodate one's individual growth and a collective social evolution.

Celibacy. Jesus chose to live a celibate life, as did the apostle John, according to traditional Hebrew writings.¹⁹⁹ Jesus confirms, in the Book of Matthew, that the gift of singleness was not for everyone, “not everyone has the capacity for that, but only those to whom it has been given” (Matt. 12:11). A celibate calling isn't about ignoring sexuality or living a gender-neutral life; rather, celibacy is about sexual fasting, awakening the deeper wells of spirituality while overcoming associated demons of loneliness.²⁰⁰

Paul addresses the topics of singleness and marriage in his letters to the early churches of the New Testament. “I wish that all of you were as I am. But each of you has your own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that. Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I do” (1 Cor. 7:7-8). The church in Corinth determined that celibacy would be a requirement for its members, rather than affirming sexuality within marriage. Paul responded to them and provided insight into God's design for sexuality, starting with the beliefs that both celibacy and sex within marriage are good. As he acknowledged the necessity and blessing of sexual love within

¹⁹⁹ Aubrey W. Argyle, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 145.

²⁰⁰ Lawrence Wright, “The Sensual Christian,” *Rolling Stone* (November 14, 1991): 78.

the covenant marriage relationship, Paul also rejected the extreme positions of the debate about sexual behavior.²⁰¹

Paul also writes, “An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord’s affairs: Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit” (1 Cor. 7:34). For those who are able to live in self-control over their sexual desires, Paul shares of a preferable, single life for Christians; he was speaking of permission for a single life set apart for focus on God and holiness, not a commandment to singleness and celibacy. This passage is often interpreted to infer that celibacy is a pleasing calling from God, useful for service in the Kingdom of God through one’s unhindered cognitive, emotional, and spiritual capacity with God, which is reserved for one’s spouse in a marriage.²⁰²

Feminine Sexuality. Healthy feminine sexuality invites women to love others with an innate unconditional acceptance rooted in mercy and compassion.²⁰³ Healthy feminine sexuality incorporates holistic female wellness, including: 1) physical, inherited biological factors influencing sexual responses from conception and throughout the life span; 2) cognitive, appropriate sexual knowledge that respects oneself and others; 3) emotional, possessing awareness and comfort relate to one’s sexuality and desires; 4) social, achieving appropriate self-disclosure and sustainability of intimate friendships and relationships; 5) moral, sexuality characterized by faithfulness, health, enrichment, and congruency with spiritual and personal life commitments; 6) spiritual, awareness of God

²⁰¹ Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011) 115-118.

²⁰² John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Matthew 16-23* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1988), 175.

²⁰³ Carter, 25.

and the sacrament of sexual expressions and desires.²⁰⁴ Mentoring, discipleship, lay counseling, and intentional friendships among women can be catalysts for exponential change in the ways that we view ourselves, our gifts, our senses of life purpose, and interactions with others. When recognizing their feminine sexuality within the image of God, women increase their capacity for healthy reciprocal relationships as they extend beyond sexuality into all interpersonal interactions.²⁰⁵

Marriage. “Marriage is the God-ordained type of the love of Christ to His church.”²⁰⁶ Healthy marriages base themselves on self-denial and self-giving, even though both attributes contradict human nature. “True intimacy with your spouse is accomplished by sharing feelings, needs, perceptions, core beliefs, and desires in a safe environment, knowing you won’t be blamed, judged, or rejected if you do.”²⁰⁷ Marriage is one way to express the discipleship of Jesus and be a living witness to God’s faithful love, as discipleship together can become life’s priority.²⁰⁸

When a married couple agrees to engage in sexual intimacy, their unity is more than genital engagement. They become totally available, mind, body, and spirit, and fully accepting of one another. Covenant sexuality demands total surrender of oneself to

²⁰⁴ Hathaway, 33.

²⁰⁵ Barger, 134.

²⁰⁶ Andrew Murray, *Holiest of All: an Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Ann Arbor, MI: Hardpress Publishing, 2012), 519.

²⁰⁷ Debra Laaser, *Shattered Vows: Hope and Healing for Women Who Have Been Sexually Betrayed* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 230.

²⁰⁸ Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Here and Now: Living in the Spirit* (New York: Crossroad, 1994), 181.

another person until nothing more is left to offer.²⁰⁹ The relationship of marriage postures couples to engage with the innate conflict of natural selfishness, calling couples to give fully to one another and God in sexuality, spirituality, emotionality, cognition, and marital relationship. Within the safe boundaries of covenant marriage, lovemaking between husband and wife may become a place of healing, safety, security, vulnerability, and being fully known. In healthy marital sexuality, God's love is deeply imparted to all parts of one person through the mediation of their beloved spouse.²¹⁰

Healthy Spirituality

Spirituality is a central thread, one essential to identity formation and life-wellness around which one may weave his or her life.²¹¹ Life-enhancing spirituality has a zest for loving, acknowledging, and accepting passions, longings, and desires and integrating them into the fabric of life.²¹² Humanity is born with the readiness and capacity for faith development, originating from within rather than from external influences.²¹³ Although a small sample of emergent adults reported some prioritization of

²⁰⁹ Jack Dominian, "Sex Within Marriage," in *Sexuality and the Sacred Sources for Theological Reflection*, ed. James B. Nelson and Sandra P. Longfellow (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 267.

²¹⁰ Jean Ponder Soto, "Redeeming Eros: A Christian Ethical Spirituality of Sexual Intimacy," Dissertation Abstracts International Section A: Humanities and Social Sciences (2003), 212.

²¹¹ Sandra R. Kirchner, "Following the Thread: Female Identity and Spirituality," Dissertation, Dissertation Abstracts International: Section B: The Sciences and Engineering (2009), 13.

²¹² Bowles, 21.

²¹³ Reymann, 10.

religiousness and spirituality,²¹⁴ healthy spirituality is not simply belief in God, association with religion, or frequent church attendance. Healthy spirituality, not inherited from family of origin, community, or culture, results from one's personal response to God in the deepest longings of the individual's spirit and soul.²¹⁵

Meditation and Prayer. Christian meditation is cultivating the ability to hear God's voice and to obey his word. Meditation integrates an authentic, intimate fellowship with God into all areas of life. The spiritual practice of Christian meditation allows for increased personal freedom and wholeness, guiding us into a place of deeper surrender to God and his will for our lives.²¹⁶ Prayer is an essential practice of a healthy spiritual life. Prayer is one of the primary ways to communicate with God and grow in our relationships with him. Prayer is not simply about placing desires and concerns before God.

Solitude and Silence. The spiritual practices of solitude and silence intentionally seek time spent alone with God, accessing useful spiritual resources helpful in combating innate loneliness and fear often hidden within humanity. "When we go into solitude and silence, we stop making demands on God. It is enough that God is God and we are his. We learn we have a soul, that God is here, and this world is 'my Father's house'"²¹⁷ While isolation create a sense of inner emptiness, solitude with God results in inner fulfillment. Sensitivity and compassion are the fruits of a disciplined spiritual life, as an

²¹⁴ Magyar-Russell, Deal, and Brown, 44.

²¹⁵ Benner, 76-77.

²¹⁶ Foster, 64.

²¹⁷ James Bryan Smith, *The Good and Beautiful Life: Putting on the Character of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009): 166.

individual embraces the regular practice of time spent alone with God. Healthy spirituality, although grounded in a disciplined life of solitude, is best demonstrated by communal living.²¹⁸

Spiritual Disciplines. Healthy spirituality is not inherited from family of origin, community, or culture; rather, it arises from a personal response to one's deepest longings and life experiences, always dynamic, evolving, and changing. Healthy spirituality requires discipline and diligence to create life space in which God can act. "Without the labor of discipline there can be no rest in love."²¹⁹ Spiritual disciplines position individuals in open postures before God as they allow themselves to become receptive to the transformative power of the Holy Spirit found within.²²⁰ Through engagement with spiritual exercises, intimacy with God strengthens, essential self-care begins, and self-esteem finds fertile soil in which to grow. A disciplined life prevents every moment from being filled up and creates space for something unexpected to happen.²²¹ Four benefits that most spiritual disciplines offer: 1) boundaries; 2) sense of right and wrong; 3) framework for discernment; and 4) forgiveness and redemption.²²²

The Church can minister to emergent women through healthy spiritual exercises such as: sacred listening, spiritual guidance, community, celebration, scriptural teaching,

²¹⁸ Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Spiritual Direction* (Cincinnati, OH: Forward Movement Publications, 1981), viii.

²¹⁹ Thomas Merton, *Contemplative Prayer* (New York: Image Books/Doubleday Religion, 2009), 36.

²²⁰ Richard J. Foster, *Streams of Living Water: Celebrating the Great Traditions of Christian Faith* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998).

²²¹ Nouwen, *Here and Now*, 97.

²²² Donna Freitas, *Sex and the Soul: Juggling Sexuality, Spirituality, Romance, and Religion On America's College Campuses* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 227.

and prayer. Emergent women will benefit from small group, large group, and individual instruction encouraging them in spiritual growth, sexuality, relationships, life purpose, personal value, healthy lifestyles, and vocational challenges. Rather than silent apathy, the Church has an opportunity to demonstrate an open attitude related to sexual conversations, one which includes concern, engagement, knowledge, and commitment to faithfully invest in the lives of emergent women as they attempt to navigate through all life stages, including sexuality and gender role definition, contained within the spiritual formation process.

Integrating Sexuality and Spirituality

Conversations Related to Spirituality and Sexuality

Conversations with emergent women must be approached in such a way that they trust and feel safe and valued by all who participate.²²³ As they respond to invitations for conversations related to Christian perspectives on spirituality and sexuality, emergent women receive opportunities to make new life choices and recognize potential circumstances that could lead to incongruence between their spiritual beliefs and sexual behaviors.

The Church has opportunities to teach emergent women about healthy spirituality, the mystery and holiness of sexuality, and ways sexuality reflects the mystery of the human need to reach out for the physical and spiritual embrace of others by linking

²²³ Collins, 20.

sexuality and spirituality as unique dimensions of health.²²⁴ Sex momentarily satiates the longing for intimacy as priceless bonds of mutual trust are forged over life-long pursuit.²²⁵ Healthy spirituality and sexuality require willingness, vulnerability, openness, and harmony even in the midst of unpredictable interpersonal relationships, often maturing and evolving over time.²²⁶

Education and Ethics. Sexual purity, along with obedience, is essential to an integrative sexual ethic.²²⁷ Grace is also an essential component of integrated sexuality and spirituality, creating a powerful internal structure for sexually integrated ethics. Healthy sexual ethics are created by: 1) learning how to be with one another through life journeys; 2) enabling grace so that married partners can grow into gracious lovers; 3) learning about one another through body intimacy; 4) learning about ourselves through holy, sexual encounters; and 5) wrestling with one's compelling values impacting sexuality.²²⁸ As emergent women evaluate personal ethical stances and relative ethical challenges in safe conversations with the Church, they have an opportunity to widen their perspectives to include a sexually integrative approach.²²⁹

²²⁴ Anderson and Morgan, 118.

²²⁵ Daniel C. Maguire, "Sex and the Sacred," *Cross Currents* 54, no. 3 (2004): 29-30, <http://www.crosscurrents.org/Maguire0304.htm>.

²²⁶ Percy, 100.

²²⁷ Charles Taylor, "Sex & Christianity: How Has the Moral Landscape Changed?" *Commonweal* 134, no. 16 (September 24, 2007): 14, <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/sex-christianity>.

²²⁸ Grosch-Miller, 190.

²²⁹ Katia Moles, "Teaching Sexuality and Christianity for Perspective Transformation: Suggested Resources and Strategies," *Teaching Theology & Religion* 20, no. 2 (April 2017): 179, <https://doi.org/10.1111/teth.12385>.

Simply informing emergent women about Christian sexual ethics and exhorting them to abide by them does not equip them to engage with spirituality and sexuality in healthy ways. Effective integrative sexual teaching requires a certain acceptance of uncertainty, risk, vulnerability, and ambiguity to navigate spiritual perspectives within a diverse sexual culture.²³⁰ Emergent women can benefit from spiritually based sex education alternatives supporting the creation and internalization of personal Christian sexual ethics and a realistic understanding of healthy human sexuality to ignite healthy integration between sex and faith.²³¹ God instructs humanity through scripture, with absolute, unchangeable moral laws meant to govern sexuality.²³² Genesis offers clarity about integrated sexual ethics through two instructive ideas.

Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being (Genesis 2:7). So God created mankind in His own image, in the image of God He created them; male and female He created them. God saw all that He had made, and it was very good (Gen. 1:27, 31).

These verses affirm that human bodies are of the earth and that the earth and everything in it is “very good.” Genesis also confirms that humanity is created in the image of God. These two concepts provide guideposts for recovering healthy meaning from human

²³⁰ Teresa Delgado, “Metaphor for Teaching: Good Teaching is Like Good Sex,” *Teaching Theology & Religion* 18, no. 3 (July 2015): 231, <https://doi.org/10.1111/teth.12385>.

²³¹ Grosch-Miller, 189.

²³² Billy Graham, “God’s View of Sex,” *Decision* 56 (August 25, 2015), <https://billygraham.org/decision-magazine/september-2015/gods-view-of-sex/>

sexuality.²³³ Sexual ethics of character ultimately defines what kind of person one wants to be.²³⁴

Interpersonal Connection. Emergent women desire safe, healthy, spiritual resources to turn to in the identity-formation process. Whether an individual, counselor, or a religious organization, safe and discreet people are needed for them to unburden their hearts of concerns, hurts, pain, and suffering.²³⁵ Recent research reveals that emergent women who participate in organized religious communities may experience increased spiritual growth.²³⁶ Emergent women often prefer informal gatherings that provide opportunities for small group engagement with others. These communities significantly shape the convictions and beliefs of emerging women by emphasizing the social and relational aspects of faith, exploring spiritual beliefs, and offering mentorship to guide younger members who are in the faith exploration process.²³⁷

Community engagement often leads to beneficial outcomes, such as positive moral motivations, for emergent adults.²³⁸ Recent research reveals that emergent women may experience increased spiritual growth as they participate in organized religion, raising the possibility that these gains result due to increased social influences from faith

²³³ Barger, 129.

²³⁴ Marva J. Dawn, *Sexual Character: Beyond Technique to Intimacy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 34.

²³⁵ Fenelon and Backhouse, 102.

²³⁶ Reymann, 44.

²³⁷ Whitney and King, 140.

²³⁸ Lee, 60.

communities.²³⁹ Christians have opportunities to provide ministry for emergent women through sacred listening, spiritual guidance, community, celebration, scriptural teaching, and prayer. When offering authentic concern and faithful investment in the lives of emergent women through spiritual community, the Church communicates its desire to play an integral role for single emergent women as they navigate through life challenges, including sexuality, spirituality, and gender roles.

Through authentic conversations with other Christians about sexuality and spirituality, emergent women may learn more about God through scripture and identify with cultural biases that may skew appropriate gospel interpretation. As they dialogue with the Church about topics such as sexuality and spirituality, emergent women are offered new ways of relating to God, theology, and scripture from a supportive spiritual context that prioritizes peace, truth, justice, and safe community.²⁴⁰ Emergent women are more likely than emergent men to discuss sexual issues, such as dating, fertility and abstinence with peers and other social support.²⁴¹ Faith congregations offer physical sites for personal and collective transformation. For a subgroup of emerging adults, such communities are central and provide invaluable resources of comfort and developmental grounding.²⁴²

²³⁹ Reymann, 105.

²⁴⁰ Turner, 49.

²⁴¹ Carly K. Friedman and Elizabeth M. Morgan, "Comparing Sexual-Minority and Heterosexual Young Women's Friends and Parents as Sources of Support for Sexual Issues," *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 38, no. 7 (August 2008): 922, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-008-9361-0>.

²⁴² Carolyn McNamara Barry and Mona M. Abo-Zena, "Seeing the Forest and the Trees," in *Emerging Adults' Religiousness and Spirituality*, ed. Carolyn McNamara Barry and Mona M. Abo-Zena (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 11.

Identify Formation

Individuals cultivate life narratives through varied formational influences, which can be reworked with new ideas resulting from new experiences leading to new narratives throughout their lifetimes. Meaning making is a key component of forming a healthy narrative within the identity formation process. Healthy identity is accomplished as individuals process feedback from life experiences and assign meaningful value to them.²⁴³ The evidence of an emergent adult's ability to make meaningful connections between experiences, personal history, and circumstances is crucial to accomplish successful identity development.²⁴⁴ In my counseling practice with emergent women, the willingness to engage in the transformational process is the primary indication of a client's success to meet desired spiritual, physical, emotional, and sexual goals. Without an individual willingness and internal commitment to finish the process of life change, efforts of other external supporters will ultimately be ineffective.

Successful navigation of identity crisis and commitment is crucial to identity formation.²⁴⁵ Identity crisis engages with meaningful alternatives to present concepts of self. Identity commitment requires personal investment to achieve one's selected identity elements. The willingness to change often accompanies the reality of personal pain, which is frequently a precedent of the transformative process. Individuals typically avoid

²⁴³ Charron, Malette, and Guindon, 99.

²⁴⁴ Johanna Carlsson, Maria Wängqvist, and Ann Frisén, "Life on Hold: Staying in Identity Diffusion in the Late Twenties," *Journal of Adolescence* 47 (2016): 227, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2015.10.023>.

²⁴⁵ Lauren A. Milner and Joseph R. Ferrari, "The Role of Goal Orientation in Emerging Adult Identity Processing Styles," *Identity* 10, no. 4 (October 2010): 271, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15283488.2010.523645>.

conflicts associated with change processes, hoping to avoid the painful circumstances that help to alter old behavior patterns, unhealthy cognition, and unproductive interactions with God, self, and others.²⁴⁶

Psychosocial Growth

As emergent women grow in personal emotional and spiritual identity, they also demonstrate increased capacity for self-awareness, self-preservation, self-affirmation, self-fulfillment, and autonomy. Healthy emergent women are characterized by taking personal responsibility for well-being, formation of life-meaning, physical and emotional health, and independence in making life decisions.²⁴⁷ They possess emotional maturity in acknowledging life's difficulties, addressing life's problems, and facing life challenges rather than simply running or hiding in fear.²⁴⁸ Greater personal engagement with religion and spirituality is generally associated with fewer symptoms of depression and anxiety for emergent women.²⁴⁹ Moreover, greater self-reported religiousness and spirituality are linked to greater subjective well-being, greater feelings of gratitude and purpose in life, and a greater sense of self-control, all of which are vitally important attributes for successful negotiation of life-challenges faced during emerging adulthood. Finally, more religiously and spiritually involved emergent adults often report greater quality of

²⁴⁶ Carter, 21.

²⁴⁷ Landgraf.

²⁴⁸ Svoboda, 26.

²⁴⁹ Mahoney, "Qualitative Study," 7-8.

parental relationships, greater involvement in organized activities, and greater perceived connection in social relationships.²⁵⁰

“For only a lived, holistic spirituality can be transformational, integrative, and capable of helping us become fully alive and deeply human.”²⁵¹ Healthy psychosocial development creates potential capacity for intimate relationships, as self-discovery increases capacity for healthy relating to others. As emergent women form healthy identities, they lay the necessary groundwork for meaningful relationships and necessary life responsibilities related to adult life.²⁵²

Engaging Emergent Women

Experiential Learning

Emergent adults benefit from learning processes incorporating an experiential development model.²⁵³ Experiential learning activates critical thinking and emotional responses.²⁵⁴ Experiential learning, along with critical reflexivity and relational teaching, empower emergent adults by increasing personal responsibility and positive outcomes

²⁵⁰ Magyar-Russell, Deal, and Brown, 44.

²⁵¹ Benner, 21.

²⁵² Denise Marie Hutter, “Weaving the Fabric of Culture: the Emergence of Personal and Collective Wisdom in Young Adults Participating in a Wilderness Rite of Passage,” Dissertation (2000), 22, Dissertation Abstracts International: Section B: The Sciences and Engineering.

²⁵³ Nathan C. Byrd, “Narrative Discipleship: Guiding Emergent Adults to ‘Connect the Dots’ of Life and Faith,” *Christian Education Journal* 8, no. 2 (2011): 249, <https://doi.org/10.1177/073989131100800202>.

²⁵⁴ Etty Vandsburger, Rana Duncan-Daston, Emily Akerson, and Tom Dillon, “The Effects of Poverty Simulation, an Experiential Learning Modality, on Students’ Understanding of Life in Poverty,” *Journal of Teaching in Social Work* 30, no. 3 (September 2010): 302, Taylor & Francis Social Science and Humanities Library.

through engagement, self-direction, collaboration, and integration related to knowledge concepts.²⁵⁵ Experiential models of learning benefit emergent adults by offering opportunities for participation, reflection, and adaptation of knowledge gained through selected learning processes.²⁵⁶

Narrative Discipleship

Narratives incorporate significant life events, such as high points, low points, and turning points to form personal identities and narrative life stories. Narratives help individuals understand lingering effects of difficult and formational life experiences and the roles that they play resulting from them.²⁵⁷ Narratives shape personal character, as individuals focus less on gender, relational, and vocational roles with more emphasis on the kind of person he or she desires to ultimately become. From a narrative perspective, individuals form their identities through elaborate narratives, ones that need to be reassessed throughout life as new understanding is attained through engagement in the ongoing experiences of life across time.²⁵⁸ Narratives are defined as stories created as individuals find meaning within experiences relating oneself to individual life events,

²⁵⁵ Julie A. Dodge, “‘But I Wouldn’t Do That’: Teaching Cultural Empathy” (DMin diss., George Fox University 2016), 24, 55. <http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/dmin/127>.

²⁵⁶ Yuhwa Eva Lu, Barbara Dane, and Arlene Gellman, “An Experiential Model: Teaching Empathy and Cultural Sensitivity,” *Journal of Teaching in Social Work* 25, no. 3/4 (2005): 91, https://doi.org/10.1300/J067v25n03_06.

²⁵⁷ Dumas, et al., 1532.

²⁵⁸ Carlsson, Wängqvist, and Frisén, 221.

family, culture, and history.²⁵⁹ Stories allow individuals to identify, form helpful connections, and express difficult thoughts and feelings related to personal life challenges.²⁶⁰

The principal challenge of personality development during emergent and young adulthood is the construction of narrative identity. Narrative identity is an evolving story of self that brings order and sensibility to One's lived experience, including the integration of self-distinctiveness with relational commitments. It attempts to reconcile the scenes, characters, and events of one's past with imagined prospects of the self in the future, and in a way that brings a sense of unity, purpose, and meaning to one's life.²⁶¹

As emergent women challenge unhealthy narrative and identity concepts, new life choices may occur and ultimately lead to congruency between their expressions of sexuality with their spiritual beliefs.²⁶² Healthy narratives strengthen notions that social support, such as family and friends, are crucial to mediate successful life transitions of emergent women.²⁶³

In my counseling practice, most emergent female clients work diligently through the narrative discipleship process to identify and reconstruct unhealthy narratives impacting perspectives of self, others, and God. Narrative discipleship analyzes and interprets personal life stories in new insight related to present circumstances, spiritual

²⁵⁹ Joanne M. Hall and Jill Powell, "Understanding the Person through Narrative," *Nursing Research and Practice* no. 293837 (February 28, 2011), <https://www.hindawi.com/journals/nrp/2011/293837/>.

²⁶⁰ Faith G. Harper, "Walking the Good Red Road: Storytelling in the Counseling Relationship Using the Film *Dreamkeeper*," *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health* 5, no. 2 (June 2010): 216-220.

²⁶¹ Hardy and Lapsey, 23.

²⁶² Dawn, 32-34.

²⁶³ Kerri A. Murphy, David L. Blustein, Amanda Bohlig, and Melissa Platt, "College to Career Transition: An Exploration of Emerging Adulthood," *Journal of Counseling & Development* 88, no. 2 (2010): 179, <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6678.2010.tb00006.x>.

community, and the biblical narrative.²⁶⁴ Narrative discipleship is highly suitable method for examining complex spiritual experiences as one creates “an open space for voicing lived experience which is not dependent on external evidence or objective detail.”²⁶⁵ Successful transition from unhealthy to healthy narratives offers emergent female clients opportunities to achieve greater measures of life wellness, spiritual growth, and sexual wholeness. Narrative reconstruction occurs through *restorytelling*; this transformative process of rewriting personal life stories frees individuals from restrictive barriers resulting from unhealthy narratives by evaluating and challenging existing beliefs while also considering new narratives.²⁶⁶ Three stages associated with the reconstructive process of *restorytelling* are 1) narration, telling personal life story; 2) reading, stepping back and reviewing the story to examine and identify new perspectives gained; and 3) rewriting, recreating the story with insight from new understanding.²⁶⁷ As emergent women gain awareness of the ways that former emotional experiences create unhealthy narratives, they are more likely to develop new ways to access and integrate emotional information effectively and constructively with their morality, identity, and ethical judgments.²⁶⁸

²⁶⁴ Byrd, 248.

²⁶⁵ Kirchner, 9.

²⁶⁶ Byrd, 251.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ Kaplan and Tivnan, 196.

Proposed Outcome

Spiritual Formation

Spiritual formation for emergent Christian women is the desired outcome of my dissertation, through engagement with an incarnational life in Christ in which healthy spirituality integrates with sexuality to produce healthy sexual behaviors. Spiritual formation occurs as individuals engage in the dynamic processes of personal growth: cognitively, emotionally, and behaviorally as they become wholly integrated persons.²⁶⁹ Without inner transformation, emergent adults are powerless to overcome temptations of sexual desire and physical longings, which may be incongruent with their spiritual beliefs.

Sanctification is the transforming process of God to purify individuals and prepare them for holy purposes. Emergent women report experiences of spiritual engagement during sexual intimacy, affirming for them that healthy, holy sexuality increases spiritual intimacy. Neurological changes associated with deep meditation and prayer are similar to neurological patterns associated with sexual activity, demonstrating the potential for shared connections between sexuality and spirituality within the human body.²⁷⁰ They experience sexual wholeness as part of the spiritual formation process, increasing the capacity of emergent women to embrace their bodies, form healthy self-

²⁶⁹ Lee and Charter, 22.

²⁷⁰ Martha Horn, Ralph Piedmont, Geraldine Fialkowski, Robert Wicks, and Mary Hunt, "Sexuality and Spirituality: The Embodied Spirituality Scale," *Theology & Sexuality* 12, no. 1 (2005): 82-83, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1355835805057788>.

concepts, and accept their natural sexual desires as God-designed and holy.²⁷¹ Healthy spiritual formation enhances holistic life, including one's emotions, sexuality, cognitions, creativity, longings, and desires. Spiritual formation ushers individuals into the transformative process of Christlikeness, recognizable by authentic character change resulting from intimate relationship with God.

Spiritual formation supersedes religious practices and personal willpower and results from God's own initiative and God's vital action to transform individual lives.²⁷² "Faith is the individual's way of finding coherence, meaning, and purpose in the midst of the complexities and diversities of life."²⁷³ The goal of spiritual formation is to become like Christ through the transformative work of the Spirit.²⁷⁴ Emergent women confirm that spiritual formation, specifically spiritual disciplines of community, scripture readings, spiritual conversations, and prayer,²⁷⁵ help them to effectively navigate life transitions.²⁷⁶ To successfully navigate their spiritual formation journeys, emergent women require spiritual guidance and engagement to be catalysts of deeper discussion,

²⁷¹ Nelson, James. "Reuniting Sexuality and Spirituality." *Christian Century* 104 (February 25, 1987): 189.

²⁷² Greenman and Kalantzis, 24.

²⁷³ Reymann, 9.

²⁷⁴ Greenman and Kalantzis, 10.

²⁷⁵ Catherine Kirwan-Avila, "The Waiting: A Student Discerns a Call to Religious Life," *America*, April 16, 2012, <https://www.americamagazine.org/issue/5137/faith-focus/waiting>.

²⁷⁶ Reymann, 269.

internalization, and application of biblical truths leading to transformational life change.²⁷⁷

Summary

Spiritual formation for emergent women begins with intimate connection to God, which includes sexual conversations and integrative sex education initiated by the Church purposed for relating to others and listening to the perspectives, experiences, and cultural contexts of others. Spiritual formation invites and educates emergent women about healthy spirituality integrated with healthy sexuality. Rather than perpetuating present culture's normative pattern of spiritual stagnancy, my desire is to see emergent adults learn about a healthy lifestyle that includes both healthy spirituality and healthy sexuality. Through integrated resources and interpersonal connections, the Church can initiate emergent women in conversations and scriptural teaching about the connections of healthy spiritual growth and sexuality.

Effective engagement in the spiritual formation process depends on the development of healthy concepts of spirituality and sexuality, in cultivating critical connections for emergent women related to the interdependent relationship between them. As emergent women grasp the positive impacts of healthy spirituality on sexual behaviors and individual identity, then they may communicate sexual challenges, relational struggles, and theological concerns within a spiritual community context without fear of judgment, silence, alienation, and associated feelings of shame and guilt.

²⁷⁷ Christy M. Hill, Book Review: "Heart-Deep Teaching: Engaging Students for Transformed Lives," *Christian Education Journal* 10, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 215-6, <https://doi.org/10.1177/073989131301000132>.

For emergent women, integrated concepts of healthy spirituality and sexuality are best taught through interpersonal relationships, by peers, families of origin, and faith communities which strive to listen and honor each young woman through a narrative learning process. Invitations for sexually integrative conversations create catalysts for interpersonal support, psychosocial growth, and successful engagement in their spiritual formation processes. Based on the information presented in this section, the following sections describe a retreat guide for engaging emergent Christian single women in conversations related to the integration of healthy spirituality and healthy sexuality leading to spiritual formation, and how that curriculum will be made available.

SECTION 4:

ARTIFACT DESCRIPTION

Summary

This dissertation considers the positive impact that healthy sexual conversations and effective spiritual interventions may have on single, Christian, emergent women. In Section 1, the problem was defined. During both historical and present times, the Church avoided topics related to sexuality. Instead, the Church offered apathetic responses or silence when challenged to address sexual issues affecting emergent women. Intentional instruction connecting spirituality to sexuality is noticeably absent for emergent Christian women, leaving them to formulate sexual perceptions based on culturally accepted sexual practices. Present culture no longer considers God to be the author or ultimate authority of sexuality. In addition, ineffective or nonexistent attempts at spiritually integrated sexual education resulted in emergent Christian women feeling unequipped to navigate sexuality in the both single and married life stages.

Section 2 discussed the ways that the Church and others have engaged with, or disengaged from, the topic of sexuality and the resulting effects on the emergent female demographic. Although influential, many cultural messages regarding sexuality are often inconsistent with scripture. Emergent women desire Christian sex education, hoping to counteract permissive sexual messages received from culture, as they seek congruency in their sexual and spiritual lives. Sexuality, based on the present cultural context, is perceived to be separate, rather than unified and intertwined, with spirituality. None of these resources, secular or spiritual, effectively addresses the need for resources

integrating healthy sexuality and spirituality for emergent women. As a result, emergent women still experience disconnection from the Church in relation to their sexuality.

In Section 3, the concepts of healthy spirituality and healthy sexuality were defined, leading to various means of effective instruction about sexuality from an integrative perspective. Integrated sexuality is defined as innate longing, born from the internal core of persons, offering a tangible expression of God's love through covenant relationship by reflecting spiritual intimacy. The ultimate outcome is effective engagement of emergent Christian women with the spiritual formation process, beginning the integration of sexuality with spirituality through intentional conversations. This section proposes that clarifying teachings, regarding the theological perspective of sexual ethics and education, and safe conversations are useful interventions to initiate connection with emergent Christian women.

The proposed methods of integration for healthy spirituality and sexuality include:

- Intentional interpersonal relationships formed through facilitated small group discussions;
- Teaching guide within a large group format, utilizing a narrative discipleship model through with stories of Biblical women to address healthy spirituality, healthy sexuality, and sexual ethics from a scripturally based perspective;
- Experiential exercises creating structure for personal application of the curriculum.

The desired outcomes resulting from engagement with the artifact are:

- Effective integration of sexuality with spirituality, through spiritual conversations, teaching integrated sexual ethics and education;
- Healthy identity formation process, including spiritual and emotional development;

- Engagement in the spiritual formation process beginning with conversations engaging sexuality from a spiritually integrated perspective.

By fostering interpersonal connection and sexual conversations, the Church invites emergent women into learning environments to consider sexuality from a spiritual context. The proposed solution is designed to encourage emergent women in their development of a healthy lifestyle, including self-concept, spirituality, and sexuality, and in their engagement with the spiritual formation process.

Artifact Description

The artifact is a retreat guide, one that I will lead, which is designed to engage emergent adult women with teaching integrating sexuality with spirituality, experiential exercises, and small group discussions. Developed for emergent Christian single women, the retreat materials may also benefit other female demographics, such as adolescents, single women of various ages, married women, and individuals involved in ministerial and educational contexts where teachings related to female spiritual formation and healthy sexuality are beneficial. The guide is designed: 1) to engage emergent women in conversations integrating spirituality with sexuality; 2) to assist emergent women by increasing awareness of healthy spirituality and healthy sexuality; 3) to increase awareness of healthy identity formation; and 4) to create avenues for communication, through sexual conversations, for effective introduction to the spiritual formation process. This guide may be adapted as an intensive educational course, an individual independent study, or a weekend curriculum, such as the proposed retreat format. If offered as an independent study, participants will benefit from having a preliminary understanding of

personal spiritual identity, Christian ethics, scripture, and an awareness of present cultural perspectives regarding feminine sexuality.

The retreat guide is one that I will facilitate to introduce engaging emergent women to the spiritual formation process through biblical teachings and sexually integrated conversations. After implementation and further development, the guide will transition into a book proposal for consideration as a published resource. The guide is titled, *God Likes Sex: Conversations Integrating Spirituality and Sexuality*. The retreat format includes three teaching sessions and three small group sessions, which may take six to nine hours of large group instruction and small group reflection. The retreat guide begins with an introduction to address the need for integration of healthy spirituality with healthy sexuality. The Teaching Guide and PowerPoints are included in Appendix B and C. The three sessions include the following stories:

Session 1: Hagar Narrative

- Teaching 1
- Small Group 1
- Friday Night Reflection
- Saturday Morning Meditation

Session 2: Sarah Narrative

- Experiential Exercise 1
- Teaching 2
- Small Group 2
- Experiential Exercise 2

Session 3: Ruth Narrative

- Teaching 3
- Small Group 3

Each session includes 1) introduction; 2) identified goals; 2) objectives; 3) materials needed; 4) session outline; 5) session discussion/teaching in a PowerPoint presentation; and 6) photo credits and bibliography. If applicable, supplemental materials are either suggested or included. The retreat guide also includes experiential exercises, based on current research about effective learning models for emergent women and my personal observations while teaching, counseling, and ministering to this demographic over the past ten years.

Application

Throughout this dissertation, I have argued that the Church's silence and avoidance of sexual topics may have contributed to the confusing cultural messages that emergent adults receive regarding sexuality, possibly resulting in their spiritual disengagement. Providers of previous secular and spiritual sexual resources have unfortunately been ineffective in addressing the need for spiritually integrated sexual education for emergent women. I do not believe that the Church is presently trying to intentionally ignore, confuse, or isolate congregants needing support and understanding. It is my belief that the Church and its clergy are challenged to produce adequate resources to equip them for engagement with sexual issues

God Likes Sex: Conversations Integrating Spirituality and Sexuality attempts to increase the Church's awareness of the critical need to engage emergent women in spiritual formation to create a healthy view of sexuality from a spiritual foundation. Spiritual formation for emergent women begins with the Church's initiation of sexual conversations and integrative sex education, which seeks to define healthy sexuality and its dependence upon healthy spirituality. This dissertation proposes that the first step

toward engagement of emergent women with the spiritual formation process is through intentional conversation integrating sexuality with spirituality. Emergent women are forming their perspective of sexuality from cultural influences and mixed messages received from the Church, rather than from the values, beliefs, and practices outlined in scripture for a healthy lifestyle including sexuality and spirituality.

The retreat guide incorporates a narrative discipleship approach to teaching emergent women about healthy spirituality and sexuality through interacting with stories of women in scripture. The facilitated small group discussions provide opportunities for emergent women to have intentional conversations with peers, related to integration of spirituality and sexuality within a safe context, to consider how culture shaped the sexual and spiritual narratives of Biblical women and ultimately their own. Experiential exercises create opportunities for personal application of new narratives based on knowledge gained from the retreat guide to form a healthier sexual and spiritual narrative.

The development of the retreat guide is based on the hypothesis that healthy spiritual identities will influence sexual behaviors. The Postscript will include further consideration of the hypothesis. The assumption is not that healthy spirituality alone will definitively result in healthy sexual behaviors. Healthy spirituality, resulting from engaging in the spiritual formation process, is the standard of truth with which messages received from other influences, such as culture, families of origin, and peers, may be compared to discern whether the communication is truth. However, I believe that healthy spirituality, resulting from spiritual formation, is the key to a healthy lifestyle, including personal identity, sexuality, and intimate relationships.

Summary

Historically, the Church often responded with apathy or silence regarding topics related to sexuality, rather than providing a theological foundation for healthy sexuality. Previous resources, designed for sex education from both secular and spiritual contexts, failed to present an effective model of spiritually integrated sexuality for emergent women. The primary hypothesis of this dissertation is that development of internalized healthy spiritual identities in emergent women will ultimately produce healthy sexual behaviors. This dissertation includes a discussion affirming the need for integration of sexuality and spirituality, exploring previous attempts, both secular and spiritual, to educate emergent women about sexuality, presenting definitions of healthy sexuality and healthy spirituality, and suggesting a model and methodology to instruct emergent women about sexuality from a spiritually integrated perspective.

This dissertation journey culminates in a retreat guide intended to engage emergent women in the spiritual formation process through teachings and conversations connecting healthy spirituality to healthy sexual behaviors through scriptural teachings, small group discussions, and experiential exercises. The artifact guide is composed of three teaching sessions, implementing a narrative discipleship model with a scriptural basis, three small group facilitated discussions, and two experiential exercises designed to create opportunities for personal application of the retreat content and introduction to the spiritual formation process. The following section discusses the suggested goals, intended audience, guide content, proposed budget items, and publication standards for the retreat guide.

SECTION 5:
ARTIFACT SPECIFICATION

Artifact Goals

God Likes Sex: Conversations Integrating Spirituality and Sexuality is intended to engage emergent women in the spiritual formation process through a guide integrating healthy spirituality with healthy sexuality. The development of this artifact is purposed to engage emergent women in conversations related to sexuality from a spiritually integrated perspective. Another desired outcome is to raise awareness of the need for the Church to interact with emergent women and the challenges they face in present culture, beginning with teachings and discussions sharing theological evidence for the connections between healthy spirituality and healthy sexuality. The primary goal of this retreat guide is for emergent women to engage in spiritual formation resources through teachings and conversations integrating healthy spirituality with healthy sexuality. Future goals include evaluating the effectiveness of the guide from two perspectives: 1) effectiveness of the teachings in relation to the intended outcomes; and 2) consideration of additional conversations, sexual or otherwise, that emergent women desire to participate in from a spiritually integrative context. A secondary goal is to raise awareness within the Church of the ways that their silence and apathetic responses related to sexuality and challenging sexual issues, have negatively impacted emergent women and their views of spirituality.

Audience

The retreat guide is intended for use by instructors within educational or ministry environments. The guide was specifically developed for a weekend seminar but may also be used in education, ministry, small group, and individual learning contexts. While specifically developed for use with emergent single Christian women, the guide may also be appropriate for other demographics of women, small group or classroom settings, intensive learning seminars, and as an independent personal study. As a licensed professional counselor, former church director of small groups, and university ministry director of spiritual development, I plan to further research effective strategies and material for engaging emergent women in the spiritual formation process, ultimately leading to a book proposal as discussed in the Postscript.

Scope and Content

The artifact will be published as PDF document with the completion of my dissertation process with Portland Seminary at George Fox University, Portland, Oregon. Distributing the retreat guide in the PDF format requires the guide to be published by each hosting organization of retreat events. The retreat guide presentation PowerPoints will be displayed through visual technology during the retreat seminar as teaching resources for each session. However, it may also be downloaded as a PDF by request from the author. The artifact includes:

1. Introduction for Retreat
 - a. The need for integration of healthy spirituality with healthy sexuality
 - b. Rationale for methodology

- c. Goals and objectives
- d. Spiritual application

2. Teaching Guide

a. Session 1

- i. Goals and objectives
- ii. Materials needed
- iii. Session outline
- iv. Session PowerPoints
- v. Photo credits and Bibliography

b. Session 2

- i. Goals and objectives
- ii. Materials needed
- iii. Session outline
- iv. Session PowerPoints
- v. Photo credits and Bibliography

c. Session 3

- i. Goals and objectives
- ii. Materials needed
- iii. Session outline
- iv. Session PowerPoints
- v. Photo credits and Bibliography

3. Small Group Leader's Discussion Guide

a. Small Group Leader Instructions

b. Session 1

- i. Goals and objectives
- ii. Leader instructions
- iii. Small Group #1 discussion guide

c. Session 2

- i. Goals and objectives
- ii. Leader instructions
- iii. Small Group #2 discussion guide

d. Session 3

- iv. Goals and objectives
- v. Leader instructions
- vi. Small Group #3 discussion guide

4. Participant's Guide

- a. Retreat schedule
- b. Sessions #1, #2, #3 outlines
- c. Small groups #1, #2, #3 discussion guides
- d. Experiential Exercise #1
- e. Experiential Exercise #1 Card
- f. Friday Night Reflection
- g. Saturday Morning Meditation
- h. Experiential Exercise #2
- i. Journaling pages
- j. Retreat Evaluation form

5. Appendix

Each session of the retreat includes learning goals and objectives, suggestions for further study, accompanying visual PowerPoints, and experiential learning activities. The Appendix includes handouts for each section, copies of participant outlines for each teaching session, and other helpful resources. The Participant Guides follow a teaching outline for each session that coordinates to the PowerPoint visual presentation, with interactive material and allotted space for note taking and further written reflection.

Budget

Two financial areas must be considered in the creation of an appropriate budget for the artifact: the publication of the retreat guide and costs associated with retreat teaching seminars. As noted, *God Likes Sex: Conversations Integrating Spirituality and Sexuality* will be published as a PDF document initially by each hosting organization of the retreat seminar, unless another format is specifically requested. As such, the details of expense are minimal and yet still being defined, since the printed materials will be customized to meet the preferences of the hosting organizations and participants. Since the retreat guide has already been developed, the primary costs associated are with transferring retreat materials, printing guides, and any publication concerns, such as printing quality, timeliness, and appropriate transcription of document imaging.

In terms of cost for instruction or honorarium, the time, travel, distance, participation, and resources of the retreat host organization will determine the financial structure. If the retreat host chooses the presented PDF format, then the costs for publishing the leader and participant guides should be minimal. If they already possess the video equipment needed for sound and visual aids, then those aspects would not require additional cost. Facility and speaker costs, along with meals provided, registration materials, marketing, displays for experiential exercises, and unique costs applicable to specific locations, would be incorporated in participant registration fees and additional organizational sponsorships. Hosting organizations would need to determine the minimum number of participants required at pre-registration to cover the projected expenses allotted for the retreat event. Group consultation and training will be offered, for groups who choose to host and facilitate their own event, with a consultation fee in

addition to the material use costs. Specific costs, such as speaker fees, consultation fees, and material use fees, will be based on market research, transportation fees, and production costs and presented to hosting organizations prior to event booking.

Post-Graduation Considerations

This retreat guide is an initial offering for an effective avenue for integrated sexual conversations with emergent women to engage them in the spiritual formation process. The publication of the artifact will occur after graduation as I begin to engage in teaching pilot retreat seminars. The retreat guide is designed for publishing as a PDF document for use at scheduled events, although other style formats may be utilized as needed for effective presentation. The intent for this resource is to create an initial contribution that provides a foundation upon which to interact with ongoing research, evaluation, develop, and ultimately publish a book to be utilized as a spiritual formation vehicle for emergent women. Next steps include:

1. To test, revise, and update the retreat guide before distribution.
2. To publish the resource after graduation.
3. To market the retreat guide to churches, ministries, and schools for the purpose of scheduling retreat seminars to begin within one year.
4. To develop a website to offer more information related to the retreat guide, teaching qualifications, event cost and logistics, and resources for engaging emergent women around sexual topics from a spiritual perspective.
5. To incorporate present knowledge, attained through personal ministry, counseling, teaching experience, and research within dissertation process, with experiential evidence and feedback gained from emergent women through their engagement with the guide in the retreat seminar format.

6. And finally, to consider broader publishing options, such as completing a book proposal and ultimately writing a book on the integration of sexuality and spirituality as a spiritual formation resource for emergent women.

Standards of Publication

This dissertation has been written according to the Turabian style requirements and standards for research and dissertations, as required by Portland Seminary of George Fox University. However, these standards are often utilized for publications in my vocational helping field, Psychology, or in popular spiritual writing. If necessary, for future publications, citations and documentation will be transferred to the American Psychological Association (APA) standards for psychological publication.

A retreat guide requires no specific standard of publication, except for related publishing costs, which will be included in the retreat registration fee. The small group leader and participant guide materials will be likely distributed in a PDF format, for written materials and PowerPoints, unless an alternative format is required by the retreat event host. This resource is flexible and can be easily transferred into another format with minimal cost. This guide offers a visual learning aspect, (PowerPoints) in addition to auditory learning (teaching sessions) and kinesthetic learning (printed resources and experiential exercises). These methods support the teaching, ministry and counseling strategies that I utilize to incorporate holistic learning and engagement for all individual learning styles.

Summary

The highlight of this dissertation is the artifact, a retreat guide titled *God Likes Sex: Conversations Integrating Spirituality and Sexuality*. The retreat guide intends to

provide emergent women with opportunities to interact with spiritual formation through teachings and conversations integrating healthy spirituality with healthy sexuality. The guide was developed specifically for emergent women to be utilized as a retreat seminar within a church or ministry context. The guide includes an introduction regarding the need for education integrating sexuality and spirituality for emergent women, three large group teaching sessions, three small group facilitated discussions, and two experiential exercises. The guide also includes suggested reflection and meditation readings, journal pages, leader and participant guides, and as visual aids for teaching sessions.

The cost of instruction is dependent upon facility and resources of the retreat host organization, in addition to the host's desired format for guide publication. The retreat guide will be published as a PDF document, although future plans are to continue development and evaluation for intended involvement into a book proposal as a sexual and spiritual resource for emergent women. Guide availability, within other formats, is also being explored, such as 1) intensive class format; 2) small group study format; and 3) independent study format. I will continue to develop and evaluate the guide by utilizing the material within church, school, retreat, and classroom settings to receive feedback and further consider effective avenues for engaging emergent women with healthy spirituality and sexuality prior to writing the book proposal.

SECTION 6:

POSTSCRIPT

Ten years ago I began working with emergent women through ministry, discipleship, prayer, events, and teaching at the University of Georgia through the Wesley Foundation. As I engaged with thousands of emergent adults over the first five years of ministry, I recognized that they were not developing a healthy spiritual identity that was sustainable after leaving the nurturing community found within their campus ministry context. I listened to emergent women express their need for education and conversations related to the challenges of purity, sexuality, dating, permissive sexual behaviors, and spirituality, from an integrative perspective within counseling and ministry contexts.

Emergent adulthood is the life stage focused on identity formation, moral development, and sexual engagement, as many young men and women prioritize the formation of intimate romantic relationships. Emergent women may become spiritually barren within their new lives characterized by increased responsibilities from vocation, personal relationships, less discretionary time, and unfamiliar church environments. Although they expressed awareness of their spiritual disconnection, emergent women possessed neither the means nor the knowledge of the spiritual formation process in which they can reconnect to God and spiritual community. Because emergent adults have not learned to engage in spiritual formation, they often grow stagnant and many ultimately move away from former spiritual identity, instead adopting culturally formed worldviews which communicate unhealthy messages related to sexuality and identity.

As I was completing my graduate program in Professional Counseling, I completed an additional certification to enable me to also work with emergent adults through pre-engagement and pre-marital counseling. I started with this ministry by developing and implementing a new pre-engagement curriculum, utilizing varied Christian psychological resources and personal observations from previous counseling experiences. From my observations, through working with many emergent couples, I confirmed the gap between the high levels of spiritual engagement for emergent adults in campus ministries and the spiritual stagnancy and disconnection present within five years post-graduation. These noted outcomes led me to hypothesize that spiritualities and sexualities are permanently bound, whether healthy or unhealthy, and ultimately affect total life wellness for emergent adults. I began to consider the potential factors which isolated emergent adults from the Church and their former faith, looking for an entry point into from which to invite them into intentional conversations and engagement with spirituality and to offer ways for them to bridge the gap between spiritual dissonance into healthy spirituality.

As I started the Doctor of Ministry program, I desired to fully utilize the opportunities to further consider the identified problem. Over the past three years I have researched topics related to emergent women, healthy sexuality, healthy spirituality, spiritual formation, the integration of spirituality and sexuality, and effective interventions for engagement with emergent women. I created the artifact and dissertation with hopes of: 1) raising awareness within the Church for the needs of emergent women for spiritual formation and a theology for healthy sexuality, 2) providing a resource for emergent women that offers a healthy spiritual perspective of sexuality; and 3) engaging

emergent women with intentional conversations and experiential exercises integrating healthy spirituality with sexuality as an introduction to the spiritual formation process.

This dissertation and artifact are the capstone results of my doctoral research. My hypothesis, which exceeds the scope of this dissertation, is that the cultivation of internalized healthy spiritual identities, through the spiritual formation process, will ultimately produce healthy sexual behaviors in emergent women. Many steps remain before my hypothesis is determined to be true. The first step of the process was to create a methodology and model for engaging emergent women with teaching guides and groups purposed for intentional conversations. I found no other retreat guides specifically integrating sexuality and spirituality for the engagement of emergent women with the spiritual formation process. Therefore, I believe this retreat guide and dissertation are unique.

As previously mentioned, this dissertation marks the beginning point of my endeavor to engage emergent women with spiritual formation through the integration of healthy spirituality with sexuality. One challenge, identified through my dissertation process, was the lack of research previously done about methods of effective engagement of emergent women in spiritual formation. I also found little research concerning the impacts of unhealthy spirituality on sexual behaviors and unhealthy sexuality on spirituality for emergent women. No resources were discovered which utilize a retreat guide to engage emergent women in spiritual formation through integrating sexuality with spirituality. Another challenge for implementation may be the potential resistance of the Church to engage in spiritually integrated teachings and conversations related to spirituality. The Church historically modeled apathy, shaming, and silence in relation to

sexual topics. Therefore, the Church may be unwilling to overcome its former resistance and rigidity to connect with and inform emergent women about theological perspectives of sexuality. If the Church does choose to initiate integrative sexual teachings, another challenge may surface. Overwhelming hurt, pain, and brokenness, possibly resulting from sexual trauma, may be uncovered and the Church would not have adequate resources and education to meet congregants' needs. In addition to these challenges, many Christian denominations disagree about scriptural interpretations defining healthy sexuality. These differing perspectives may lead to further confusion, especially for emergent women, as they attempt to clarify spiritual perspectives related to healthy sexuality.

My next step is to further develop the retreat guide and additional supporting resources prior teaching the guide in both ministry and educational settings. For example, a Small Group Leader guide needs to be further developed and facilitated for Small Group Leaders within a training workshop format to be held before each retreat seminar event. It is my intention to transform this guide, after extensive implementation and revision, into a book proposal for intended publication. Future research and effective interventions are needed to continue to engage emergent women in the spiritual formation process through various media formats integrating spirituality with sexuality. I would like to consider other demographics targeted for engagement with healthy sexuality from a spiritual perspective. Emergent males will also greatly benefit from theological instruction related to sexual behaviors, dating, and ways to prepare for healthy marriage.

Finally, in considering ways to effectively integrate sexuality with spirituality for emergent women, the need for more sexual teachings from theological perspective was evident. What I discovered was a need for further clergy education around sexual issues

from a theological foundation. Seminary may not be providing adequate resources needed for the sexual challenges facing clergy within current faith congregations. I did not enter the dissertation process to interact with the current debates surrounding scriptural interpretation of sexual practices. As I continued in research about connections between healthy spirituality and healthy sexuality, I realize that the effects of the Church's historical silence and culture's influence of shaping of sexual views will have major implications for the continuation of the formal Church structure as we know it. The perceived apathy of the Church regarding sexuality is isolating emergent adults, who may be more concerned with sexuality and gender issues rather than sharing the social concerns of former generations. Emergent adults are leaving home and disengaging from structured faith communities, possibly due to lack of sexual engagement. These transitions of emergent adults away from spiritual communities have increased over time, indicating significant financial impact as they will quickly dominate the work force and hold the majority of culture's finances and power. Sexual topics, such as sexual identity and gender identity, presently challenge the Church and need further consideration to provide clarity regarding sexually integrative perspectives of marriage, ordination, and membership. The Church is challenged to engage in these hard conversations and provide a theological framework for sexuality for emergent adults, which may encourage them to reconsider their needs for healthy spirituality identities.

APPENDIX A:
TEACHING GUIDE



Teaching Guide

Introduction to Retreat Guide

Integration of Healthy Spirituality with Healthy Sexuality:

Both historically and presently, the Church chooses silent and avoidant responses to issues related to sexuality. Theological education and ethics instructing emergent women about the integrative relationship between spirituality sexuality is either insufficient or absent, leaving them to form their sexual contexts based on cultural norms rather than scripture. This tragedy negatively impacts sexual perspectives of emergent women, since present culture considers God to be neither the author nor the ultimate authority on sexuality. As a result, emergent Christian women are left feeling unequipped to navigate sexuality, congruent with their spirituality, during both single and married life stages. Emergent women are advocating for Christian sex education to counteract permissive sexual messages they receive from present culture regarding sexuality.

Rationale for Methodology:

Emergent women desire Christian sex education to combat the permissive sexual culture that they face as those seeking to live with congruent sexuality and spirituality. Emergent women desire safe, healthy, spiritual resources to turn to when in the identity formation process.

- Experiential Learning: Learning models that incorporate an experiential developmental exercise greatly benefit emergent adults.²⁷⁸ Experiential models allow emergent adults to have opportunities for deeper reflection and impartation of knowledge through these learning exercises.²⁷⁹
- Interpersonal Conversations: From safe conversations within a spiritual context, emergent women receive opportunities for evaluation of previously held beliefs as they enhance their knowledge to include an integrative approach to sexuality.²⁸⁰

²⁷⁸ Nathan C. Byrd, "Narrative Discipleship: Guiding Emergent Adults to 'Connect the Dots' of Life and Faith" *Christian Education Journal* 8, no. 2 (2011): 249, <https://doi.org/10.1177/073989131100800202>.

²⁷⁹ Yuhwa Eva Lu, Barbara Dane, and Arlene Gellman, "An Experiential Model: Teaching Empathy and Cultural Sensitivity," *Journal of Teaching in Social Work* 25, no. 3/4 (2005): 91, https://doi.org/10.1300/J067v25n03_06.

²⁸⁰ Katia Moles, "Teaching Sexuality and Christianity for Perspective Transformation: Suggested Resources and Strategies," *Teaching Theology & Religion* 20, no. 2 (Apr. 2017): 179, <https://doi.org/10.1111/teth.12385>.

Emergent women need safe and discreet people, especially from a spiritual context, with whom they may share their questions, hurts, pain, and suffering, specifically in relation to spirituality and sexuality.²⁸¹

- Narrative Discipleship: The principal challenge for emergent women is to persevere in overcoming the lingering effects of their formational life experiences to achieve healthy construction of narrative identity.²⁸² A narrative discipleship model includes: 1) sharing one's personal story; 2) considering the narrative through an existential lens; 3) attempting to reconcile past scenes, events, and characters; 4) connecting former experiences to present and future concepts of self; and 5) achieving greater sense of personal wholeness and significance.²⁸³

Goals and Objectives

Goals: The goals of the retreat guide are:

- Formation of healthy identity for emergent women, including spirituality, sexuality, and emotional development;
- Integration of sexuality with spirituality through effective educational resources for emergent women;
- Engagement of emergent women in the spiritual formation process.

Objectives: The objectives of the retreat guide include:

²⁸¹ Francois de Salignac de La Mothe Fenelon and Halcyon C. Backhouse, *Christian Perfection* (London, UK: Hodder and Stoughton, 1990), 102.

²⁸² Tara M. Dumas, Heather Lawford, Thanh-Thanh Tieu, and Michael W. Pratt, "Positive Parenting in Adolescence and Its Relation to Low Point Narration and Identity Status in Emerging Adulthood: A Longitudinal Analysis," *Developmental Psychology* 45, no. 6 (Nov, 2009): 1532, APA PsychNet.

²⁸³ Sam A. Hardy and Daniel Lapsley, "Identity Formation and Moral Development in Emerging Adulthood," in *Flourishing in Emerging Adulthood: Positive Development During the Third Decade of Life*, eds. Laura M. Padilla-Walker and Larry J. Nelson, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017), 23.

- Formation of interpersonal connections with emergent women through facilitated small group discussions and intentional conversations;
- Engagement with a narrative discipleship model through scripture study of women, connecting and contrasting them with integrative perspectives of healthy spirituality, healthy sexuality, and sexual ethics;
- Application through experiential exercises, structured to encourage reflection and internalization of the retreat guide.

Spiritual Application:

The purpose of the retreat guide is to engage emergent women in the spiritual formation process, beginning with conversations engaging sexuality from a spiritually integrated perspective. Emergent women are experiencing disconnection from the Church in relation to their sexuality. Recent research confirms that emergent women may experience increased spiritual growth as they participate in organized religious communities. As emergent women disconnect from the Church, likely due to its silence and apathetic responses related to sexuality, recent research challenges Christians to intentionally engage with emergent women, because participation in organized religious communities will likely result in emergent women experiencing spiritual growth.²⁸⁴

²⁸⁴ Linda S. Reymann, "Exploratory Study of Spiritual Development and Psychosocial Growth in College Students as Emerging Adults," Dissertation, (2010): 44, Dissertation Abstracts International Section A: Humanities and Social Sciences.

Session 1: Hagar Narrative

Materials Needed:

- Bible
- Session 1 Teaching Outline
- Session 1 PowerPoints
- Audio/Visual Equipment for PowerPoints and microphone
- Session 1 Participant Guide
- Friday Night Reflection
- Saturday Morning Meditation
- Experiential Exercise 1
- Teaching Podium
- Bottle of Water

Session 1 Introduction: “God’s Story”

The story of Hagar introduces us to a young Egyptian slave woman, one who has no control over her own body or sexuality. In her story, Hagar realizes that she truly belongs to what enslaves her. This narrative is significant for us because God shows us through Hagar that He sees our suffering, even if our circumstances indicate that we are forgotten. God hears Hagar’s cries and responds when she most needs Him, just as He does for us.

Session 1 Identified Goals:

- Initial presentation of God’s holy design for sexuality in scripture
- Initial identification of sexual ethics in scripture
- Initial establishment of connections between unhealthy spirituality, unhealthy sexuality, and unhealthy identity in women
- Introduction of spiritual formation exercises

Session 1 Objectives:

- Scripture study to uncover the integrative threads of spirituality and sexuality in the Hagar narrative

- Connections demonstrating impacts of unhealthy spirituality on sexual behaviors in the Hagar narrative
- Identification of God's storyline of love and faithfulness, specifically to women, beginning with the Hagar narrative
- Introduction of Friday Night Reflection, Saturday Morning Meditation, and Experiential Exercise 1, designed for reflection and discovery of personal narratives related to spirituality, sexuality, and identity
- Introduction of spiritual formation through study, community, meditation, worship, solitude, silence, personal reflection, and prayer

Session 1 Teaching Outline: "God's Story"

Instructions:

- Small groups 1
- Discussion questions 1
- Friday Night Reflection
- Saturday Morning Meditation
- Experiential Exercise 1

Hagar's Narrative

Scripture: Genesis 16, NIV

¹ Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. But she had an Egyptian slave named Hagar; ² so she said to Abram, "The Lord has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my slave; perhaps I can build a family through her." Abram agreed to what Sarai said.

³ So after Abram had been living in Canaan ten years, Sarai his wife took her Egyptian slave Hagar and gave her to her husband to be his wife. ⁴ He slept with Hagar, and she conceived. When she knew she was pregnant, she began to despise her mistress.

⁵ Then Sarai said to Abram, "You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering. I put my slave in your arms, and now that she knows she is pregnant, she despises me. May the Lord judge between you and me." ⁶ "Your slave is in your hands," Abram said. "Do with her whatever you think best." Then Sarai mistreated Hagar; so she fled from her.

⁷ The angel of the Lord found Hagar near a spring in the desert; it was the spring that is beside the road to Shur. ⁸ And he said, “Hagar, slave of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going?” “I’m running away from my mistress Sarai,” she answered. Then the angel of the Lord told her, “Go back to your mistress and submit to her.” ¹⁰ The angel added, “I will increase your descendants so much that they will be too numerous to count.”

¹¹ The angel of the Lord also said to her: “You are now pregnant and you will give birth to a son. You shall name him Ishmael, for the Lord has heard of your misery. ¹² He will be a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone’s hand against him, and he will live in hostility toward all his brothers.

¹³ She gave this name to the Lord who spoke to her: “You are the God who sees me,” for she said, “I have now seen the One who sees me.” ¹⁴ That is why the well was called Beer Lahai Roi; it is still there, between Kadesh and Bered. ¹⁵ So Hagar bore Abram a son, and Abram gave the name Ishmael to the son she had borne. ¹⁶ Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore him Ishmael.

Hagar’s Identity:

What’s in a Name?:

- “Hagar” possibly means "flight" in Hebrew.
- Hagar responded with “flight” in response to her desperate circumstances. Her salvation did not result from her flight to Egypt but from God. He saw Hagar, her suffering and quickly came to her rescue.

Slave:

“‘Your slave is in your hands,’ Abram said. ‘Do with her whatever you think best.’ Then Sarai mistreated Hagar; so she fled from her” (Genesis 16:6).” During the timeline of Hagar’s narrative, families grew in size by acquiring more slaves. Even though some slaves were treated as part of the family unit, they were still regarded as personal property.

Sarah treated Hagar in a way that was not customary with Hebrew law. Although Hagar was legally considered to be the property of her mistress, she was also entitled to

receive the customary benefits and good will attributed to loyal servants. She was not be oppressed by her owners and had the rights of Sabbath rest and attendance at national festivals. Only female slaves, ones sold as maidservants, remained bound to their owners for life.

Because of her unsafe circumstances, Hagar resorted to desperate measures as she chose to flee and risk her life. When Hagar realized she was unable to remain under the protection of Abraham, she began her quest to her homeland, Egypt, on the desert road.

Sexual Ethics

- Justice:

“The angel of the Lord also said to her: ‘You are now pregnant and you will give birth to a son. You shall name him Ishmael, for the Lord has heard of your misery’” (16:11). God heard her cries of and intended to respond to the injustices affecting Hagar and her unborn son.

- Restitution

God was asking Hagar to obey Him, trust Him as she walks back into her difficult situation, believing that He would somehow provide restitution, or compensation, as He protects her from unnecessary suffering.

- Why?

“Then the angel of the Lord told her, “Go back to your mistress and submit to her” (16:9). Hagar was called to obey and walk the harder path of humility and servanthood, rather than the false hope of security behind her desert flight. God was asking Hagar to obey Him, trust Him, and walk back into a difficult situation, believing that He would somehow bless her with something good as recompense for her suffering.

God’s call for Hagar to return and submit, likely resulting in more pain and suffering, likely brought the abused woman a sense of terror. And yet Hagar was courageous and chose to believe two divine promises made to her by God: 1) she would have numerable descendants; and 2) she was pregnant with a male child named Ishmael.

Why return to Abraham and Sarah? God gave her hope for a life beyond slavery. Hagar’s motivations were the Promises of God that her future generations would prosper and that her son wouldn’t become enslaved.

- God’s Storyline of Faithfulness

For the Hebrew people in the ancient times, this passage of scripture assured that the promises of God were true and would be fulfilled in His timing. The miraculous means that God used in bringing about His promised heir to Abraham sharply contrasted with the complicated substitute created by Sarai through Hagar and Ishmael. God demonstrated His faithfulness, even in the midst of human interference, by providing both identity and inheritance for Ishmael also.

Hagar named God, El Roi or the God Who sees me. Her identification of God results from divinely inspired revelation, confirming that He sees the afflictions of His people, His heart is moved with compassion, He meets us in the place of our affliction, and He acts on our behalf to bring about justice.

“The angel of the Lord found Hagar near a spring in the desert; it was the spring that is beside the road to Shur” (Gen. 16:7). God pursued Hagar even though she was not seeking Him. Hagar fled back to Egypt where she came from, by way of the desert road.

The desert can bring us to the point where we are finally willing to see and hear from God, even as we run from pain, suffering, poor choices, and often spirituality. God may lead forward in life, at times by way of the desert road, so that our attention focused solely on Him for connection, renewal, courage, vision, identity, strength and provision.

- Integrative Sexuality in Hagar Narrative

God sees You.

As with Hagar, God sees you in your present circumstances, He loves you, He will be with you, and He will help you no matter what type of suffering you are facing. He sees past our mistakes and can make your life new, no matter your former choices or present circumstances. Hagar’s story assures us that God’s redemption is available to everyone, even if you may be feeling that you are unseen or forgotten. He has a purpose, plan, and destiny for your life and it will be better than you can possibly imagine (Ephesians 3:19-21).

- Closing Prayer
- Small Group 1 Discussion Questions:
 - Where did you see God’s faithfulness threaded throughout the story of Hagar?
 - What did I learn about God’s design for sexuality that I did not know before?
 - How was unhealthy sexuality redeemed in the story of Hagar?
 - Silent Reflection: How am I like Hagar? How have I been hurt, even abused, sexually and/or spiritually? By whom? (Optional response: journaling or within group discussion).

Sources:

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Unless otherwise noted, all Biblical passages referenced are in the New International Version.

Session 2: Sarah Narrative

Materials Needed:

- Bible
- Session 2 Teaching Outline
- Session 2 PowerPoints
- Audio/Visual Equipment for PowerPoints and microphone
- Experiential Exercise 2
- Teaching Podium
- Bottle of Water

Session 2 Introduction:

The story of Sarah reveals the life of a Mesopotamian woman who follows her wandering husband, experiencing the consequences of his fears, which leave her sexually vulnerable multiple times. As her narrative unfolds, Sarah demonstrates the effects of unhealthy spirituality and sexuality on her identity and life choices. Her suffering multiplies as she also allows her fears to create painful consequences for others. God is faithful and forgiving to Sarah, keeping His promise to provide for her a child, in spite of her barrenness.

Session 2 Identified Goals:

- Continued presentation of God's holy design for sexuality in scripture
- Continued identification of theological sexual ethics pertaining to sexuality
- Continued establishment of impacts of unhealthy spirituality and sexuality on female identity
- Definition of forgiveness, specifically related spirituality and sexuality
- Engagement with spiritual formation exercises

Session 2 Objectives:

- Identification of ways that unhealthy sexuality impacts identity in the Sarah narrative
- Identification of God's ongoing storyline of love and faithfulness, specifically to women, found within the Sarah narrative
- Introduction of Experiential Exercise 2 allowing further reflection of personal narratives related to spirituality, sexuality, and identity

- Engagement with spiritual formation through devotion, study, community, prayer, soul friendship, solitude, silence, personal reflection, and worship

Session 2 Teaching Outline: “My Story”

Instructions:

- Small group 3
- Discussion Questions 3
- Worship and Closing Session

Introduction:

The story of Sarah reveals the life of a Mesopotamian woman who follows her wandering husband, experiencing the consequences of his fears, which leave her sexually vulnerable multiple times. As her narrative unfolds, Sarah demonstrates the effects of unhealthy spirituality and sexuality on her identity and life choices. Her suffering multiplies as she also allows her fears to create painful consequences for others. God is faithful and forgiving to Sarah, keeping His promise to provide for her a child, in spite of her barrenness.

Sarah Narrative

Scripture: Genesis 11: 29-30

“The name of Abram’s wife was Sarai, and the name of Nahor’s wife was Milkah; she was the daughter of Haran, the father of both Milkah and Iskah. Now Sarai was childless because she was not able to conceive.”

Scripture: Genesis 12: 5, 11-13

“He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Harran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there. As he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, ‘I know what a beautiful woman you are. When the Egyptians see you, they will say, ‘This is his wife.’ Then they will kill me but will let you live. Say you are my sister, so that I will be treated well for your sake and my life will be spared because of you.’

Scripture: Genesis 12: 14-20

When Abram came to Egypt, the Egyptians saw that Sarai was a very beautiful woman. And when Pharaoh's officials saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh, and she was taken into his palace. But the Lord inflicted serious diseases on Pharaoh and his household because of Abram's wife Sarai. So Pharaoh summoned Abram. 'What have you done to me?' he said. 'Why didn't you tell me she was your wife? Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her to be my wife? Now then, here is your wife. Take her and go!'"

Scripture: Genesis 16:1-2

"Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. But she had an Egyptian slave named Hagar; so she said to Abram, "The Lord has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my slave; perhaps I can build a family through her."

Scripture: Genesis 17:15-19

"God also said to Abraham, 'As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai; her name will be Sarah. I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her. Abraham fell facedown; he laughed and said to himself, 'Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?' And Abraham said to God, 'If only Ishmael might live under your blessing! Then God said, "Yes, but your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac."

Scripture: Genesis 20: 1-2, 9-12

"For a while he stayed in Gerar, and there Abraham said of his wife Sarah, 'She is my sister.' Then Abimelek king of Gerar sent for Sarah and took her. Then Abimelek called Abraham in and said, 'What have you done to us? How have I wronged you that you have brought such great guilt upon me and my kingdom? You have done things to me that should never be done.' And Abimelek asked Abraham, 'What was your reason for doing this?' Abraham replied, 'I said to myself, 'There is surely no fear of God in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife.' Besides, she really is my sister, the daughter of my father though not of my mother; and she became my wife.'"

Scripture: Genesis 21:1-3

“Now the Lord was gracious to Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did for Sarah what he had promised. Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him. Abraham gave the name Isaac^[a] to the son Sarah bore him.”

Scripture: Hebrews 11:11

“And by faith even Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was enabled to bear children because she considered him faithful who had made the promise.”

Sarah's Identity:

What's in a Name?

- Sarai = "princess"
- “Abram and Nahor both married. The name of Abram's wife was Sarai, and the name of Nahor's wife was Milkah; she was the daughter of Haran, the father of both Milkah and Iskah” (Genesis 11:29).
- Sarah = "noblewoman"
- “And God said unto Abraham, as for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall her name be” (Genesis 17:15).

Women:

The traditional role of women was to be subservient to men in the ancient Hebrew society. This role differential did not mean that they were disrespected or unloved. Rather, women's roles were important, especially valuable due to their capacity for childbirth within a culture centered on the family unit.

Motherhood and reproductive capability literally saved the lives of women during the time period of Sarah's narrative.

Sarah's Sexual Narrative:

- Abuse

“Abram agreed to what Sarai said. So after Abram had been living in Canaan ten years, Sarai his wife took her Egyptian slave Hagar and gave her to her husband to be his wife. He slept with Hagar, and she conceived” (Genesis 16:2-4).

Because she was a slave, Hagar had neither ability or legal right to refuse the orders of her mistress nor the sexual advances of Abraham.

- Adultery:

Although monogamy, one wife for each man, was considered to be the ideal, it was not strictly practiced during the patriarch period.

Many of the patriarchs had more than one wife or multiple concubines. Multiple marriages often caused unnecessary conflict within the patriarchal families.

The necessity for motherhood for ancient biblical women demonstrated the reasons why Sarah would rather Abraham take another wife, Hagar, than remain childless and disgraced.

“Abram agreed to what Sarai said. So after Abram had been living in Canaan ten years, Sarai his wife took her Egyptian slave Hagar and gave her to her husband to be his wife. He slept with Hagar, and she conceived” (Genesis 16:2-4).

Unfortunately, marriage does not guarantee that the couple will produce children, and childlessness was a shameful condition during the patriarchal period. Therefore, the conclusion may have wrongly been that God refused to respond to Abraham and Sarah, and ultimately fulfill His promises, for a son through natural means.

- Deceit

Abraham attempted to pass off Sarah as his sister instead of his wife, not once, but twice (Genesis 12 and 20). He told partial truths, possibly to protect her, but instead Abraham puts Sarah in dangerous situations, both sexually and physically. due to his fear and lack of trust in God.

Unhealthy Sexuality and Identity:

- Unbelief

Sarah's unbelief in God's faithfulness and ability to keep His promises led to unhealthy sexuality, spirituality, identity, and ultimately abuse.

Unbelief can keep me from seeing the fulfillment of God's promises in my life. So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief" (Hebrews 3:19).

Sexual Ethics:

- Consequences:

When Hagar knew she was pregnant, she began to despise her mistress, Sarai. Then Sarai said to Abram, "You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering. I put my slave in your arms, and now that she knows she is pregnant, she despises me. May the Lord judge between you and me" (Genesis 16:4-5).

- Manipulation and Control

Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. But she had an Egyptian slave named Hagar; so she said to Abram, "The Lord has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my slave; perhaps I can build a family through her." When Hagar knew she was pregnant, she began to despise her mistress. Then Sarai said to Abram, "You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering. I put my slave in your arms, and now that she knows she is pregnant, she despises me. May the Lord judge between you and me."

The miraculous means that God used in bringing about His promised heir to Abraham sharply contrasted with the complicated substitute created by Sarai through Hagar and Ishmael. Sarai and her anxiety, an unhealthy fear and an unwillingness to trust God, resulted in unnecessary suffering for all parties involved in her schemes.

If Sarah had continued to pray and seek God, the difficulty of the circumstances surrounding the pregnancy and birth of Ishmael would have not been necessary. God was planning to fulfill His promises to Abraham and Sarah without their intervention.

God's Storyline of Faithfulness:

For the Hebrew people in the ancient times, this passage of scripture assured that the promises of God were true and would be fulfilled in His timing.

The miraculous means that God used in bringing about His promised heir to Abraham sharply contrasted with the complicated substitute created by Sarai through Hagar and Ishmael.

God demonstrated His faithfulness, even in the midst of human interference, by providing an identity and an inheritance for Ishmael also.

- Forgiveness:

Definition: to pardon, to cease to feel resentment against, to grant relief from payment.

“And by faith even Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was enabled to bear children because she considered him faithful who had made the promise” (Hebrews 11:11).

Sarah ultimately achieves a relatively intimate connection with God. He directly intervenes on her behalf and keeps His promise to give her a son. Sarah's story demonstrates the availability for forgiveness and restoration in relationship between women and God.

- New Name, New Identity:

Sarah's identity transformation was evident as she received her new name. In Genesis 11, she is called *Sarai*, which means beautiful. In Genesis 17, God renamed her *Sarah*, which means nobility. Beauty without nobility may be settling for less healthy identity God desires for us.

Closing Prayer

Small Group 2 Discussion Questions:

- Where did you see God's faithfulness threaded through the story of Sarah?
- How did culture, unhealthy sexuality, and unhealthy spirituality influence Sarah's choices in her story?
- How do you see God's forgiveness impact Sarah's story, affecting her identity, sexuality, and spirituality?
- Silent Reflection: How have my choices affected others and myself in hurtful ways? How have others hurt me in ways that still negatively impact me today? (optional response: journaling or within group discussion).

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Unless otherwise noted, all Biblical passages referenced are in the New International Version.

Session 3: Ruth Narrative

Materials Needed:

- Bible
- Session 3 Teaching Outline
- Session 3 PowerPoints
- Audio/Visual Equipment for PowerPoints and microphone
- Session 3 Participant Guide
- Teaching Podium
- Bottle of Water
- Retreat Evaluation Form

Session 3 Introduction:

The story of Ruth introduces us to a young Moabite widow, one who has experienced great losses, of her homeland, family of origin, the hope of children, her father-in-law, and finally, her husband. In her story, Ruth finds herself at a crossroads of destiny, along with her mother-in-law, Naomi, and her sister-in-law, Orpah. The Ruth narrative confirms that God may allow, or even appoint, our difficult life circumstances to redirect our paths and lead us to new beginnings beyond our expectations and imaginations. God provides for us and is not indifferent to our sufferings. For Ruth, the losses, that at first seemed to be her ending, was actually turning the page for God's redemptive beginning. The Book of Ruth reveals God's desire to gently restore the lost and heal the wounded soul.

Session 3 Identified Goals:

- Continued presentation of God's holy design for sexuality in scripture
- Continued identification of theological sexual ethics pertaining to sexuality
- Identification of effects of healthy spirituality and healthy sexuality on identity formation for emergent women
- Definition of redemption, specifically related to spirituality and sexuality
- Continued engagement with spiritual formation exercises

Session 3 Objectives:

- Scripture study to uncover the integrative threads of spirituality and sexuality in the Ruth narrative
- Identification of ways that healthy spirituality impacts sexuality and identity in the Ruth narrative
- Invitation to consider means and desires for the creation of new personal narratives, relating to identity, sexuality, and spirituality
- Identification of God's ongoing storyline of love and faithfulness, specifically to women, found within the Ruth narrative
- Continued engagement in spiritual formation through study, community, prayer, personal reflection, worship, and soul friendship

Session 3 Teaching Outline: "New Story"

- Instructions:
- Small group 3
- Discussion Questions 3
- Worship and Closing Session

Introduction

The story of Ruth introduces us to a young Moabite widow, one who has experienced great losses, of her homeland, family of origin, the hope of children, her father-in-law, and finally, her husband. In her story, Ruth finds herself at a crossroads of destiny, along with her mother-in-law, Naomi, and her sister-in-law, Orpah. The Ruth narrative confirms that God may allow, or even appoint, our difficult life circumstances to redirect our paths and lead us to new beginnings beyond our expectations and imaginations. God provides for us and is not indifferent to our sufferings. For Ruth, the losses, that at first seemed to be her ending, was actually turning the page for God's redemptive beginning. The Book of Ruth reveals God's desire to gently restore the lost and heal the wounded soul.

Ruth Narrative

Scripture: Ruth 1:3-5

“Now Elimelek, Naomi’s husband, died, and she was left with her two sons. They married Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other Ruth. After they had lived there about ten years, both Mahlon and Kilion also died, and Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband.”

Scripture: Ruth 1:15-19

“But Ruth replied, ‘Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me.’ When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her. So the two women went on until they came to Bethlehem.”

Scripture: Ruth 1:19-20

“When they arrived in Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them, and the women exclaimed, ‘Can this be Naomi?’ Don’t call me Naomi,¹ she told them. ‘Call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter. I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The Lord has afflicted¹ me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me.’”

Scripture: Ruth 2:2-4

“And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, “Let me go to the fields and pick up the leftover grain behind anyone in whose eyes I find favor.” Naomi said to her, “Go ahead, my daughter.” So she went out, entered a field and began to glean behind the harvesters. As it turned out, she was working in a field belonging to Boaz, who was from the clan of Elimelek.”

Scripture: Ruth 2:5-8

“Boaz asked the overseer of his harvesters, ‘Who does that young woman belong to?’ The overseer replied, ‘She is the Moabite who came back from Moab with

Naomi. She said, ‘Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves behind the harvesters.’ She came into the field and has remained here from morning till now, except for a short rest in the shelter.’ So Boaz said to Ruth, ‘My daughter, listen to me. Don’t go and glean in another field and don’t go away from here. Stay here with the women who work for me. Watch the field where the men are harvesting, and follow along after the women. I have told the men not to lay a hand on you.’”

Scripture: Ruth 2:19-20

“Her mother-in-law asked her, ‘Where did you glean today? Where did you work? Blessed be the man who took notice of you!’ Then Ruth told her mother-in-law about the one at whose place she had been working. “The name of the man I worked with today is Boaz,” she said. ‘The Lord bless him!’ Naomi said to her daughter-in-law. ‘He has not stopped showing his kindness to the living and the dead.’ She added, ‘That man is our close relative; he is one of our guardian-redeemers.’”

Scripture: Ruth 3:2-5

“Now Boaz, with whose women you have worked, is a relative of ours. Tonight he will be winnowing barley on the threshing floor. Wash, put on perfume, and get dressed in your best clothes. Then go down to the threshing floor, but don’t let him know you are there until he has finished eating and drinking. When he lies down, note the place where he is lying. Then go and uncover his feet and lie down. He will tell you what to do.’ ‘I will do whatever you say,’ Ruth answered. So she went down to the threshing floor and did everything her mother-in-law told her to do.”

Scripture: Ruth 3:8-10

“In the middle of the night something startled the man; he turned—and there was a woman lying at his feet! ‘Who are you?’ he asked. ‘I am your servant Ruth,’ she said. ‘Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a guardian-redeemer^l of our family.’ ‘The Lord bless you, my daughter,’ he replied. ‘This kindness is greater than that which you showed earlier: You have not run after the younger men, whether rich or poor. And now, my daughter, don’t be afraid. I will do for you all you ask.’”

Scripture: Ruth 4:13-15

“So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. When he made love to her, the Lord enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son. The women said to Naomi: ‘Praise be to the Lord, who this day has not left you without a guardian-redeemer. May he become famous throughout Israel! He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth.’”

Ruth's and Naomi's Identity:

What's in a Name?

- Ruth means “friendship.”
- As Ruth discovers friendship with God, she finds a better identity and covering through Boaz.
- Naomi means “pleasant.”
- Mara means “bitter.”

Moabite:

Genesis 19:30-37 revealed the origins of the Moabite people, born from the incestuous deception of Lot by his daughters. One of the sons born of incest was named Moab, the ancestral father of the Moabites.

Moabites were not included in the promises and covenant of God, considered to be lonely and forsaken outsiders.

Moabites were considered to be “thorns in the flesh” to the Israel's side, and their relationship was marked by constant enmity.

Ruth demonstrated that the uncleanness associated with Moabite women was not from their ethnicity but rather due to their mindsets formed within Moabite culture.

- Law of Deuteronomy

(2:9): “Then the LORD said to me, “Do not harass the Moabites or provoke them to war, for I will not give you any part of their land. I have given Ar to the descendants of Lot as a possession.”

(7:3-4): “You shall not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons, for they would turn away your sons from following me, to serve other gods. Then the anger of the Lord would be kindled against you, and He would destroy you quickly.”

(23:2): “No one born of a forbidden marriage nor any of their descendants may enter the assembly of the Lord, not even in the tenth generation.”

Sexual Ethics:

- Redemption

The act of making something better or more acceptable: the act of exchanging something for money or an award; the act of saving people from sin and evil.

Redemption is about love and about the one to whom the redemption belongs. Redemption required Ruth to wait and trust in God’s faithfulness to provide for her.

Ruth journeyed to a place and joined a people group that she had not known, putting herself at risk and unconditionally in the hands of God.

Redemption came though her risky obedience, as she humbled herself before Boaz. She boldly stated her desired identity as his maidservant and revealed her vulnerability by inviting his covering (Ruth 3:9).

- Impacts of Healthy Spirituality on Sexuality

In Ruth 2:7, Ruth was sitting down as she waited on Boaz and God. She depended on God to provide for her present and future needs. In patriarchal society, men made life decisions for women, specifically related to marriage.

Despite her Moabite origin, she married a godly, Hebrew man. Her faith in God resulted in her redemption through marriage.

God's Storyline of Faithfulness

- As Ruth returned with Naomi to Israel, she began to identify herself with the God of Israel, receiving provision through Boaz through God's redemptive plan.
- God's undeniable divine intervention, in the story of Ruth and Boaz, was evident in the words from Ruth 2:3, "As it turned out, she was working in a field belonging to Boaz, who was from the clan of Elimelek." As Ruth humbly went to the fields intending to gather the crumbs that harvesters cast aside for the poor, God unknowingly led her straight to the jackpot. The field she gleaned from belonged to her kinsman redeemer, an eligible relative with the means to redeem Ruth and her husband's inheritance for their family line.

New Narrative, New Identity

- Cinderella Scene:

The challenge of revealing true identity. The risk of whether or not we will be loved as we truly are.

"Would who she was, who she really was, be enough? There was no magic to help her this time. This is perhaps the greatest risk that any of us will take. To be seen as we truly are."

"Have courage, and be kind."

- Naomi:

Within ancient Hebrew culture, the losses of her husband and both sons basically stripped her of all identity. Naomi changed her name to show evidence of her identity transition, from Naomi to Mara (1:20).

Grief and loss revealed her true personality traits, emptiness and bitterness, through her actions and choices. "Don't call me Naomi," she told them. "Call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter. I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The Lord has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me" (Ruth 1: 20-21).

Naomi demonstrated, throughout the Ruth narrative, that she desired only redemption from her circumstances, instead of salvation from her sin and internal pain.

- Ruth:

Ruth 2:5-10 provides evidence of Ruth's gentleness of spirit and the absence of the immorality that characterized the Moabite people. "Then Boaz said to his servant who was in charge of the reapers, "Whose young woman is this?" So the servant who was in charge of the reapers answered and said, "It is the young Moabite woman...?"

Bride: "So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife" (Ruth 4:13).

Mother: "For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth" (Ruth 4:15).

Closing Prayer

Small Group 3 Discussion Questions:

- Where did you see God's faithfulness threaded through the story of Ruth?
- How were Ruth's past choices, sexually, spiritually, and relationally, redeemed in her story?
- Silent Reflection: Where does my sexuality need to be redeemed? Where can I really use a "divine do-over"? (optional response: journaling or within group discussion).
- What does God want to do (and am I willing) to empower myself to live with healthy sexuality and spirituality?
- What resources do I need (for example: bible study, community, prayer, personal reflection, and worship) as I begin to live from a new narrative, one that includes healthy identity, sexuality and spirituality?

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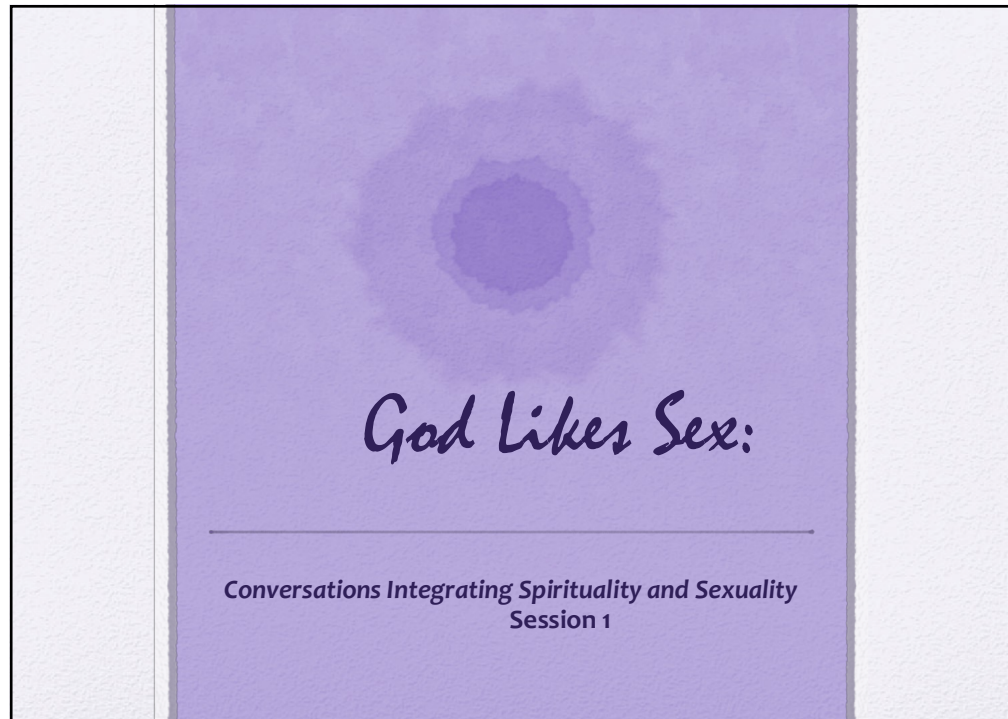
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Unless otherwise noted, all Biblical passages referenced are in the New International Version.

APPENDIX B:
SECTION 1 POWERPOINT

Appendix B includes the PowerPoint slides for the Session 1 workshop.



Introduction

- Hagar was a young Egyptian slave woman belonging to Abraham and Sarah. This narrative is significant because God confirms to us that He sees our suffering, even if we feel forgotten. God heard Hagar's cries for help and responded when she most needed Him.

Genesis 16

Scripture: Genesis 16 New International Version

Genesis 16

*She gave this name to the Lord who spoke to her:
“You are the God who sees me,” for she said, “I
have now seen the One who sees me”*

(Genesis 16:13).

THE GOD WHO SEES ME

אֱלֹהֵי רֹאִי

El Roi

Identity



What's in a Name?

- The name “Hagar” possibly means “flight” in Hebrew.
- Hagar responded with “flight” in response to her desperate circumstances. Her salvation did not result from her flight to Egypt but from God.

Slave



'Your slave is in your hands,' Abram said. 'Do with her whatever you think best.' Then Sarai mistreated Hagar; so she fled from her. (Genesis 16:6).

Slave

- Even though some slaves were treated as part of the family unit, they were still regarded as personal property.
- Sarah treated Hagar in a way that was not customary with Hebrew law. Although Hagar was legally considered to be the property of her mistress, she was also entitled to receive the customary benefits and good will attributed to loyal servants.

Sexual Ethics

- Justice
 - The angel of the Lord also said to her: 'You are now pregnant and you will give birth to a son. You shall name him Ishmael, for the Lord has heard of your misery.' (16:11) God heard her cries and intended to respond to the injustices affecting Hagar and her unborn son.

Sexual Ethics

- Restitution
 - God was asking Hagar to obey Him, trust Him as she walks back into her difficult situation, believing that He would somehow provide restitution, or compensation, as He protects her from unnecessary suffering.

Why Did He Say That?

- Then the angel of the Lord told her, “Go back to your mistress and submit to her.” (16:9)
- Obedience was the harder path of humility and servanthood.
- God was asking Hagar to believe that He would bring something good from her suffering.

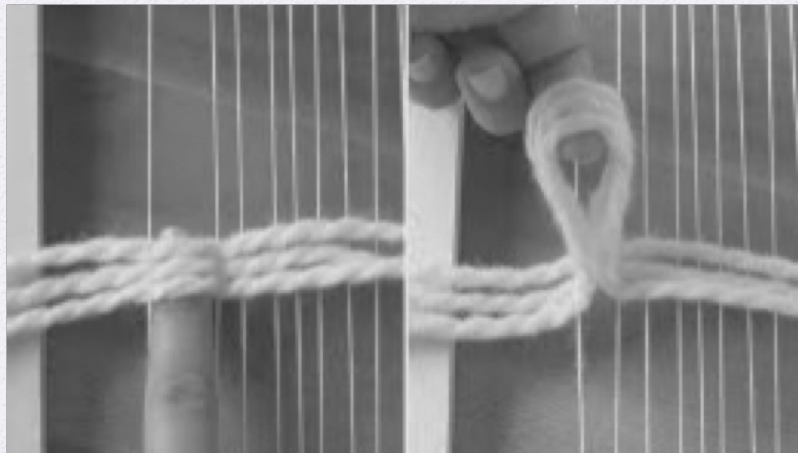
Why?

- God called her to return and submit to Abraham and Sarah, even though she was treated unjustly.
- Obedience likely resulted in more pain and suffering, and possibly a sense of terror to the abused woman.

Why Return?

- Why Return?
 - God gave her hope for a life beyond slavery.
 - Hagar's motivations were the Promises of God that her future generations would prosper and that her son wouldn't become enslaved.
- The two divine promises : 1) she would have numerable descendants; and 2) she was pregnant with a male child named Ishmael.

God's Storyline: Faithfulness



God's Storyline: Faithfulness

- God demonstrated His faithfulness, even in the midst of human interference, by providing both identity and inheritance for Ishmael also.
- God sees the afflictions of His people, His heart is moved with compassion, He meets us in the place of our affliction, and He acts on our behalf to bring about justice.

God's Storyline: Faithfulness



God's Storyline: Faithfulness

- *The angel of the Lord found Hagar near a spring in the desert; it was the spring that is beside the road to Shur (Gen. 16:7).*
- The desert can bring us to the place of our attention becoming solely focused on God, even if we run away from Him due to pain, suffering, and our poor choices.

Sexuality and Spirituality

- God sees You
- As with Hagar, **God sees you in your present circumstances, He loves you, He will be with you, and He will help you no matter what type of suffering you are facing.**

Sexuality and Spirituality

- God sees past your mistakes and can make your life new, no matter your former choices or present circumstances.
- God **has a purpose, plan, and destiny for your life** and it will be better than you can possibly imagine (Ephesians 3:19-21).

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APPENDIX C: RETREAT SCHEDULE

Friday

Dinner	(5:30 - 6:30 pm)
Intro/Worship	(6:30 – 7:00 pm)
Session 1	(7:00 – 8:00 pm)
Small Group 1: My Story	(8:00 – 9:00 pm)

Saturday

Coffee and Conversation: Experiential 1	(8:30 - 9:30 am)
Worship	(9:30 – 10:00 am)
Response	(10:00 - 10:30 am)
Session 2	(10:30 - 11:30 am)
Small Group 2: God's Story	(11:30 - 12:30 am)
Lunch: Experiential 2	(12:30 - 1:30 pm)
Worship	(1:30 – 2:00 pm)
Response	(2:00 - 2:30 pm)
Session 3	(2:30 - 3:30 pm)
Small Group 3: New Narratives	(3:30 - 4:15 pm)
Closing Worship and Benediction	(4:15 - 5:00 pm)

APPENDIX D:
FRIDAY NIGHT REFLECTION



An angel of God found her beside a spring in the desert; it was the spring on the road to Shur. He said, “Hagar, maid of Sarai, what are you doing here?” She answered God by name, praying to the God who spoke to her, “You’re the God who sees me! Yes! He saw me; and then I saw Him!”
(Genesis 16:7-8, 13)

For most people, desert seasons represent the places of preparation or testing... places where we don’t want to linger. Hagar, a single mom, was desperate to leave what she felt like was a hopeless situation. Rather than remain in an abusive environment, she ran away, choosing what seemed to be her only option: a risky journey on the desert road alone. Hagar was helpless, broken, and alone, or so she thought. At just the time when it looked as though all hope was lost, God broke through. God found Hagar when she was not even looking for him. Many individuals base their faith on the belief that God can only be found or accessed by religious means and striving. This passage was clearly indicating that he was the One who pursued Hagar. God found her in the middle of her messy life. Even when she did not know what she was running to, God came to her

rescue and called her by name. God initiated an opportunity for confession, repentance, and restoration in him. Hagar, a slave woman, had no voice in scripture until God found her and gave her one. She was the first person in Genesis to encounter an angel of God. Hagar was the first woman to receive promises from God. Hagar encountered Emmanuel, God in the flesh, even as she made her desert escape.

As I read these verses, I wonder if Hagar ever asked herself, “How did I get here, abandoned, abused, and alone in this desert place?” When I became a single mom over eleven years ago, I desperately needed to know that God was with me in the midst of the overwhelming obstacles that I was facing. As with Hagar, my life was unfolding in a way that I had never dreamed it would. And there in the middle of my crisis, I faced an unexpected turn. My desert wanderings led me to an unforeseen encounter with God. Finally, at that very place, I reached the end of myself. In my inability to hold my life together in my own strength, I came to the point of complete surrender to God, his love, and his plan for my life. And there, in the middle of my desert journey, I was changed. Suddenly, my eyes were opened and I could see, as I had never been able to see before. I became a new creation and began the transformation into the woman that he had always intended for me to be. When I finally hit rock bottom, I realized that I was never truly alone. God was with me. God had always been with me. He had seen every tear and heartache. He cares for me with an infinite love that I previously did not really believe existed. With open eyes, I recognized Truth, his love changed me, and deep soul healing began. On my desert road, in the middle of my wilderness wanderings, I encountered EL Roi, the God Who Sees me.

I was never the same.

Hagar's description of God as El Roi confirmed that God had seen the affliction of his people, his heart was moved with compassion, and he wanted to come to their defense or rescue to meet them in the place of their suffering. This same God, the One Who sees us today in our present circumstances, was telling us that he would also be with us in whatever challenges our lives may hold. He was demonstrating his ability to see past our mistakes and to make something good come from even the most disastrous circumstances. This story pointed to the availability of redemption for every individual, even if he or she felt unseen or forgotten, offering hope for a purposeful destiny from a caring and loving God.

Reflection:

- What part of Hagar's story do I most connect with tonight?
- Where did I see God today?
- When did I last feel like an outsider?
- What am I running from?

Journal:

- Please take a few moments to journal your responses to the reflection questions.

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