

Narrative, Theological, and Pastoral  
Approaches to  
Sexual and Gender Identity



# Where we are going:

- ❖ **Section I:** Narratives
- ❖ **Section II:** Does the Christian Sexual Ethic Make Sense in the 21st Century?
- ❖ **Section III:** Being on the Way: Homosexuality and Christian Faithfulness
- ❖ **Section IV:** The Question of Gender Identity
- ❖ **Section V:** Pastoral Care within the Church and Outreach to the LGBT Community
- ❖ **Section VI:** A Case Study (or two)

# Section I: Narratives

What would you say to your child if they  
came out to you as gay?

# Starting Question: What would you say to your child if they came out to you as gay?

- ❖ What factors would you consider in answering? How might you determine what was most important to say?
- ❖ What do you think would be the most challenging part of a conversation like this?
- ❖ How did the question make you feel? What emotions did it bring up?
- ❖ Do you know anyone who has gone through this experience? What was it like for them?

# My Story

**Section II:**

**Does the Christian Sexual  
Ethic make sense in the  
21st Century?**

**One of the biggest objections to Christianity today is that it  
the Christian faith is immoral because its sexual ethic is  
unethical and inherently bigoted.**



So...

**Does the Christian Sexual Ethic  
Make Sense in the 21st Century?**

**NO**

**...at least from our culture's perspective**

# 3 Reasons the Christian Sexual Ethic Doesn't Make Sense to Our Culture:

1. Evolutionary Worldview
2. Expressive Individualism
3. Telos of Self-fulfillment

# The Modern Ethical Formula:

2 Questions:

1. Do I desire “X”?
2. Will “X” harm anyone else?

Our culture's dilemma:

We want both radical autonomy and deep intimacy.

# The problems with the radical autonomy of expressive individualism (from Tim Keller's talk at Wheaton):

1. incoherent: we have conflicting desires
2. unstable: our desires change
3. illusory: we all have a morally-charged grid from our culture
4. crushing: self-made identities demand more than we give
5. excluding: achieved identities necessarily exclude others'

# The problems with intimacy:

- ❖ People can't meet your needs
- ❖ We don't give in relationships so much as we expect people to give to us
- ❖ We are so centered on the self that we cannot commit to the other.
  - Cheap replacements: pornography, serial monogamy

# The Cultural Script

- Intimate relationships are essential to personal identity BUT we can't fully commit ourselves to these same relationships.
- Serial monogamy: moving from relationship to relationship, leaving one when it no longer satisfies
- Authenticity is found chiefly in making peace with oneself, rather than in making peace with God.
- Consumerism: sex is another means of entertainment, it can be bought and sold, and has value insofar as it makes me happy.



# Our Culture's Sexual Identity Script:

- ❖ Same-sex attractions indicate something that is intended by God;
- ❖ same-sex attractions are the way that you know who you *really* are;
- ❖ these attractions are the most defining aspect of one's identity;
- ❖ same-sex sexual behavior is a natural extension of this identity.

So...

**Does the Christian Sexual Ethic  
Make Sense in the 21st Century?**

**YES**

**...at least from a biblical perspective**

**Creation**

**Rebellion**

**Redemption**

**Consummation**

# Creation

Rebellion

Redemption

Consummation

- ❖ Genesis 1-2: God created sex. It is good. It is meant to connect people to one another and to God himself. The original context for sex was between a man and a woman in marriage.
- ❖ Genesis 1:27-28
  - We are created in the image of God.
  - We are under authority.
  - We don't get to define ourselves.
- ❖ The purpose of sex/marriage:
  - Procreation
  - Intimacy
  - Pleasure
  - Picture

Creation

# Rebellion

Redemption

Consummation

- ❖ Gen. 3, Mt. 5:27-28, Rom. 1:24-27, 1 Cor. 6:9-10
- ❖ Our sexuality is affected by the Fall. We all have broken sexualities that are marred by the effects of sin. God calls us out of lesser manifestations of sex into his sexual ideal.
- ❖ 3 Dimensions of Sin
  - We are:
    - 1) Sinners
    - 2) Sinned-Against
    - 3) In a Sinful World

Creation  
Rebellion  
**Redemption**  
Consummation

- ❖ 1 Cor. 6:11, 2 Cor. 3:17-18, Eph. 5:22-33
- ❖ God's radical grace in Christ is offered to *all*. As we accept that radical offer of righteousness in Christ alone, our identity is then formed, shaped and defined by Christ.
- ❖ *For while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*  
~Romans 5:8
- ❖ As the grace of God works in our hearts and lives, he makes us more and more into his image.

Creation  
Rebellion  
Redemption  
**Consummation**

- ❖ 1 Jn. 3:2-3, Rev. 21:3-5
- ❖ In the new heavens and the new earth, our sexualities will be fully redeemed and renewed. We will experience intimacy—being fully known and fully loved—perfectly.



**Section III:  
Being on the Way:  
Homosexuality and  
Christian Faithfulness**

**What obstacles make Christian faithfulness implausible to same-sex attracted people?**

# What's in an identity? How should we describe ourselves?

- Ontology:
  - Who God has created us as those made in his image
- Phenomenology:
  - How we experience the world in all its fallenness
- Teleology:
  - Who God is remaking us into as those who have been united to Christ by faith

# Sexual Identity Formation

## Sexual Identity Development

## Milestones (age\*)

Identity Dilemma

Attractions (14)

Identity Development

Behavior (17)

Identity Synthesis

Identity Label (17-18)

Disclosure (17-18)

Relationship (17)

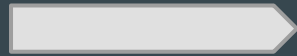
\*Age based on studies of adolescents in church homes.

# Meaning-Making Questions

(Yarhouse, *Understanding Sexual Identity*)

## Milestones (age)

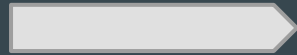
Attractions (14)



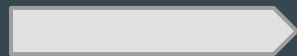
Behavior (17)



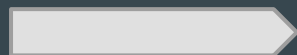
Identity Label (17-18)



Disclosure (17-18)



Relationship (17)



## Meaning-Making Questions

How do I make sense of what I feel?

Should I delay or refrain from sexual behavior?

How do I name my reality?

Who can I trust with what I'm going through?

How can my needs for intimacy  
be met?

# A Shame-Based Christian Script

(Yarhouse, *Understanding Sexual Identity*)

## Meaning-Making Questions

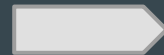
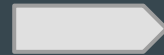
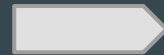
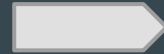
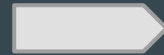
How do I make sense of what I feel?

Should I delay or refrain from sexual behavior?

How do I name my reality?

Who can I trust with what I'm going through?

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## Shame-based Script

I am different in ways that violate my community's standards

My behavior reflects who I am

Who I am (Gay) is bad

I cannot risk letting others know me

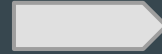
I am not worthy of intimacy

# The Christian Script

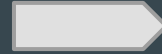
(Yarhouse, *Understanding Sexual Identity*)

## Meaning-Making Questions

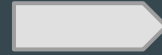
How do I make sense of what I feel?  
Should I delay or refrain from sexual behavior?



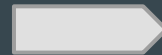
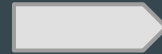
How do I name my reality?



Who can I trust with what I'm going through?



How can my needs for intimacy be met?



## Christian Script

Attractions unchosen, but an effect of the fall

Sexual behavior reserved for marriage

Sexuality a part, but not ultimate; identity in Christ

Grace-based "safe" communities

Christ, friendship, and the church

# Created and Constructed Identities (Peterson, 2018)

- Created Identities
  - “Fundamental truths about who we are as humans before God.”
  - “God’s determination to make humanity what it is.”
  - E.g. Made in the image of God
- Constructed Identities
  - “Our efforts, often fleeting and malleable, to make sense of our personal identities in light of the way we experience human nature and our discreet relations and roles.”
  - “Self-characterizing interpretations of one’s place in the world.”
  - E.g. Relations (married, single); vocations (teacher, coach)

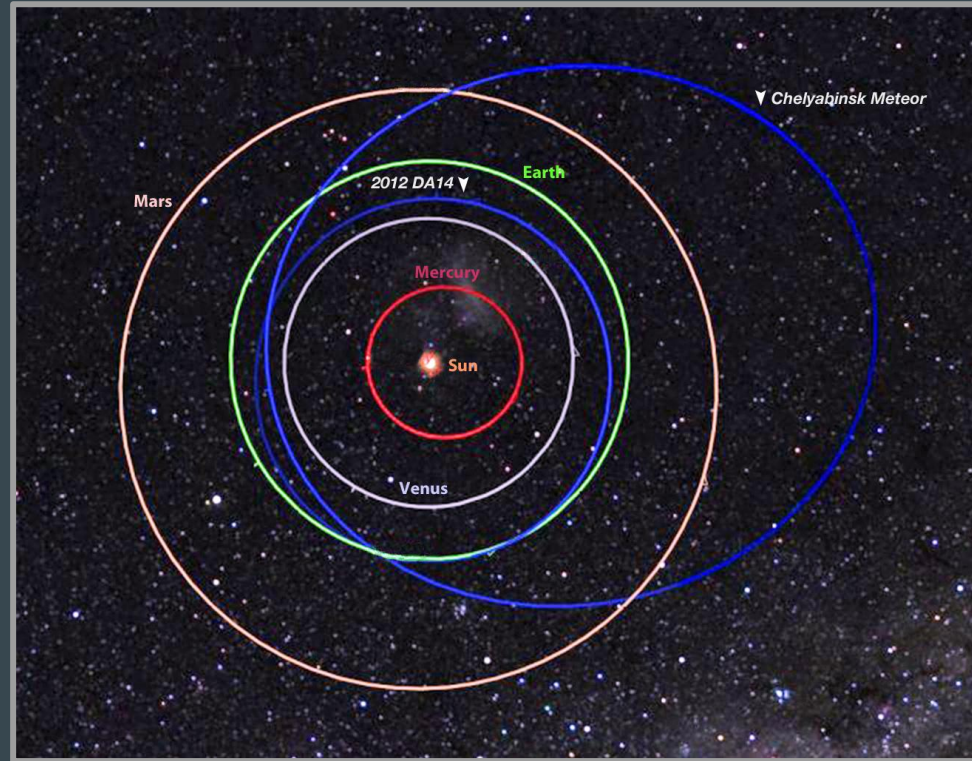


# Created and Constructed Identities (Peterson, 2018)

The question: What is the proper relationship between created and constructed identities?

# A Christian Sexual Identity Model: The Orbit Model

- ❖ How identities work: the orbit model
- ❖ Being “in Christ” is the most core identity for the Christian
- ❖ Other identities still remain—but they are shaped and bent by the identity that is at the center
  - E.g. I’m an American Christian, I’m a Christian husband, etc.



# What causes people to be same-sex attracted?

- ❖ Does causation matter?
- ❖ The Principle of Equifinality: There are multiple pathways to the same endpoint.
- ❖ APA statement: What causes a person to have a particular sexual orientation?
  - *There is no consensus among scientists about the exact reasons that an individual develops a heterosexual, bisexual, gay, or lesbian orientation. Although much research has examined the possible genetic, hormonal, developmental, social, and cultural influences on sexual orientation, no findings have emerged that permit scientists to conclude that sexual orientation is determined by any particular factor or factors. Many think that nature and nurture both play complex roles; most people experience little or no sense of choice about their sexual orientation.*

# Can people change?

- ❖ What type of change should be expected? Pursued?
- ❖ Key Questions:
  - In biblical discipleship, what is “change”?
  - What changes are we responsible for?
- ❖ Defining Change:
  - Attraction, Orientation, Behavior, Identity?
- ❖ Orientation Change Approaches

# Can people change?

- ❖ What is the goal of discipleship with respect to our sexuality?
- ❖ An emphasis on discipleship:
  - Progressive sanctification: a theology of sanctification that allows people to be in process  
(2 Cor. 3:17-18, 12:7-10)
  - Singular goal: Christlikeness
  - Diverse vocations (callings): marriage, celibacy, etc.

# What words should we use? A primer on terminology

- Yarhouse's three tiers (Yarhouse, 2010):
  - Same-sex attractions
  - Homosexual orientation
  - Gay identity
- LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning/Queer)
- Same-sex attraction (SSA)
- Sexual identity
- Sexual minority
- Gay lifestyle

# What words should we use?

- ❖ What type of language do we use to describe students' discipleship journeys?
  - Use of the vocabulary of “faithfulness” over against “victory”
  - Should people call themselves “gay”? Define your terms! Note possible consequences to identity labels.
    - Values: honesty, undermining shame, distancing from triumphalistic narratives
    - Risks: misunderstanding, misappropriation, syncretism

# Section IV: The Question of Gender Identity



# Gender Identity: Initial Affirmations

- ❖ The normative: God created humanity male and female.
  - Our biological sex matters! We are embodied creatures.
- ❖ Maleness and femaleness expresses itself in both biological sex and gender.
- ❖ Gender dysphoria is a real experience.
  - Gender dysphoria: when a person's experience of their gender identity doesn't line up with their biological sex.
  - Also called "gender incongruence"

# Gender Identity: General Frameworks (from Yarhouse)

- ❖ **Integrity:** integrity of maleness and femaleness as part of God’s design; desire to adopt a different gender identity is rebellion against God’s design
- ❖ **Disability:** gender dysphoria is a product of the Fall, but in the same way that any other mental health issue is (i.e. it’s a non-moral reality)
  - Cf. Anorexia, depression?
- ❖ **Diversity:** transgender issues reflect a “an identity and culture to be celebrated as an expression of diversity”
  - Weak form: focuses on place of identity and community for trans people
  - Strong form: total deconstruction of sex and gender

# Key Questions Surrounding Gender Identity

- Early Onset vs. Rapid Onset Gender Dysphoria
  - Vast majority of cases before the past ten years were early onset in biological boys
  - Rise in rapid onset cases in past ten years and shift to biological girls
- Is there a diverse range of representations of what it means to be a man or woman?
  - Or are our stereotypes causing those insecure with masculinity or femininity to reach false conclusions about their gender identity?
- To what extent does dysphoria resolve itself?
  - Historical data suggests that it normally resolves itself with self-identification with birth sex
- Is dysphoria an expression of human diversity (i.e. normative) or does it represent something abnormal that ought to be treated?
- What is the best way to treat true dysphoria?

**Section V:  
Pastoral Care Within the Church  
and Outreach to the LGBT Community**

**How do we make the church as safe place to  
talk about sexual identity?**

# Making the Church a Safe Place to talk about Sexuality

- Listen well.
- Make it personal.
- Talk about it.
- Culture of confession and vulnerability.
- Not just a theology of grace—a culture of grace.
- Rehabilitate singleness.
- Be present.

# Case Studies