

**VALIDATING BELIEFS: LIBERAL AND CONSERVATIVE PROTESTANT
VIEWS OF SEXUAL MORALITY IN AMERICA**

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ABSTRACT

Validating Beliefs: Liberal and Conservative Protestant Views of Sexual Morality in America

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While many debates about sexual morality seem to be dominated by conservative, right wing Protestants, there are differing worldviews within Protestantism as there are in the larger American culture. In Protestantism, disparate beliefs about sexual morality have caused division between groups. Concurrently, these differing perspectives have bled into the larger discourse about sexual morality in the United States. Each group has spokespeople who attempt to validate what individuals should believe about issues like the family, sexuality, and how Protestants, and Americans in general, should think and act regarding these issues. Prior research provided a limited analysis about the views and conversations of these spokespeople and their arguments to validate their positions on sexual morality issues. To better understand how Protestants attempt to validate their beliefs, I focus on what liberals and conservatives say about sexual morality issues. In particular, what do those in influential positions (i.e., authors and pastors) tell others? To answer this question, I conduct a content analysis of 30 Protestant sex advice manuals and 20 in-depth pastoral interviews. The results indicate not only the differences and similarities of beliefs, but also that many spokespeople use various forms of validation besides, or in addition to, biblical texts. The influential are influenced greatly by their own personal biases and views of gender, maybe even more than their particular religious

beliefs. Future research should explore whether there is a definitive correlation between spokespersons' messages and listeners' adherence.

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To the most intelligent and beautiful woman in the world,
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In Protestantism, disparate views of sexual morality have caused division between groups that share similar belief systems. Simultaneously, these divergent perspectives have bled into the larger discourse about sexual morality in the United States. Each group has spokespeople for their particular belief system who attempt to validate what individuals should believe about issues such as the family and sexuality, and how Protestants, and Americans in general, should think and act regarding these issues. To better understand how Protestants attempt to validate their beliefs, I focus on what liberal and conservative Protestants have to say about issues of sexual morality. In particular, what do those spokespersons who are in a position to influence others (i.e., authors and pastors) tell others? Protestant authors and pastors speak for their specific groups, give advice to those who want to develop in their particular belief systems, and present the ideals for their particular branch of Protestantism. However, the information given by spokespeople is embedded with their interpretations of what their groups believe. Furthermore, Robert Wuthnow finds that “most Americans trust the clergy, at least more than they trust leaders of government and industry” (2002, 385).

While trying to make the connection between the spokesperson’s messages and the actions or beliefs of the hearers is outside the scope of this study, understanding their messages is useful for identifying and understanding differing views on sexual morality in the United States. Arguably, there is some influence of these spokespeople on the perspective, ideology, and even the behaviors of those who choose to follow them. Also, it is important to understand why they feel their perspectives are tenable.

While many debates about sexual morality seem to be dominated by conservative, right-wing Protestants, there are differing worldviews within Protestantism as there are in the U.S. in general. Therefore, understanding some of the differences presented by Protestant spokespeople will give a more complete and nuanced view of Protestant leaders' beliefs about sexual morality. In addition, prior research has provided a limited analysis about the views and conversations of these spokespeople and what they use to validate their particular position on different issues within sexual morality. Therefore, this research is necessary to gain an understanding of not only what these spokespeople are saying, but also, how they try to support the messages they espouse.

Why Research Protestant Views of Sexual Morality?

However, like the debates over sexual morality, the dissertation will encompass much more. First, this dissertation is about how a large and diverse group in America focuses on sexuality to make sense of perceived social changes in family values and gender roles. According to the 2006 General Social Survey, Protestants are the largest group in the United States, making up 52 percent of respondents. Even though this number has been decreasing since the initial GSS survey in 1972, they still outnumber both those who have a different religious preference and those who do not have any combined.¹ Additionally, while roughly 84 percent of those surveyed believe that it is important to follow her or his own conscience, approximately 65 percent of Protestants who agree with that statement also believe that it was at least moderately important for people to attend church regularly, and close to 79 percent believe that it is important to

¹ See Appendix A.

follow the church teachings to be a good Christian. It is supposedly through attendance and adherence that Protestants learn how to be better Christians and better people.²

Second, despite the decline in the overall percentage of Protestants in America over the past thirty years, Protestant Christianity has been and continues to be influential in American social discourse and debates about sexual morality. For example, the 2008 same-sex marriage ban in California which overturned the right for lesbian and gay couples to get married was championed by conservative Protestants as well as other religiously and socially conservative groups (i.e., Mormons and Catholics). The continuing debates in California and throughout the U.S. about same-sex marriage that followed are evidence that there continues to be strong discussion and debate about sexual morality. Numerous groups of people, like politicians and religious leaders, have much to say about this debate, which covers a range of beliefs and perspectives. However, this debate is not new. Gallagher (2003) argues that nearly every generation has shown concern about sexual morality and connected it to a number of other perceived social ills, such as crime, teenage pregnancy, and poverty.

Third, debates about sexuality are not just about sex but rather the larger meanings we attach to social and cultural changes (e.g., the family, gender roles). Differing groups attach various meanings to sexual morality issues based on their standpoints. For example, a report by a conservative Protestant group, The Howard Center for Family, Religion, and Society (Andrews 2000), argues that since family values

² From this data, one can also surmise that while these Protestants think it is important to go to church and follow church teachings, they may not do it themselves. In addition, with close to 84 percent of those who were surveyed stating that it is important to follow their own consciences, it is very likely that those who attend church and follow the church teachings are following their consciences. Following conscience and following church teachings may not be mutually exclusive beliefs.

have declined in the U.S., “the divorce rate has risen dramatically . . . [the] out of wedlock birth rate has risen and the proportion of single-parent families has climbed markedly,” and as a result, “youth suicide has increased . . . reports of child abuse rise each year . . . violence has risen [and] levels of welfare dependency are much higher than two or three decades ago.”³ As seen in this example, focusing on sexuality can also be a way to make statements about gender roles.

Additionally, Protestant views of sexual morality express a deeper, more holistic concern about the individual. For some groups of Protestants, one’s sexual morality is just a gauge of one’s moral rectitude. Therefore, great concern is given by some Protestant spokespeople to the issue of sexual morality. Monti states that “since the church generally understands sexuality and sexual morality to pertain to the fundamental exercise of Christian character, sex will always be a significant concern” (1995, 18). This concern can translate into concerns about femininity and masculinity. These issues have also been evident in theoretical and empirical work on gender inequality and gender relations. While I focus on Protestant leaders’ views of sexual morality and how they are validated (i.e., Biblical interpretation, traditional views, social and cultural norms), I also identify how these views may be gendered. Gender is influential in what Protestants have to say about sexual morality issues.

Overview

³ While correlations are given between the links between what they consider decreasing family values and current social problems, no data is supplied to verify causality.

Researchers have shown that Christianity has been, and continues to be, influential concerning what is viewed as morally right and wrong in America (Finke and Starke 2005; Martos and Hegy 1998; Demerath 1995). Some data have shown that the growth in the number of American Protestants churchgoers has made Protestant Christianity more influential now than in previous times. For example, Finke and Starke (2005) indicated that religious adherence has risen from 34 percent in 1850 to 59 percent in 1950 to 62 percent in 2000 and argue that America is becoming more and more “churched” as a result.⁴ These studies show that Christian beliefs still tend to be influential and are becoming more significant. Consequently, it is important to know the views of Protestants.

However, there is not just one distinct Protestant belief, but multiple different and opposing worldviews on issues within Protestant Christianity. Hunter (1991) argues that liberal and conservative groups are constantly debating what is morally right and why their standpoint is necessary for the good of American culture. Different beliefs about sexual morality abound within Protestant Christianity due to how churches, pastors, leaders, authors, and others interpret the Bible, as well as their own agendas, social upbringing, and experiences. Since everyone is interpreting and selecting from the Bible based on his or her own worldview, scholars need a framework for differing Protestant views. Understanding the views of Protestants who broadly represent various sides of the debate will enable us to have a more in-depth understanding of beliefs held by liberal and

⁴ Finke and Stark (2005), in using the term “religious adherence,” were referring to people who believe they live their life based on Christian principles that have been taught through a church. As a result, people who are churched are people who attend church and are influenced by the teachings of the church.

conservative Protestants. In turn, this research will give a greater understanding of the influential Protestant beliefs embedded in public debates.

Additionally, sexual morality debates include debates over gender roles and family values. It is necessary to understand the beliefs of Protestants to know if validations of beliefs are based on doctrine or are also influenced by gender, as is the case in social debates over sexual morality.⁵ One of the ways to understand the beliefs or at least the ideologies of Protestants is through Protestant spokespeople.

Spokespeople offer a good avenue for understanding the ideology of Protestants because many listen to them for justification, validation, and direction. I realize that studying Protestant spokespeople does not give a precise indication of what all Protestants believe, but it does provide an indication and understanding of the ideology that is prevalent among many Protestants. Additionally, this study provides a purview of how those who adhere to these beliefs think about what they are “supposed” to believe.

In fact, since many of these authors’ books are popular in Protestant circles, and the pastors who were interviewed have growing congregations, it is plausible to research and understand their views to understand Protestant groups in general. This is one of the main reasons that the books and pastors were selected: to lend credence to understanding liberal and conservative views of sexual morality in the U.S. The messages, therefore, that are given by the spokespeople are viewed as less prescriptive and more descriptive. As a result, these authors and pastors rarely give new information but instead provide justification and a set ideology for beliefs possibly already held about sexual morality.

⁵ This point will be discussed thoroughly in the literature review section.

This set ideology, in turn, is influenced by and inculcated into the beliefs systems of numerous Protestants in the U.S.

Therefore, the research question I address is: How do liberal and conservative Protestant spokespeople view sexual morality? To explore this question, I examine the messages people are given about sexuality from liberal and conservative Protestant perspectives. These messages are given by those leading authors and pastors who, in the context of this study, are viewed as spokespeople for divergent Protestant groups. I argue that understanding sexual morality from liberal to conservative Protestant perspectives will help us to understand not only the differing Protestant views, but also opposing American cultural attitudes as they are influenced by Protestantism. Additionally, I propose that many views and proscriptions are ensconced with gendered biases.⁶

Each chapter of this dissertation supplies necessary information for better understanding differing Protestant discourses on sexual morality. In chapter 2 I review literature related to the issues discussed in this dissertation. I then define the terms I use for this research more explicitly (i.e., Christianity, Protestant, liberal, conservative) and discuss how the Bible is both viewed and used. Then I review the influence of Protestant Christianity in American culture and some of the current topics of debate in regards to sexual morality (i.e., family and gender). What becomes evident is that not much research has been done analyzing the perspectives of differing Protestants and how those perspectives are argued and validated.

⁶ While religion and gender are the main emphasis of study in this research, I will incorporate race as well to see if there are any differences. This will be discussed later in the literature review.

Chapter 3 is a more thorough statement of the research problem. Also, in this chapter I discuss the methodology used to obtain answers to my research question. Here, I discuss how I did my content analysis of sex and marriage guides written by Protestant authors. In addition, chapter 3 shows how pastors were chosen to be interviewed and the questions they were asked. I believe this methodology will provide a copious amount of information about Protestant views of sexual morality.

Chapters 4 and 5 contain my content analysis of Protestant sex and marriage guides and examine how the guides discuss the *purpose* and *practice* of sex. As noted in the literature review, Protestant sex and marriage guides are a multimillion dollar industry. This fact shows that people are at least buying these books and it can be implied that they are being informed by them as well. These chapters focus both on what is stated by the authors as well as how they support their beliefs. For example, a number of the liberal Protestant authors are counselors and doctors and may refer to their credentials and experience more often than conservative Protestant authors. However, conservative Protestants link their interpretation of the Bible to their personal experience. In addition, these chapters also explore the influence of gender.

Chapter 6 is the first part of the interview analysis. This chapter focuses more specifically on the question, “What is a family?” As mentioned earlier, debates about sexual morality include debates about the family and family values; therefore, this chapter thoroughly studies pastors’ perceptions of the family. It is in this chapter that conflicting arguments that liberal and conservative Protestant pastors present about the state of the family in the United States are discussed and analyzed. Particular attention is

also given to the “necessity” of gender roles for the successful functioning of the family. Lastly, there is a discussion of homosexuality and same-sex marriage. Special interest is given to how liberal and conservative Protestants validate and justify their arguments about homosexuality and same-sex marriage.

Chapter 7 is the second part of the interview analysis. In this chapter, more attention is given to the views of the role and purpose of sex. Therefore, the question that I focus on is, “What is the purpose of sex?” In this chapter, differing views on such topics as nonmarital sex, extramarital sex, and forgiveness are detailed. Overall this chapter provides interesting data to understanding how Protestant spokespeople view sexuality and its larger salience in society. One major difference in Protestant discussions of sexual morality is that liberal Protestants discuss what *is done* in society and how Protestants have to adapt to societal norms. Conservative Protestant pastors discuss what people *should do* based on what they assert are their own interpretations of the Bible.

Finally, in chapter 8, I conclude by discussing the results and implications that have been found as a result of my study. In addition, I conclude with limitations for this research and suggestions for future research. At the end of this study, I believe the reader will have a greater understanding of not only what is argued by differing Protestant spokespeople about sexual morality, but also how these arguments are validated and justified. In addition, the reader should realize that Protestant arguments are based on social interpretations of Bible and church doctrine that has been affected by personal experiences, social norms, gendered beliefs, and race. As a result, there is not one Protestant perspective, but there are multifaceted beliefs and arguments. This allows us to

see Protestant arguments of sexuality in a more nuanced way by showing how these spokespeople are able to validate their arguments to others and how these arguments and statements may have influence on some groups in the U.S.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW:

Opposing Worldviews In American Culture

According to Peter Berger (1967), the greatest dilemma of contemporary society is the coexistence of various, irreconcilable worldviews on issues of morality. Some social scientists have further focused on the incompatible worldviews discussed by Berger and argued that there is a “culture war” that centers on the existence and continuance of two opposing and competing worldviews on morality (Guinness 1993; Hunter 1991). For example, James Davidson Hunter (1991) argues that political debates about moral issues transcend the social group and are a result of a broader “culture war” in society. This war is between two groups that exist in direct opposition to each other because of differing worldviews. Worldviews, which are “ways of apprehending reality, of ordering experience” (1991, 128), are often based on assumptions about the world that are taken for granted, may be impossible to prove scientifically, and are used to make decisions about moral issues.⁷

One way that these opposing views are characterized is along a liberal/conservative continuum. In American society, political, social, and/or religious debates mainly consist of two distinct opposing views that are frameworks for making sense of social life and values.⁸ Many terms have been used to describe these main views, such as Democrat and Republican in the political sphere, and liberal and fundamentalist

⁷ While Hunter argues that there are usually two main views that are in direct opposition to each other to define morality, this

⁸ While there are other views, there are usually two main views on an issue on separate ends of a continuum. All other views, including moderate ones, usually fall in between.

in the social and religious. The most commonly used terms, however, are liberal and conservative, which have been used to discuss opposing views in political, social, and religious groups. Therefore, it is necessary to understand what these terms mean, although it is difficult to define liberalism or conservatism since the meaning of each has changed over time. However, since the two terms are frameworks for making sense of social life and values, these positions can characterize beliefs, views, and attitudes toward either changing or maintaining the status quo. In America, social scientists have done research to clarify why these two opposing views were established and why they continue to exist, and especially why they have such influence over issues of morality.⁹

Another way to characterize these opposing worldviews is as “orthodox” and “progressive” viewpoints (Hunter 1991). People who have an orthodox worldview are committed “to an external, definable, and transcendent authority,” which gives “an unchangeable measure of value, purpose, goodness, and identity, both personal and collective . . . that is sufficient for all time” (Hunter 1991, 44). People with this worldview believe that moral authority comes from God and is fixed no matter the time period. In contrast, people who have a progressive worldview see “moral authority defined by the spirit of the modern age, a spirit of rationalism and subjectivism . . . truth tends to be viewed as a process, as a reality that is ever unfolding.” Religious proponents, who have this worldview, have a “tendency to resymbolize historic faiths according to the prevailing assumptions of contemporary life” (Hunter 1991, 44 – 45).

⁹ Morality in the context of this study is defined as the belief of right conduct in American society. Therefore, this research will look at Protestants’ views of what is correct sexual conduct.

According to Hunter, these two worldviews determine a person's perspective on moral issues, social conflict, and political debates. Berger (1992) further argues that the assumptions a person has about their view of the world define reality and, as a result, morality for the individual. Worldviews influence views of morality which predispose people to align with, and accept, particular arguments (Green et al. 1996; Bennett 1992). For example, people with a progressive worldview are more likely to argue or accept the argument that gender roles and sexual relationships are socially constructed; thus, they would likely align with arguments that nontraditional gender roles and sexual relationships should be accepted. People with an orthodox worldview are more likely to see gender roles and relationships as fixed and ordered, and as a result, they would likely agree with arguments that view nontraditional views of the family, gender roles, and sexual relationships as abnormal (Hunter 1991).¹⁰

While this perspective is persuasive, there are several critiques to be made. First, the "culture wars" perspective is too simplistic. Williams (1997) argues that American culture and politics in particular do not coincide with either/or positions but instead include multifarious beliefs about particular issues. It is only due to our social institutions, organizations, or elites that we experience ideological pressures to be a part of one side or another, but the majority of Americans are not that polarized. Therefore, the culture war that we see is a culture war between the elites and ideologues, not necessarily most people.

¹⁰ Hunter also argues that since these worldviews transcend the social group, non-Protestant and/or nonreligious people with either progressive or orthodox worldviews would share the same worldviews with their Protestant counterparts.

A second and connected critique argues that the idea that there are “culture wars” is a myth that continues to be propagated by elite groups within the media in American culture. Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope’s study (2006) of the 2004 presidential election indicated that there was no sharp division in the electoral behavior of Republicans and Democrats. While those who are either activists or stalwarts of the two groups encourage people to vote on one specific side or the other on all issues, the authors found that most voters were somewhere in the middle. Most voters have a centrist position on various hot-button issues such as abortion, same-sex marriage, gender equality, and others.

Acknowledging these critiques, the “culture wars” perspective is still useful for this research for several reasons. First, proponents of this perspective argue that worldviews are based on how people perceive social life and are influential in creating and continuing debates on issues of morality. When researching the differing beliefs of Protestants, it is necessary to know if they have a unique worldview of sexuality that informs their opinions about sexual morality. This worldview is not limited to them but shared, and often reinforced, by others who have similarly orthodox or progressive worldviews. In addition, it is important to know the positions of Protestant spokespeople, who the critics of the “culture wars” perspective would argue incite and accentuate the polarization of various beliefs and positions. Therefore, understanding the worldview of American Protestant spokespeople will help us to understand their influence upon the worldview of others and the resulting assumptions made about sexual morality.

Second, this perspective is helpful because it focuses on two opposing positions. In American politics and society, there have been, among others, two main worldviews

about reality and morality: progressive and orthodox. Hunter found that liberal Protestants tend to have progressive worldviews and conservative Protestants have orthodox worldviews. As a result of this perspective, this research will focus on liberal Protestants (progressive) and conservative Protestants (orthodox) and the arguments made based on their worldviews.

Lastly, proponents of this perspective argue that worldviews shape perceptions, which incline individuals to accept particular arguments or ideology (e.g., arguments about sexual morality). It is important for this research to clarify that ideologies are influential as to what people believe about sexual morality, and arguments made and accepted about sexuality. Hunter argues that the principles and ideals of one's worldview provide "basic commitments and beliefs that provide a source of identity, purpose, and togetherness for the people who live by them" (1991, 42).

The "culture wars" perspective provides a useful theoretical framework for this study. While the previous studies cited (and others) have explained the two opposing worldviews and how they differ, it is also useful to understand how arguments are made by the proponents of those worldviews about morality. So regardless of whether individuals, groups, or churches consider themselves to be political or not, they will have a specific worldview that will inform their choices in this "culture war." While Bennett (1992) argues that worldviews shape perceptions that predispose individuals to accept particular arguments, it is necessary to know what those arguments are. Yet, it must be acknowledged that while people have similar worldviews about one specific area such as sexuality, it is difficult to state that all of their worldviews are similar just because they

are liberal or conservative. There are numerous crosscutting issues such as race, class, gender, and age that complicate the liberal/conservative division. As a result, while there are Protestants who are conservative about issues of sexuality, their views may change because of their race or due to issues based on race.

Understanding that there are not two broad worldviews, it is still necessary to know what messages people might receive from these various positions and, more specifically, the arguments given by liberal and conservative Protestants to support their positions. Thus, this research differentiates liberal Protestants from conservative Protestants and groups the movements into each category by understanding how they view the Bible.¹¹

Interpreting The Bible

Within Protestantism, the Bible, which is arguably the main text for the religion, gives instructions for the way Christians should live their lives. However, the way in which it is interpreted is what has led to numerous divisions and as a result, numerous translations (Stein 1995). It is important to distinguish between the way the Bible is *viewed* and the way the Bible is *used*. First, two major *views* of the Bible divide liberals from conservatives. One such view is based on the belief that some of the ideas, arguments, and stories in the Bible are erroneous (Thuesen 1996). Following this liberal point of view, some Protestants believe even though the Bible contains the Word of God,

¹¹ It must be stated that the “culture war” perspective is confounded by the influence of racial differences of perspectives. For example, there are both white and black Protestant groups that would consider themselves religiously conservative about issues of sexual morality, yet these groups have different positions on various issues such as social justice.

it also has material that must be rejected since it would actually go against the character of a loving God. Such material would involve the condoning of slavery, treatment of women, avocation of genocide, sexism, racism, homophobia, and religious intolerance. In addition, people with this liberal perspective argue that the Bible was written and translated by humans who are fallible, and therefore a more “rational” approach should be taken when translating the scriptures, and one should view the Bible as a historical document (Stein 1995). However, this group also argues that the Bible’s call for justice and good treatment of all people is one of the most important virtues of the text (Cobb 2003). Also, the Bible contains contradictions which are indicators that those who wrote it were fallible and some things may be misinterpreted or inaccurate due to the writer of the particular text. As a result, liberal Protestants believe that one must be careful not to take a supposedly literal interpretation of the Bible.

Another way the Bible is *viewed* is as the inerrant Word of God. Following this view, which is conservative, some Protestants argue that the Bible writers were inspired by God and thus the text is inerrant and infallible. They see the Bible as flawless and without contradiction. Also, proponents of this view argue that all passages are useful and necessary for life, but only for those who believe in Jesus, because those who do not believe would incorrectly interpret the biblical text (Thuesen 1999). For example, conservative Protestant writer and teacher Ray Comfort (2002) argues that those who are “godly” know that there are no contradictions in the Bible because they are able to see the scriptures more clearly than those who are not godly. In his book, he states:

All scripture is given by inspiration of God . . . God has deliberately included seeming contradictions in His word to snare the proud. He has

hidden things from the wise and prudent and revealed them to babes . . . If an ungodly [person] refuses to humble himself and obey the gospel and instead desires to build a case against the Bible, God gives him enough material to build his own gallows. (70)

It is evident from his quote that some conservative Protestants believe that those parts of the Bible that seem like contradictions are only contradictions from the perspective of those who are “ungodly” and do not follow the rules of the Bible. On the other hand, those who are truly “godly” would not see contradictions, but those things that may seem like contradictions would be revealed to them by “inspiration of God.”

Biblical authority is also *used* in different ways (Wood 1996). Scroggs (1995) presents two different types of authority of the Bible used by both liberal and conservative Protestants. The first form of authority is called “causative authority,” in which the Bible is used as a source to understand and learn about faith and morality. Here, the biblical scriptures teach the individual to achieve an end, such as the knowledge of God, conduct for life, or sexual morality (Wood 1994). The second form is called “normative authority,” in which the Bible is used as a judge of doctrine and morality. In this mode, scripture is seen as a rule book of faith and morals, which is used by individuals and churches to judge all matters and question differing doctrines (Wood 1996). The biblical scriptures are seen as the supreme judge of all matters and those who interpret them are subject to the authority of the scriptures (Turretin 1992). In both instances, however, the person is influenced greatly by his or her worldview and interprets the Bible accordingly. Both liberal and conservative Protestants determine

“what the scripture says [by] what the reader thinks Scripture is and how the reader thinks Scripture ‘says’ anything” (Wood 1996, 200).

There is also a third way the Bible is used. Biblical scripture has been used blatantly to further personal, political, and/or social agendas, which Scroggs calls the “authoritarian misuses of Scripture.” There have been numerous studies that showed how the Bible was used for an agenda (e.g., validation of slavery and sexism). For example, Kimmel (2004) showed how the Bible was used to validate the subordination of women. He found that theologians, prior to the nineteenth century, argued against women’s right to vote since the Bible states that God created man and woman for different purposes; therefore, the argument went, women’s suffrage would reverse the very laws of God. there, the Bible was used as a way to validate one’s political agenda.¹²

While different assumptions can be made about people’s motives based on how people *use* the Bible, in this study, liberal and conservative Protestants generally will be categorized by the way in which they *view* the Bible. Therefore, before going any further, it is necessary to define what liberal and conservative Protestant Christianity mean in the context of this study. The definition of Protestant Christianity is based on the definition given by Francoeur and Perper (1998). Liberal Protestants, for the purpose of this study,

¹² Additionally, many pastors use various editions or translations of the Bible that more closely support their positions. There are religiously liberal and conservative translations of the Bible which are selected by pastors based on where they are on the liberal to conservative continuum. Additionally, pastors will use multiple conservative or liberal translations or versions to find the wording that best suits their particular argument. For example, Rick Warren, in his successful book, “The Purpose Driven Life” quoted from approximately a dozen translations and paraphrases of the Bible.

include various mainstream and progressive groups. Liberal Protestants have a progressive and evolutionary worldview¹³ in which they respect the Bible as the

record of the response to the word of God addressed to the Church throughout centuries of changing social, historical, and cultural traditions. The faithful responded with the realities of their particular situation, guided by the direction of previous revelation, but not captive to it” (Thayer et al. 1987, pg.9).

According to Francoeur and Perper (1998), conservative Christians have an orthodox worldview and see themselves as accepting the Bible as the word of God and as word-for-word truth writings; as a result, they believe that people should live by the “literal” commandments that are in the Bible. They believe their interpretation of the Bible is the literal interpretation of the Bible. This difference allows for great variety in beliefs about sexual morality (Francoeur and Perper 1998). Also, the Bible becomes “naturalized” for individuals, especially conservative Protestants.¹⁴ These conservative Protestants believe that the Bible influences people’s worldview and how they attempt to influence others based on their beliefs as Protestants. As a result, understanding Protestant Christianity and the different movements in Protestant Christianity will assist in understanding how to determine the difference between liberal and conservative Protestants.

Understanding Protestant Christianity

Numerous researchers have documented the increasing importance that religion and, more specifically, Protestant Christianity play in American society (Manza and

¹³ The “progressive worldview” ascribed to some Protestants in the context of this research is defined as those who are interested in new ideas, advances in culture, and new opportunities and ultimately see these different occurrences as useful in helping them to live as Christians.

¹⁴ “Naturalized,” in this context, means that the Bible is viewed as absolutely necessary to live. It argues that the Bible is deeply embedded in individuals and is essential for all life situations.

Brooks 1997; Davis and Robinson 1996; DiMaggio, Evans, and Bryson 1996; Green et al. 1996). Steensland et al. argue, “Research has demonstrated that religious worldviews shape social and political attitudes in ways that cannot be reduced to social class, educational attainment, or other more traditional sociological factors” (2000, 292). As a result, it is essential to come up with a good way to understand and categorize Protestant Christians.

Defining Christianity or what it means to be a Christian is very complex and difficult to accomplish. Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online (2005) simply defines Christianity as “the religion derived from Jesus Christ.”¹⁵ However, it is not so simple to define what Christianity is or means in this culture because it has so many different meanings for different people, incorporates various ideas, and has been used in multiple ways (Martos and Pierre 1998; Bensko et al. 1995; Kelly 1989). Within the religion of American Christianity there are two major groups: Protestants and Catholics.¹⁶ This study will focus on Protestant Christianity since it makes up the majority of Christians in the U.S. and most of the major leaders in the U.S. have been Protestant (Woodberry and Smith 1998; Davidson et al. 1995).¹⁷

Protestantism in the United States is difficult to categorize. The multifarious arrangement of Protestant groups, and the inability of any study to include every Protestant group, results in multiple ways to group and categorize Protestant groups (Hart

¹⁵ Merriam-Webster Dictionary also defines Christian as “one who professes belief in the teachings of Jesus Christ” (2005).

¹⁶ When viewing Christianity worldwide, some researchers would also add Eastern Orthodox and Anglican to the list of major groups.

¹⁷ According to the 2004 General Social Survey, 76.5 percent or 159 million Americans consider themselves Christians, with 52 percent labeling themselves as Protestant and 24.5 percent Catholic.

1997). In this study, the liberal/conservative continuum has been chosen due to the prevalence of this divide in United States politics and debates about sexual morality. When viewing Protestants, numerous scholars have found it sufficient to group Protestants into the two categories of liberal Protestants and conservative Protestants (Thuesen 2002; Regnerus and Smith 1998; Woodberry and Smith 1998).¹⁸ This continuum was chosen to help simplify the discussion. In addition, these categories provide an umbrella for including different denominations and movements based on how they view the Bible. This continuum clearly does not include all Protestant groups.¹⁹ However, to study these groups, researchers have viewed how Protestants self-identify themselves,²⁰ by denominations²¹ or by religious movements. While these ways may be useful, the main way in which I will group Protestants is based on how they view the Bible.

The Influence Of Protestantism

¹⁸ It must be said that there are some scholars who would disagree with the idea of grouping Protestants into liberal and conservative Christians (e.g., Hutchison). The disagreement and the reasons why I have chosen this way to group many Protestants will be discussed briefly later in this literature review.

¹⁹ The liberal/conservative Protestant categorization presented in this proposal is not to be viewed as the only division or way to discuss Protestants, nor is it the only story of Protestants. It is just one way to view differences in Protestant groups amongst many other ways. Since this division does not encompass all Protestant groups, the groups that are included will be discussed later in the literature review.

²⁰ Watt (2002) found that this method was fruitless because most people whose beliefs may coincide with one group or the other may incorrectly state that they are not part of a certain group due to their own perceived definitions. In his book, David Watt simply defined conservative Christians as Bible-Carrying Christians (2002).

²¹ Woodberry and Smith (1998) argue that it is difficult to measure denominations accurately, as within denominations, there are differences.

In the first century of American history, the “Protestant Establishment” emerged and influenced American culture.²² The social and political elites during this time, according to Davidson et al. (1995), created an American way of life that reflected their worldviews and worked to their advantage socially, economically, and politically. Protestant and moral perspectives were even embedded in the curriculum of schools and built into the nation’s economy (Kluegel and Smith 1986). Feagin and Feagin (2002) further indicate that Protestantism arguably has become so institutionalized that its influences continue today in our public institutions and cultural orientations.

According to Wuthnow (1989), in 1800 there were roughly 3 dozen major denominations of Protestant Christianity. By 1900, this number increased to more than 200. Currently, it is estimated at over 1000 (Woodberry and Smith 1998). In addition, Finke and Stark (2005) state that church membership and adherence overall has increased for the majority of Americans.

Recently, Protestant Christianity has become more and more influential in promoting ideology. The growth of churches, television evangelism, and Protestant activism has disseminated ideas about sexuality to many more people than ever before. There are numerous Christian-themed bestselling books, such as *The Purpose Driven Life*, by Rick Warren; *Your Best Life Now*, by Joel Osteen; and *God’s Politics*, by Jim Wallis. Books like these send messages about how people should act based on Protestant Christian principles and ideals. In addition, churches can now reach a large mass of

²² The term “Protestant Establishment” referred to the Protestant groups that were made up of the social, economic, and political elites since the beginning of American History. They mainly consisted of white Americans who were either Episcopalian, Congregationalist (now United Church of Christ), or Presbyterians. This term was coined by Digby E. Baltzell (1964).

people. Roberts and Cohen (1995) showed how at a 15,000-member church a weekly budget of \$228,000 is averaged with an annual budget of almost 12 million dollars. With these types of resources, more Protestant pastors are capable of getting their point of view across to the general public. For example, the largest church in America (over 30,000 members), Lakewood Church, renovated the Compaq Center, a former basketball arena, in Houston, Texas and had their first service on July 16, 2005. The pastor, Joel Osteen, is watched by millions both on television and the internet and has preached to sell-out crowds in arenas across the country during his 2005 – 2008 tours. With the ability for evangelists and pastors to reach so many people, Protestant Christian messages and beliefs are communicated to a large number of people.

According to Anderson (1999), 102 million people attend Protestant Christian churches each week. Furthermore, comparing church attendance to attendance at sporting events, he found that the attendance at basketball, football, and baseball games combined was only 94 million a year. People who attend sporting events would make up only 2 percent of those who attend Protestant Christian churches in the U.S. weekly. He also argues that statistics show for every 100 people who are ages 70 and over in church, there are 160 – 200 people in their twenties who are attending church on a regular basis.

Research also suggests that Protestantism has an important influence on debates in our society (Davis and Robinson 1996). In fact, Laymann (1997) has shown that there are great political divisions between liberal and conservative Protestants that have increased since 1980. According to Francoeur and Perper, as a result of the “recent public debate focusing on sexual morality (e.g., contraception, abortion, and homosexuality), a

paradoxical realignment has occurred with liberal [groups] lining up on one side of these issues, and conservative [groups] on the other side” (1998, 19). Due to the differing worldviews of liberal and conservative Protestants, there is a division not only in doctrine or theology, but in views of sexual morality as well (Davis and Robinson 1996). According to Davis and Robinson, “religion is an important source of political division in the United States . . . the effect of this religious division is primarily on gender and family issues of . . . sexuality” (1996, 758).

Sexuality And Gender

Not only are Protestant views of sexual morality based on different biblical and religious beliefs, they may also be based on beliefs about gender. According to Schippers (2000), when analyzing sexuality issues a gender analysis is undertaken. Furthermore, Schippers argue that sexuality is included under gender relations as a means of patriarchy.²³ Some theoretical and empirical research on sexuality has found that societal beliefs, institutional structures, and daily interactions have organized sexuality in a way that supports, defends, and maintains male dominance (Collins 2004; Schippers 2000). As a result of sexuality being a part of the connection between gender and power, Connell (2005) has found that unequal power relations exist not just between women and men, but also amongst women, and amongst men.²⁴

²³ Gender refers to the socially constructed definitions of masculinity and femininity which have to be learned and achieved. Patriarchy refers to male-dominated institutions and interactions that exhibit male-centered norms and lead to the oppression of women and socially unaccepted men (Kimmel 2003).

²⁴ Collins (2004) argued that there is a different form of racism based on racial ideologies of the sexuality of black people that has created or continued unequal power relations amongst men and amongst women.

Other theorists, such as Rubin (1990), have argued that sexuality is a distinct feature of social relations which organizes gender as well as general social relations (Stein and Plummer 1996; Foucault 1980). For example, by focusing on historical and social processes in the construction of sexual scripts, Foucault (1980) argues that sexual discourse is a form of social control. According to this argument, sexuality is not just a product of gender relations but has organized social and institutional relations.²⁵ Sexuality, like gender, is a separate way to organize and categorize the societal power structure.

While research has shown both that gender and sexuality are connected and that sexuality is a distinct feature of social relations, solely stating one claim or the other would be a mistake. Numerous researchers have found that sexuality and gender may be analytically distinct but oftentimes intersect (Collins 2004, 2000; Smith 1990). This approach to sexuality will be taken in this research. Schippers (2000) states:

Sexuality and gender are separate organizing features of social relations but intersect by mutually constituting, reinforcing, and naturalizing each other. Gender relations—which include how masculinity and femininity are mapped onto identities and how gender is displayed, enacted and understood—naturalize, reinforce, and support sexuality, which includes the display, enactment, and meanings of sexual desire and sexual identities. Likewise, sexuality simultaneously naturalizes, reinforces, and supports gender. (748)

Since sexuality and gender are mutually reinforcing, it is likely that Protestant views of sexuality are influenced by, or include, issues of gender (i.e., perceived gender roles in sexuality and the family).²⁶ According to Britton (2000), “gender is a constitutive element of social structures” (418). In social structures and institutions, gender is “present in [the]

²⁵ Foucault rarely focused on gender. However, it can be argued that his work has gendered implications.

²⁶ Gender roles are the expected way of behaving and thinking that a society associates with women and men.

processes, practices, images, ideologies and distributions of power” (Acker 1992, 567). As a result, gender roles and gendered beliefs should be apparent in views of Protestants. Therefore, it is necessary to understand not only the religious debates over sexual morality but also how beliefs about gender differences and roles are influential as well. Evident in the sexual morality debate in society and amongst Protestants are debates about family values, sexuality issues, and gender roles. Understanding these debates will give some insight as to how gender is implicated in these debates.

Family Values Debate And Gender Roles

When discussing Protestant views of sexual morality, it is necessary to understand the “family values” debate. According to Stephanie Coontz (1997), debates on family values were stoked by Dan Quayle’s denouncement of comedy sitcom character Murphy Brown for being an unmarried mother. Following Quayle’s speech, the culture began to discuss terms like “the decline of the family” and “family breakdown,” and conservatives argued that the depiction of the family in the media showed that the family was in a state of crisis. However, the meaning of the term “family values” is rather ambiguous since it does not cover the gambit of issues in families (i.e., child abuse, spousal abuse, incest). What is certain about the family values debate in our society is that it focuses on the “traditional family” as the ideal form. The traditional family refers to married heterosexual couples with children. In this family type, women are full-time stay-at-home wives and mothers; men are the sole breadwinners. However, within conservatism, the traditional family has been transformed so that the man is always the head of the

household, regardless of whether the wife is a full-time homemaker or is in the workforce. A conservative point of view argues that the traditional family form is necessary for society to function efficiently, whereas a liberal point of view believes that the differing and diverse forms of families are necessary and beneficial for society.²⁷

According to Denton (2004), conservative Protestants, along with other conservative groups, have been influential in the push for traditional families in society. In addition, he argues maintaining the traditional family is highly encouraged by conservative groups through the beliefs and practices of the family lives of their adherents. However, more liberal religious groups see the family structure, gender roles, and ideologies as ever-changing because it indicates the evolution and the adaptability of the family. In fact, Coontz (1997) finds that those with a more liberal viewpoint consider many forms of families to be effective and necessary for society, and view the diversity of families as evidence of the strength and longevity of the family.

Changes in the traditional family have been reflected in numerous statistics. For example, according to the Population Reference Bureau (2003) in 1970, 70 percent of households with children were made up of heterosexual married couples. However, in 2003 this percentage dropped to 52 percent. What it means to be a family today is different from what it meant thirty years ago. For example, the U.S. Census Bureau now defines family as two or more persons related by marriage, blood, or adoption who dwell together. It has become evident over the past thirty years that there are different forms of

²⁷ However, it must be noted that Coontz (1992) has effectively shown that there has never been an ideal family and instead American society have nostalgia about the ideal traditional family which did not and does not exist. What have remained constant are the diversity of families and the rate of marriages (Coontz 1997).

family (e.g., single parent, same-sex, cohabitating). During this time period, scholars have noted that divorce rates, nonmarital sexuality, and extramarital relationships have increased. Because of the perceived correlation, a debate has ensued and has been made prominent during recent presidential elections.

On the conservative side of the family values debate, the main argument is that new forms of families and alternative lifestyles are breaking down the traditional family. Schlafly (2003), for example, argues that the change in families is a result of changes in gender roles. In addition, some conservatives have argued that men are disempowered and emasculated; sexuality outside of marriage is encouraged; traditional values of self-sacrifice, family commitment, and motherhood are undermined; and more social problems are created by these gender role changes (Popenoe 2003; Schlafly 2003). Such social problems, according to Popenoe (2003), include the breakdown of the traditional family, less birth control, more promiscuous behavior, and a greater number of divorces. As a result, he further argues, the state takes on what were once family responsibilities (Popenoe 2003). Therefore, Cohen and Katzenstein (1991) argue, conservative politicians and Protestants believe returning to the traditional family will eliminate many of the problems we have in society since sexuality is tempered by heterosexual marriage. In addition, conservatives believe that instead of undermining and removing men from the position of dominance, men should be the unchallenged heads of the families for the benefit of both families and society (Schlafly 2003; Davidson 1988).

Schwartz and Rutter (1998), however, argue that the changes apparent in the family structure and the subsequent decline of the traditional family have less to do with

the change in gender roles and more to do with economic necessity. With the cost of living increasing, the lack of a family pay rate, and the rate of pay not increasing with inflation, a dual-earner household is necessary to survive financially. Also, Cherlin (1999) finds that liberal politicians argue for and desire an increase in gender role egalitarianism in marriages and the ultimate happiness of individuals. Some researchers even say the traditional family has not always been in existence and is a rather recent phenomenon. In other words, the traditional family is not that traditional. For example, Coontz (1992) argues that the traditional family as we know it today was made evident and became defined during the 1950s. During this brief time period television shows such as *Father Knows Best* and *Leave it To Beaver* solidified family ideals (Coontz 1992).²⁸ Therefore, the traditional family, besides the brief period during the fifties, was and is virtually nonexistent. Many people celebrate the different forms of families and view the diverse forms as confirmation in the strength of the American family. For example, marriage continues to be very popular. According to Coltrane (1997), the majority of people in the United States, including gay and lesbian couples, want to get married.

Sexuality Debates And Gender Roles

In addition to the family value debate, there are also debates over specific sexual issues such as nonmarital sex, extramarital sex, and homosexuality. Sexuality is personal as well as social. While it is something that affects each individual differently in her or his own way, it has also become a social issue in which discussions and debates about

²⁸ In addition, Coontz (1997) argues that the real problems in our society are not divorced parents and single mothers, but the economy, labor market, and government policy.

sexuality have become central in cotemporary politics and discourse over morality. Jeffrey Weeks argues that sex is “a contested zone. It is more than a source of intense pleasure or acute anxiety; it has become a moral and political battlefield” (1985, 4). The meaning of sex and its purpose are constantly being defined by various groups and social movements. These groups debate and define sexual morality due to the influences and social connections to the commercialization of sexual pleasure, the “dangers” of sex and sex-related diseases, and people’s sexuality encouraging a range of emotions from celebration to vitriol based on the gendered actors.

Therefore, it is necessary to understand the meanings and justifications of sexual morality by Protestant Christians. As mentioned earlier, it is not enough to just research views of sexuality based solely on religious beliefs, but one must study gender difference as well.²⁹ In addition to discussion about the purpose of sex, there are key themes that have received persistent societal debate, including nonmarital sex, extramarital sex, and homosexuality³⁰.

Nonmarital Sex

Nonmarital sex is defined as sex between two people, neither of whom married. According to the General Social Survey (GSS), American attitudes about nonmarital sex have become increasingly liberal over time (Loftus 2001). In 1994, Laumann et al. show that approximately 44 percent of men and 40 percent of women between the ages of 18 to

²⁹ Racial differences will be addressed as well.

³⁰ Weeks (1985) discussed the different purposes about sexuality (i.e., sex as pleasure, sex as sacrament, sex as source of fulfillment, and sex as fear and loathing). The purpose of sex to liberal and conservative Protestants will be researched in this study.

59 had participated in nonmarital sexual intercourse in the previous year. Currently, Rouse (2002) states that even though men have sex earlier and have more sex partners, by the time both women and men graduate from college; the majority of both are sexually experienced. In addition, half of all teenagers between the ages of 15 and 19 have had sexual intercourse. Conservative arguments about nonmarital sex range from the argument that it undermines the family to the ideas that it causes unwanted pregnancies, encourages immature or young people to participate, spreads disease, and causes psychological problems (Loftus 2001). For example, Joyner and Udry (2000) argue that teenagers who have sex tend to be more depressed than their non-sexually-active counterparts.³¹ In addition, girls tend to be more depressed or depressed longer as a result. Liberal arguments about nonmarital sex focus on the individual being in control of their own body and sex as liberation. Wolfe (1998) argues that the argument against nonmarital sex exists only because there continues to be a double standard according to which men are able to express themselves sexually while women are not. In addition, Wolfe argues that the conservative opinions about nonmarital sexuality and especially the beliefs about women who are sexually active are put in place to control women's sexuality, to force them to conform to a social ideal of womanhood. For example, South and Baumer (2000) and Wilson (1996) found that socioeconomic status and race strongly affects the percentages of nonmarital sexual activity and children born out of wedlock, and it has been argued that poor and minority women's sexuality is more likely to be controlled since they do not represent the ideal of womanhood. Wolfe (1998) also finds

³¹ However, the study by Joyner and Udry leaves open the question of causality. In other words, was it that sexual activity caused the teenagers to be depressed, as they argued, or is it that they were already depressed and had sex as a result?

that teenage girls and young women—unlike boys and young men—have to constantly and actively strategize their sexuality so that they will not be considered “sluts.” As a result, according to Wilcox (2001), some liberal pundits argue that there needs to be a new “theology of sexuality” whereby people would be able to explore sex without marriage. Understanding both beliefs within Protestantism will further clarify the differing views of nonmarital sexuality because this issue has been the center of fierce societal debate.

Extramarital Sex

While the GSS has shown that attitudes about nonmarital sex have become more liberal over time, it has also found that attitudes about extramarital sex have become increasingly conservative (Loftus 2001). Even though most Americans express dissatisfaction and intolerance for extramarital relations, the statistics show that extramarital affairs are somewhat common. Over one-third of men and one-fourth of women have had an extramarital relationship (NORC 2002). According to Atwater (1982), extramarital affairs are pursued because Americans are unrealistic about love and the ability of a wife or husband to satisfy all desires. As a result, in extreme cases, South and Lloyd (1995) found that extramarital affairs are viewed by some couples as a “spousal alternative” since it is impossible for one person to supply all of her or his spouse’s needs.

However, within extramarital relationships there are several gender differences. When it comes to extramarital affairs, McCabe (2000) states that men are more willing to

pursue and plan for them than women. Numerous researchers have argued that the main reasons why sex is pursued outside of marriage, for men, are a lack of sexual excitement and fulfillment, sexual rejection by wives, and boredom with having sex with the same person; whereas for women it is a lack of emotional intimacy, emotional support, and companionship (Atkins et al. 2001; Levine 1998; Hite 1994). Studies have indicated that when affairs are exposed, women's reputations are more threatened than men's. Batten (1992) contends that females who have had extramarital affairs are treated more harshly than men who have had extramarital affairs, both socially and legally. But what about religiously? Are they granted forgiveness differently or encouraged to divorce their spouses more often based on who committed the affair? While these issues take place in society in general, what do various Protestant groups teach about extramarital affairs, and furthermore, how do they address preventing or stopping it? What happens to a Protestant if she or he has sex outside of marriage? Do liberal and conservative Protestants differ in their views on extramarital affairs? These issues will be addressed in this research, as well as the sexual morality issue of homosexuality.

Homosexuality

Homosexuality has been a hot-button issue in sexual morality debates for a long time. However, debates in the U.S. over same-sex marriage are rather recent (Wolfson 2005; Chauncey 2004). In 1996, Hawaii became the first state to legalize same-sex marriage, although two years later, the legalization was reversed. This debate became more heated in 2004 when a San Francisco judge, judges in Massachusetts, and some

local mayors in different cities and towns started issuing marriage licenses to same-sex couples (Chauncey 2004). The debate continued and in 2008, California residents voted by a narrow margin to maintain the definition and legality of marriage as being only between a man and woman. To the delight of conservatives and the chagrin of same-sex couples, the ban on same sex marriage was reinstated. From a conservative viewpoint, same-sex marriages are detrimental to traditional definitions and values of family, and, in fact, conservatives have proposed a “federal marriage amendment” to the constitution that would define marriage as being strictly between a man and a woman to “save” traditional marriage (Gerstmann 2003). However, according to Mackinnon (2003), more liberal groups argue that same-sex marriage is not a detriment to the traditional family but is a new type of family which should be given the same support and benefits as heterosexual marriages receive. Therefore, it is necessary to understand the beliefs of both liberal and conservative Protestants and how they validate those beliefs to understand these diverse positions about homosexuality.

Race, Gender, Sexuality and Protestantism

Roof and McKinney (1987), among others, make a distinction between black and white Protestant traditions, noting that race must be taken into account in studies of Protestantism. While the goal of this dissertation is not to find racial differences in beliefs, numerous scholars have indicated that in most social institutions, especially religion, there are some racial differences (Collins 2004, 2000; Feagin 2000; Lincoln and

Mamiya 1991). Therefore, the racial differences in Protestant beliefs that arise in this study will be indicated, but are not the centerpiece of this study.

According to Lincoln and Mamiya (1991), the African-American church has been a central influence in the lives of many African-Americans and a staple of the African-American community due to its importance before emancipation through the civil rights era until today. It differs from many white Protestant churches since, according to Wuthnow (1993), for white Protestants religion has increasingly become separated from politics and economics, whereas for many black Protestants, those spheres have remained intersected. As a result, within the African-American community, the influence of religious beliefs on social attitudes is strong. For example, African-American Protestants are generally conservative on social and family issues since the African-American social experience of dealing with racism has caused them to be more conservative when it comes to issues such as sexual morality (Collins 2004; Cohen 1999; Douglas 1999).³²

African-American churches have tended to be either conservative or inactive in issues of sexuality. Collins (2004) as well as Cohen (1999) argue that due to the racial stigma of sexuality, African-Americans have disdained homosexuality for fear that it would further stigmatize the race and as a result have been inactive in dealing with HIV/AIDS in the African-American community.³³ Collins (2004, 2000) also argues that due to the racism in the United States, African-Americans have been seen through

³² While African-American Protestants are generally conservative on issues such as sexual morality, these same researchers show that the African-American Protestants are more liberal when it comes to issues of social justice.

³³ A stereotype attached to homosexuality was that homosexuals are the reason for HIV/AIDS. According to Cohen (1999), the African-American community did not want to accept HIV/AIDS as a problem in the African-American community due to the fear that another negative stereotype will be attached to African-Americans.

controlling images as sexually wanton beings. Therefore, when it comes to issues such as nonmarital sex and extramarital sex, African-American churches are strongly conservative (Douglas 1999). In addition, due to controlling images of African-Americans, black women in the church find themselves in a subordinate role while African-American men try to obtain the American standard of masculinity (Collins 2000; Douglas 1999). As a result, it is more likely that there is a double standard when it comes to sexuality and family. Furthermore, traditional family roles are often emphasized and encouraged in African-American churches (Williams 2004; Douglas 1999).

Williams (2004) argues that so much work has been done in African-American churches to fight against racism and to shield the African-American community from social injustice that sexism in African-American churches has been overlooked.³⁴ The views of sexual morality in African-American churches, like white Protestant churches, may be influenced by gender inequality and traditional beliefs about gender roles in addition to or in place of scriptural or doctrinal validation. A general underlying question or pursuit in this research is to see if beliefs about sexual morality are based on doctrinal and scriptural views, if traditional beliefs of gender are evident, and, to a lesser extent, if there are racial differences in views. This point indicates that ideology is not necessarily based on the Bible, but the Bible is used to support ideology.

The research question I address is: How do liberal and conservative Protestant spokespeople view sexual morality? To explore this question, I examine the messages

³⁴ Churches that are not as conservative or focused on sexual morality may be more influenced by Black Liberation Theology. According to Cone (2000), Black Liberation Theology focuses more on dealing with the historical and current “evils” and injustice of anti-black racism which has been and continue to be practiced or overlooked by many white Christians than the abstract “problem of evil.”

people are given about sexuality from liberal and conservative Protestant perspectives. As a result of this literature review, I am able to argue that since people are becoming more religious, understanding sexual morality from both liberal and conservative Protestant perspectives will help us to understand not only the differing Protestant views, but also opposing American cultural attitudes about sexual morality, influenced by Protestantism. Also, to explore this question, I examine whether these views are gendered; in other words, if Protestant prescriptions are given differently based on the ways in which they are gendered. By addressing these areas I am better capable to identify the views of liberal and conservative Protestant spokespeople and what they use to validate those views. It is quite possible and evident that “Christians . . . attempt to get God onto their predetermined side instead of trying to be sure they are on His side” (Moberg 2008). Therefore, the next section will address the research methods used in this study.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH PROCEDURES

The literature indicates the influence of Protestant Christianity on debates of sexual morality. Therefore, the goal of my research is to discover the views and arguments that Protestants use to support their beliefs about family values and sexuality. First, this research allows us to analyze the differences and debates within Protestant Christianity itself. All Protestant views are not the same because they are based largely on people's interpretations of the Bible. It is necessary to understand that there is not just one Protestant group or belief but that there are numerous beliefs and validating statements for those beliefs based on Protestant Christianity.

Secondly, the Protestant sexual morality debate also "affects the lives of secular Americans with no connection with a church . . . because the religious debate over sexual values permeates all levels of American society, and no one can escape the impact of this debate and conflict on politics, legislation, and social policies" (Francoeur and Perper 1998, 20). Since secular American culture is influenced greatly by Protestant Christianity, understanding clearly some Protestant views of sexual morality will allow people to either make arguments for or against dominant arguments about different issues of sexual morality (e.g., family values, the purpose of sex, same-sex marriage). This, also, will help us to understand how differing attitudes about family values and sexuality are validated by some Protestants. In addition, this research will help us to see how gender continues to be evident as a major factor in debates over sexual morality.

Finally, this research will be able to say something about American culture in general. More specifically, it will show not just how the two sides of the sexual morality debate express their views, but also how they try to define morality in American culture. In addition, this research is necessary to understand how debates over culture are framed and supported by each side. This research will attempt to help readers to understand what is seen as sexually moral in America and why certain attitudes are held about sexuality (i.e., Biblical, doctrinal, traditional, and/or gendered). Also, this research will provide knowledge for researchers and others who want to understand Protestant views about sexuality and the reasons behind them.

To address these research problems, I argue that social scientists need to gain a better understanding of Protestant views of sexual morality. Initially, I will analyze leading Protestants' views on family values and sexuality by focusing on the following topics: the purpose of sex, extramarital sex, nonmarital sex, homosexuality, the possibility of forgiveness for sexual "transgressions," and in what ways these spokespeople's views may be gendered. In addition, I consider the difference between the beliefs of liberal Protestants and the beliefs of conservative Protestants and how they substantiate their viewpoint.

To conduct this study, I have one main research question: How do liberal and conservative Protestant spokespeople view sexual morality?³⁵ To fully answer this larger question, I also address several sub-questions: What are the messages that people are given about sexuality as liberal or conservative Protestants (through leading books and

³⁵ Of course this question will not be based on all Christians' answers, but it will be based on answers given by those in a position to influence other Protestant Christians and speak out for those differing protestant groups (i.e., authors, preachers/leaders).

pastors of churches)? What is the purpose of sex for liberal and conservative Protestants? What is allowed within marriage for liberal and conservative Protestants? How do liberal and conservative Protestants deal with forgiveness of sexual “transgressions”? And are the messages given about sexual morality gendered?

To answer the questions of this research, two steps were taken. First, a content analysis of Christian books discussing what Protestant Christians should believe and how they should behave in regards to sex was conducted. Then, interviews with liberal and conservative church pastors were conducted. It is important to understand the criteria that was used to code books and pastors as liberal or conservative.

Criteria For Liberal And Conservative

Protestants were divided primarily based on their view of the Bible. As mentioned earlier, liberal Protestants are people who claim the Bible includes ideas, stories, and arguments that could be erroneous or open to wide interpretation, whereas conservative Protestants are people who claim and are committed to the notion that the Bible is the inerrant word of God. I also chose several themes to focus on in discussing sexuality, and data were collected based on those themes: the purpose of sex, nonmarital sex, extramarital sex, and homosexuality. These themes are coded as acceptable or not a sin, acceptable with conditions, neutral, not acceptable with conditions, not acceptable or sin. These themes and the coding scheme are especially helpful when answering my research question about what is allowed in marriage. I determine how these acts are described, range of permission, and range of forgiveness (from God and from spouse). In addition, I

examine these themes to discover views of sexual morality. Also, any differences that arise based on gender or race will be discussed.

Book Content Analysis

Selection Criteria

There are three different criteria for selecting books for this study. One criterion is that none of the books used for this content analysis was published before 1992, with most of the books published in the late 1990s and 2000s. The second criterion is that the books were chosen based on institutional, organizational, and pastoral/church endorsements. This demonstrates their importance to parts of the Protestant communities. For example, the books selected are required readings in various Protestant colleges and seminaries, influential in training ministers, or highly recommended by Protestant denominations, organizations, and the pastors whom I interviewed for this study (e.g., Southern Baptist Convention, United Church of Christ, Sojourners).³⁶ While focusing on Protestant seminaries and Bible colleges, I examined books required for classes in family counseling, sexuality, and other related classes, as well as books written by faculty from those colleges and seminaries. Books that were highly recommended by Protestant denominations or organizations include books that are recommended to the group as authoritative on the topic of family values and sexual morality. In addition, the pastors I interviewed suggested books that they give to couples in their congregations who are considering being married, couples who are already married, or general recommendations

³⁶ A book may be influential but not be bestseller because the general public is not buying it in huge numbers. However, it may be required reading for many Protestants in colleges, denominations, or other Protestant organizations, which makes it beneficial to this study.

for their congregations about the topics of family values and sexual morality. The final criterion, although not as important as the others, is the availability of the books.

Availability is taken into consideration because it shows that many people have access to read what these authors are suggesting for Protestants. Therefore, the books examined in this study are sold in large popular bookstores and Christian bookstores combined (i.e. Barnes and Noble, Borders, Waldenbooks, CLC Bookcenter). As a result, thirty books were reviewed: fifteen liberal Protestant and fifteen conservative Protestant.³⁷

Categorized As Liberal Or Conservative

These books are coded as liberal Protestant or conservative Protestant based on the institution, organization, or pastors/churches that recommended them to their congregation. Books are categorized as liberal if the institution, organization, or pastors/churches that recommended them did not view the Bible as the inerrant word of God. As a result, these groups view the Bible as having stories that can be applied to life, but the Bible may be used only sparingly or critically assessed for perceived flaws. Books are categorized as conservative Protestant if the institution, organization, and pastors/churches view the Bible as the inspired word of God without error and perceive themselves as taking a literal interpretation of the Bible. Consequently, a conservative Protestant group would be expected to rely heavily on the “literal interpretation” of biblical scriptures to validate their views. For example, if a Protestant seminary or Bible college encouraged the book, the statement of what they believe as an academic institution helped me to code books as either liberal or conservative. Each Protestant

³⁷ Refer to Appendix B.

institution has a statement of what they believe as an institution.³⁸ This includes how they view the Bible as well as other biblical doctrines. Using this multistep approach, I am able to code the books as liberal or conservative Protestant.

Themes of the Study

These books are examined based on previously selected themes. The primary themes are the purpose(s) of sex and the practice of sex, which includes homosexuality, nonmarital sexuality, extramarital sexuality, and forgiveness as a result of extramarital sexuality.³⁹ These themes were evident in the literature review as key issues within Protestantism and society. Also, these themes were evident in debates over sexual morality and family values. Furthermore, after analyzing the books selected for this study, the themes that were chosen are the major themes of focus in the books. There were other themes that were either secondary or that would take another study to analyze thoroughly. Such themes are abortion, polygamy, and the morality of alternative forms of intercourse (i.e., anal sex and oral sex). Even though these topics are interesting themes as well, I feel the ones that were selected fit the scope of this study and have caused a great amount of debate in Protestant as well as other social circles.

This analysis is a qualitative study using a content analysis of thirty different books that Protestant Christians may read. To code the books as liberal Protestant or conservative Protestant, a multistep approach is taken. First, I view books that are

³⁸ Another institution that is viewed in order to see what books are endorsed is the Protestant Christian *media*. Protestant Christian media includes: magazines, newspapers, newsletters, and television and radio broadcasts.

³⁹ The theme of forgiveness will lead to some discussion and analysis of divorce as well even though this is not a primary theme.

suggested, encouraged, or required reading in several institutions, such as Protestant seminaries and Bible colleges. I view books that they require for classes or make mandatory for students to read, as well as books that are written by faculty from those colleges and seminaries. These books were coded as liberal Protestant or conservative Protestant based on the statement of what the seminaries and colleges believe as academic institutions.⁴⁰ I also considered the Protestant Christian media in selecting books. I was able to understand what their beliefs are and what books they are endorsing. Protestant Christian media includes magazines, newspapers, newsletters, and television and radio broadcasts. Thirdly, I view books that have been encouraged or promoted by major denominational or Protestant groups (e.g., Southern Baptist Convention, Sojourners). From this multistep approach, I was able to code the books as liberal or conservative Protestant. Thirty books in total were reviewed; fifteen liberal Protestant and fifteen conservative Protestant. Each book was either a best seller within the last ten years (i.e., published before 1997)⁴¹ or influential in the Protestant community (e.g., the book is influential in training ministers; the book is influential as required reading or highly recommended in various colleges, denominations, and/or Protestant organizations).⁴² This shows the book's importance in the Protestant community. The themes that have been indicated in this study were coded and analyzed.

⁴⁰ Each Protestant institution has a statement of what they believe as an institution. This includes how they view the Bible as well as other biblical doctrine.

⁴¹ The only exception to this rule is if a book is so influential that it is highly recommended or required reading currently in Protestant colleges, denominations, and/or organizations.

⁴² A book may be influential but is not a bestseller because the general public is not buying it in huge numbers. However, it may be required reading for many Protestants in colleges, denominations, or other Protestant organizations.

Interviews Of Clergy

In addition to the content analysis, I also interviewed twenty pastors about their views on the family and sexuality. My main research question in interviewing these pastors is how they as liberal and conservative Protestant pastors view sexual morality. Since Protestant religious beliefs are influential in debates about family values and sexual morality in the U.S., understanding family values and sexual morality from both liberal and conservative Protestant perspectives will provide some understanding of not only the differing Protestant views, but also opposing American cultural attitudes influenced by Protestantism about sexual morality and the reasons why they are held and defended publicly.⁴³

I interviewed ten liberal Protestant pastors and ten conservative Protestant pastors. Each pastor has a growing membership of at least five hundred people to a maximum of 26 thousand members.⁴⁴ This is an indication of influence. I have chosen these pastors based on several contributing factors. First, I located them based on denomination or religious movement. Then I had them self-identify themselves as liberal or conservative and asked them how they viewed the Bible. By taking this multistep approach I was able to code the clergy as either liberal or conservative more accurately based on the definition given for this study.

⁴³ The reasons refer to the biblical/doctrinal and social reasons that are given in this study to support the particular view.

⁴⁴ These numbers are based on information gained on the church's website and/or information given from the pastor.

The interview questions were based on the themes in this study.⁴⁵ While I had prepared questions, I allowed the pastors to elaborate in their answers. In addition, based on the conversations, I added additional questions or probing questions to clarify or add to the research being done. The goal is to identify the pastors' views and what they would teach others based on their standpoints as liberal or conservative Protestants. By doing this part of the study, it helped me to know what people who have the job of interpreting the biblical positions on family values and sexual morality believe as liberal or conservative Protestants. Through these steps, I believe I have a good view of what liberal and conservative Protestants are taught about family values and sexual morality and what some of their pastors believe on the subject as well. However, it is necessary to find out what Protestants are reading and the arguments that are given in the books about sexual morality.

⁴⁵ See Appendix C.

CHAPTER 4
CONTENT ANALYSIS OF PROTESTANT BOOKS:
THE PURPOSE OF SEX

Understanding the differing views Protestant Christians hold about sexual morality will help us to better comprehend current social debates and worldviews. Specifically, we gain an understanding of contentious issues such as same sex marriage and nonmarital sexuality. For example, Adam states,

Within American Protestantism and even within the same denominations, there are radically opposed interpretations of the place of homosexuality, along with a series of other contemporary issues. One need only think of Jesse Jackson and Jerry Falwell, both Baptists, who represent polar opposites in these debates (2003, 263).

These debates bleed into society at large. Therefore, this section of my research is a content analysis on what liberal and conservative Protestant authors have to say in their books about issues of sexual morality. Protestant authors act, in a sense, as spokespeople for the differing groups within Protestant Christianity. However, not only are they spokespeople, but their books help to implement and maintain a certain worldview in the lives of Protestants.⁴⁶

Worldviews are essential to understanding current debates. Bennett (1992) argues that worldviews shape perceptions that predispose individuals to accept particular arguments. According to Hunter (1991), these worldviews shape a person's view on

⁴⁶ The religious subculture perspective, mentioned in previous chapters, provides a framework for understanding differing Protestant views about marriage and intimacy. Using this perspective as a framework, we will better understand how religious perspectives thrive "When they provide a clear set of beliefs and practices that strengthen group identity and distinguish one's own religious subculture from the alternatives" (Gallagher 2004, 216).

moral issues, social conflict and political debates. Berger (1992) further argues that the assumptions a person has about their views of the world define reality and, consequently, morality for the individual. Therefore, worldviews influence morality, which predispose people to align with and accept particular arguments in social debates (Green et al. 1996; Bennett 1992).

For example, many conservative Protestants accept the worldview that humans are intrinsically evil and have to be controlled, while many liberals do not. Paul Tillich indicates that conservative Protestants believe that human nature is “basically distorted. The difficult concept of ‘original sin’ denotes an original self-contradiction in human existence” (1957, 237). This contradiction in human existence is at work, according to Stevenson and Haberman, because humans, “misuse our freedom, reject God’s will, and are infected with sin” from birth (1998, 7). As a result, Protestants with such a worldview might be more likely to see forms of sexuality as evil and in need of control, whereas a more liberal Protestant worldview, like that of Thelos (2006), sees human nature as too complex to consider either “good or evil” and argues that humans should be given freedom and liberty to do what is pleasurable.⁴⁷ Presbyterian minister Rev. Timothy F. Simpson (2006) states,

Two basic intellectual traditions that undergird liberal Christian belief and that inform every aspect of thinking--and not just about sex--are the tradition of the Enlightenment, with its emphasis on reason and a scientific understanding of the world, and the tradition of scripture and theological confessions, with its emphasis on faith. Unlike their secular counterparts in American life who ignore the traditions of the faith while prizing Enlightenment rationality, and unlike their conservative Christian brethren

⁴⁷ However, this point does not mean that conservative Protestants are against all forms of sexuality. As this research will show, conservative Protestants fully support sexuality as long as it is expressed within the boundaries of a heterosexual marriage.

who subordinate the rationalism of modernity to their beliefs, liberal Christians strive to hold the two strands together and are thus often conflicted about issues where the modern world and the faith don't see eye to eye.

These varied worldviews and the multiple perceptions along the spectrum of liberal and conservative Protestantism are prevalent in debates over sexual morality within Protestantism.⁴⁸ Debates about sexuality are not just debates about sex but about the larger meanings we attach to social and cultural changes (e.g., the family). Focusing on sexuality may clarify how worldviews of sexuality inform beliefs about gender roles. In addition, understanding those arguments is necessary to understanding the ongoing "culture war" in the United States.⁴⁹

The Inception Of Writing About Marriage And Intimacy

Writing about sex and marriage in manual form is not a new occurrence. However, to provide the context of this dissertation, I will briefly focus on the history of these sex and marriage manuals that were written in the 19th to 20th centuries and how they have evolved into the Christian sex and marriage manuals that are popular today. Studying marriage and sex manuals provides a good perspective on views about sexuality from different perspectives. Even more, we are better capable of understanding how the authors view women and men within a marital relationship and in turn, many may view themselves during this time period.

⁴⁸ With these worldviews, causality can be problematic.

⁴⁹ "Culture war" refers to the dilemma in contemporary society due to the coexistence of various, irreconcilable worldviews on issues of morality (Berger 1967). For greater detail on this concept, refer to the literature review chapter of this dissertation.

Seidman (1991), in his study of love in America from 1830 to 1980, shows how people were taught about sex through the popular writings of various time periods. For example, during the Victorian period, he states that most people, especially Protestants, thought that there was a difference between love and sex. In other words, sex was not a component of love even though, within a marital relationship, love can sometimes be expressed by sex. These authors, according to Seidman, while viewing sex as healthy and natural, also saw it as a way of fomenting instinctive and destructive passions within the love relationship. While there were some attempt to balance love and sex, Seidman argues that the Victorians did not necessarily suppress sexuality but actively discussed, debated, and (obviously) participated in sexual activity.

According to Victorian writers, Seidman states, sexual activity was or should be confined to heterosexual marital relationships. Even more, for sex to be healthy and beneficial, it must be properly exercised. This means that sexual activity, while healthy and necessary in a marriage, should be limited. To exemplify this point, Seidman quoted Victorian advice writer William Acton's recommendation that

since sex is a pleasurable sensation . . . of momentary duration, its place in marriage would normally be quite limited. To elevate the role of sexual expression in marriage would degrade the husband and wife to the level of an animal. (1991, 26)

The Victorian view of sex, therefore, is a paradox of sorts. While sex was viewed by Victorian advice writers as a natural instinct that relates to the beneficial physical health of a human, its indulgence would have an adverse affect physically as well as spiritually. This point was validated by other Victorian writers as well. Seidman states that Orson Fowler argued that while mutual sexual pleasure is a requirement and necessity in a

happy marriage, flippantly indulging in it for mere pleasure reduces humans to nothing more than animals.

According to Seidman, Victorian writers viewed the pleasure of sex as a latent function of its procreative and biological nature. Sex, therefore, was a natural occurrence that should be limited to and within the marital relationship. Furthermore, while sex could be done in love, it was not what constituted love. Seidman argues that these writings are a valid means of understanding the sexual beliefs of the Victorians since sex manuals and advice literature sold many copies and they were reprinted numerous times.

Social scientist Jessamyn Neuhaus, in his study of early- to- mid-20th century marriage sex manuals, echoes the previous point. He states:

Marital sex manuals—as part of a discursive process—express a sexual ideal. They indicate how “experts” (whether self-proclaimed or widely recognized) thought the sexual identity of men and women should be understood and conveyed; they articulate a set of sex and gender norms established by physicians, psychiatrists, and cultural commentators for the bourgeoisie; and they played a role in the deployment of those norms. Though we may not know how individual consumers read or interpreted marital sex manuals, the genre’s longevity, the number of titles, and the sales figures for particular books do indicate the presence of such materials in people’s lives. (2000, 448)

Neuhaus further helps us to understand how these guides serve as good sources for showing us how “sexual scripts” have changed. Neuhaus argues that after World War I, marital sex manuals reflected a continual and national debate about gender roles, and more specifically the definition of white middle-class sexuality.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ There are several reasons why marital sex manuals focused on white middle class sexuality. For example, the nineteenth century was the height of Victorian sexuality, where sex was viewed as dangerous, resulting in the attempt to repress and oppress women’s sexuality. This restraint, in turn, resulted in a culture of sexual restraint within marriages (Gay 1984). In addition, the eugenics movement during this time worked

The 1920s and early 30s did see several significant changes in the ways Americans discussed and understood sexuality . . . After the war ended, consumerism helped bring sex to the forefront of American consciousness. For example, advertisements, popular songs, magazines, pulp fiction, and Hollywood films often put sex at the center of the story or the sell. A new youth culture, including more college-educated women than ever before, adopted new courtship patterns. ‘Petting’ became a commonly used term (452 – 53)

As a result, authors during this time period found a need to specify the sexual roles for married women and men. Therefore, during the 1920s and 1930s, some marital sex manuals focused on male sexual technique as the key to female sexual pleasure in the marriage. In other words, female sexual pleasure was based on male skill as men were in charge of the sexual pleasure, which had to lead to female orgasm in order to be considered successful.⁵¹ One example is *Ideal Marriage: Its Physiology and Technique*, by a retired Dutch gynecologist named Theodore H. Van de Velde, published in 1930. Van de Velde’s main argument is that men are responsible for marital pleasure. Men should understand how to stimulate their wives so they can please them sexually. To that end, he describes skills that men need to have for making sure their wives are sexually satisfied. Another manual, *The Art of Marriage* by J.F. Hayed, shows the difference between a wife whose husband has poor sexual technique and a sexually satisfied wife.

Quite often when a married woman is ailing, has a pasty, dingy complexion, lusterless eyes, suffers from lack of appetite and insomnia, is irritable and cranky, wants she-does-not-know-what, is in a mood varying from black to the deepest azure, has been given dozens of kinds of drugs, and treated by massage, baths, electricity, etc., and has not been improved in the least, quite often we say, such a woman needs not treatment at all—

to limit the birth rate of poor and minority families. As a result, the twentieth century gave rise to “middle- and- upper-class readers who snapped up published marital sex . . . advice” (Neuhaus 2000, 451).

⁵¹ Arguably the focus on women’s orgasm was not a new occurrence in the 1920s. Rachel P. Maines shows that since in the nineteenth century it was viewed as a way to cure hysteria and was the focus of medical understanding of female patients (1999).

it is her husband that needs it. And very often he needs no treatment either—merely a little [sexual] advice. And just a little advice frankly and plainly given does the work. The wife's complexion clears up, her eyes acquire a luster, her walk has a spring to it which it did not possess before, her appetite is fine, she is jolly and happy, life has a new interest which it did not possess before—in short, she is thoroughly permeated with the joy of living. (1920 144)

This quote presents sexual happiness as the responsibility of the husband. Neuhaus noted that these books and their views of sexuality “reiterated the belief in a fundamental female helplessness that required male intervention” (2000 456).

What is implicit in these statements, regardless of their subtle nuances, is the idea that women's sexuality is problematic. For example, Ericksen (1999), in her work on researching sex surveys in the 20th century and how these surveys were used or misused, indicates that many surveys and writings acted to show or lend validation to the belief that women needed more help than men in the marital relationship to have a successful marriage. Problematic in this assessment, Ericksen notes, is that marital success and happiness were congruent to women pleasing their husbands sexually. This included, for example, women not involving themselves in “premarital” sex, since women who do end up having bad marriages. However, even the conceptualization of “premarital sex” was gendered since “male researchers justified [women's nonmarital sexuality] as premarital sex, that is sex leading to marriage” (85). What is implicit and at times explicit was the overall argument that women's sexuality is problematic and that the onus is on women to be the best sexual partners that they can be for their husbands. These surveys and writings went beyond just reporting data, but biased male researchers used these surveys to characterized or construct sexual behavior instead of describe actual sexual behavior.

Marriage manuals after World War II continued the focus on women. It was the job of married women to find pleasure in sexual intercourse instead of the men's. Therefore, we find in the 1950s that there was a "burden shift" so that husbands were no longer relegated responsibility by writers for their wives' orgasms. Instead, the wives were responsible for not only sexually satisfying their husbands but being sexually satisfied themselves. If the wives were not sexually satisfied, then their sexuality was labeled as problematic, neurotic, and faulty. In addition, some books indicated that women's sexual enjoyment was not necessary for marriage. At the same time, men were reflected as more fragile and sexually vulnerable. For example, while arguing that a woman's orgasm was no longer necessary for a successful marriage, author Richard Steiner wrote, "There are, I believe, many good marriages in the course of which the wife seldom achieves an orgasm in the sexual relationship. But this is possible only when there is a cheerful acceptance of this fact on the part of husband and wife" (1955, pg.27). However, some books during this time period did focus on women as the ones that had to fix the "sexual problem" in the relationship. For example, in the book *Marriage Before and After*, Paul Popenoe argues that not only is a woman's lack of sexual responsiveness her fault, but also a man's impotence. He states:

Many a wife is frigid or partly so, thereby impairing her husband's satisfaction with marital relations. This sexual inadequacy of hers may not be exactly her fault—we'll call it her misfortune—but if it exists and she does not take prompt and energetic steps to improve it by consulting an expert, then she is certainly guilty of negligence. On the other hand, if her husband is wholly or partly impotent, that may be her fault too. (2003, 200)

It was out of this context of trying to indicate the sexual roles of women and men that sex and marriage guides for Protestants emerged from this already successful genre of secular writing. Protestant sex and marriage guides in the mid- to late-20th century were initially written to explain the role of a husband and a wife and to let Protestant married couples know that it was acceptable to be sexual. However, wives remained the primary focus when Marabel Morgan wrote *The Total Woman* in 1973. This book was unprecedented because it helped to place something that was deemed secular, sex, into a sacred framework.

Marabel Morgan wrote her book for what a 1977 edition of Time Magazine calls “housewife blues in the age of liberation.” According to the article, the American marriage was troubled because of women who were disenchanted (lonely and isolated, encouraged by some feminist authors to find happiness outside the home) and men who were disinterested (due to a focus on their career). Out of the growing atmosphere of the feminist movement, the alleged unhappiness of housewives, her success in her own marriage and the instructions about being submissive to one’s husband based on Apostle Paul’s statement in Ephesians 6:21, Morgan felt the need to share her views about how to be “true women” and live happily in the role of a woman when it comes to intimacy in the marriage.⁵² She indicated that Protestant women and men had the right to sexual pleasure. The end result was her book, *The Total Woman*. Her message was so well received that the book sold over three million copies and was referred to often in academic, feminist, and evangelical circles. In fact, David Harrington Watt noted that her book,

⁵² Ephesians 6:21 is a passage in the Bible that states, “Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord.”

achieved such prominence in conservative Protestant circles that evangelical writers assumed that “everyone is familiar with the Total Woman phenomenon.” Evangelical celebrities . . . came to Morgan for help; evangelical humorists parodied her ideas . . . and Billy Graham alluded to them in his sermons. Morgan’s ideas circulated well beyond the evangelical subculture. Secular women’s magazines printed excerpts from her books. Network news organizations devoted segments of documentaries to the “total woman” phenomenon. The National Review and the New York Times commented on her writings, and newsweeklies placed her picture on their covers. Feminist activists subjected her books to skeptical scrutiny, and a group at Princeton University tried to sponsor a debate between her and Betty Friedan. (1991,132)

Morgan’s writing was influential and controversial because she claimed that women’s focus on sexually pleasing their mates was not only a right in Protestant marriages but also should be acknowledged, celebrated, and thoroughly enjoyed. In her book, she states, “A total woman caters to her man’s special quirks, whether it be in salads, sex, or sports” (60). She states that a woman’s role in the home is to cater to her husband because, “God ordained man to be the head of the family . . . there is no way you can alter or improve the arrangement” (82). According to Morgan, the total woman desires to submit to her husband; it is not a grievous duty. The result of this submission would be a fulfilled happy marriage because a wife would bring out the best in her husband. Therefore, she expresses the idea that it is the Protestant woman’s job to initiate sexual activity by doing things like meeting her husband at the door after taking a nice bubble bath wearing nothing but plastic wrap, and that any sexual problems in the household are ultimately the fault of the woman.⁵³

⁵³ While she felt like she was showing what it meant to be a strong Christian woman, her book actually went against the strides of feminism by arguing that true strong women (married women) must do all they can to make sure that their husband is happy and satisfied sexually.

Morgan's focus on the woman's position in the home indicates the significance of different gender roles within the first formal Christian sex and marriage guide. As indicated earlier, gender continues to be evident in more recent books. However, she also indicates that "sex is for the marriage relationship only, but within those bounds . . . sex is as clean and pure as eating cottage cheese" (141). So her book also proclaims that sex should be within the confines of marriage; however, within those confines, sex can be an awesome, intimacy-building experience, which, in turn, will help the American family to be successful. However, it must be noted that the sex relationship, according to Morgan, is one of service to her husband.

Since then, the sex and marriage guides have continued to make their mark within Protestantism and with secular audiences discussing the roles of women and men in a marriage. For example, conservative Protestant writer James Dobson wrote *What Wives Wish Their Husbands Knew about Women* in 1975. His book has sold over two million copies and made James Dobson an important figure in the movement to uphold family values and sexual values.⁵⁴ Also in 1976, Tim and Beverly LaHaye wrote *The Act of Marriage*, which has sold over 2.5 million copies.⁵⁵ Oppenheimer (1999) states that over time, Christian sex and marriage guides have become a multimillion dollar industry, and amongst all categories of Christian books, sex and marriage guides are the best sellers, with millions of books already sold. It is through these guides that the idea of "God's design for the family" is evident, through discussions of marriage, the role of intimacy, godly sexuality, and gender roles (Bartkoski 2004; Manning 1999). By any standards, the

⁵⁴ James Dobson is the founder and leader of Focus on the Family, which is a conservative protestant group with over one million members.

⁵⁵ Sales figures were taken from amazon.com.

Christian sex and marriage guides that tell Christians how to live sexually moral lives have sold well within the United States. But in addition, these guides also discuss the roles women and men should play when it come to marriage and intimacy. Further, such books are referenced in discussions of issues of marriage and sexual morality such as nonmarital sex, extramarital sex, homosexuality, divorce, and the purpose of sex (Levine 2004; Kintz 1997). There are no data concerning whether liberal Protestant books sold in such record numbers as the conservative books. However, based on the type of Protestant books that are best sellers, it is assumed that they did not sell as much as conservative Protestant authors. While the books mention in this chapter did not do as well as the popular sex guide, *The Joy of Sex* (Comfort 1972), which sold over eight million copies, *The Act of Marriage* and *What Wives Wish Their Husbands Knew About Women*, focused solely on the Christian market. Therefore, selling over two million copies is very respectable.⁵⁶

My main research question in analyzing these books is the following: How do liberal and conservative Protestant authors view sexual morality? Since Protestant religious beliefs are influential in debates about sexual morality in the U.S., understanding sexual morality from both liberal and conservative Protestant perspectives will provide some understanding of not only the differing Protestant views, but also,

⁵⁶ All of these books were written by conservative Protestants. While books may have been written by more liberal Protestants during this time period, they were either infinitesimal or incorporated into the larger category of secular sex manuals. DeRogatis (2005) gives some indication of this point in her work on Protestant sex manuals from 1950 to the present.

opposing American cultural attitudes influenced by Protestantism about sexual morality and the reasons they are held and defended publicly.⁵⁷

In the following sections, I first discuss in further detail the methods that were used in selecting the books for the content analysis portion of this study. Next, I provide evidence for the major findings of this chapter. For example, I indicate how different biblical interpretations as well as the influence of gendered beliefs inform the authors' views on the purpose of sex, nonmarital sexuality, extramarital sexuality, homosexuality (including same-sex marriage), and divorce. Lastly, I conclude with the limitations of the research while providing suggestions for future research.

Methodology

Selection Criteria

There are three different criteria for selecting books for this study. One criterion is that none of the books used for this content analysis was published before 1992, with most of the books published since. The second criterion is that the books were chosen based on institutional, organizational, and pastoral/church endorsements. This demonstrates their importance to legitimate parts of the Protestant communities. For example, the books selected are required readings in various Protestant colleges and seminaries, influential in training ministers, or highly recommended by Protestant denominations, organizations, and the pastors whom I interviewed for this study (i.e.,

⁵⁷ The reasons refer to the biblical/doctrinal and social reasons that are given in this study to support the particular view.

Southern Baptist Convention, United Church of Christ, Sojourners).⁵⁸ While focusing on Protestant seminaries and Bible colleges, I examine books required for classes in family counseling, sexuality, and other related classes, as well as books written by faculty from those colleges and seminaries. Books that were highly recommended by Protestant denominations or organizations include books that are recommended to the group as authoritative on the topic of family values and sexual morality. In addition, through my interviews with pastors, they suggested books that they give to couples in their congregations who are considering being married, couples who are already married, or general recommendations for their congregations about the topics of family values and sexual morality. The final criterion (while not as important as the others), is their availability, which is taken into consideration because it shows that many people have access to read these authors' suggestions for Protestants. Therefore, the books studied are sold in large popular bookstores as well as Christian bookstores (i.e., Barnes and Noble, Borders, Waldenbooks, CLC Bookcenter). As a result, thirty books were reviewed: fifteen liberal Protestant and fifteen conservative Protestant.⁵⁹

Categorized as Liberal or Conservative

These books are coded as liberal Protestant or conservative Protestant based on the institution, organization, or pastors/churches that recommended them to their congregation. Books are categorized as liberal if the institution, organization, or

⁵⁸ A book may be influential but not a bestseller because the general public is not buying it in huge numbers. However, it may be required reading for many Protestants in colleges, denominations, or other Protestant organizations which makes it beneficial to this study.

⁵⁹ Refer to Appendix B.

pastors/churches that recommended them did not view the Bible as the inerrant word of God. These groups believe that the Bible contains stories that can be applied to life, but the Bible may be used only sparingly or critically assessed for perceived flaws. Books are categorized as conservative if the institution, organization, and pastors/churches that recommended them view the Bible as the inspired word of God without error and perceive themselves as taking a literal interpretation of the Bible. Consequently, a conservative Protestant group would claim to be using a “literal interpretation” of biblical scriptures to validate their views. If a Protestant seminary or Bible college encouraged the book, the statement of what they believe as an academic institution helped me to code books as either liberal or conservative. Each Protestant institution has a statement of what they believe as an academic institution.⁶⁰ This includes a statement on how they view the Bible as well as other biblical doctrines. From this multistep approach, I was able to code the books as liberal or conservative Protestant.

Themes of the Study

These books are examined based on themes that are central to this study: the purpose(s) of sex, homosexuality, nonmarital sexuality, extramarital sexuality, and forgiveness of extramarital sexuality.⁶¹ These themes were evident in the literature review as key issues within Protestantism and society. Also, these themes were evident in debates over sexual morality and family values. Furthermore, after analyzing the books selected for this study, the themes that were chosen are the major themes of focus in the

⁶⁰ Another institution that is viewed in order to see what books are endorsed is the Protestant Christian *media*. Protestant Christian media includes: magazines, newspapers, newsletters, and television and radio broadcasts.

⁶¹ The theme of forgiveness will lead to some discussion and analysis of divorce as well even though this is not a primary theme.

books. There were other themes that were either secondary or that would take another study to analyze thoroughly, such as abortion, polygamy, and the morality of alternative forms of intercourse (i.e., anal sex and oral sex). Even though these themes are interesting, I feel the ones that were selected fit the scope of this study and have caused a great amount of debate in Protestant as well as social circles.

Therefore, in this chapter, I discuss findings from the more popular Protestant sex and marriage guides to show what is being said to Protestants about sexual morality by authors. In particular, I analyze what both liberal and conservative Protestants state and how they validate their views. In addition, this chapter also draws out the ways that gender assumptions are evident or implied. For example, are men expected to have extramarital affairs more than women? If so, why is this the case? Another issue viewed in this content analysis is whether authors assign different responsibilities and expectations based on gender.

Marriage and Intimacy

Marriage and intimacy are topics that are often addressed within Protestantism because they seem to be at the foundation of Protestant beliefs as the oldest institutions of God. However, beliefs about marriage are not as easily interpreted. Some of the books used for this study address marriage and intimacy as sacred and holy, while others focus on the marital union and intimacy as misunderstood. Consequently, all of the books used for this research address marriage because of Protestants' perceived lack of knowledge, due to either social influences or church proscriptions.

Re-establishing The Holiness Of Marriage

Some books from both the liberal and the conservative perspectives see the institution of marriage as being under attack and thus write to inform Protestants that regardless of changes in society, marriage is a divine institution created by God. For example, Dr. Kevin Leman, who is a psychologist, president of Couples of Promise, and founder and host of RealFAMILIES.com, states that the institution of marriage is under attack.⁶² He writes, “The very foundations of marriage have been weakened during the past several decades by social turmoil, a series of democratic revolutions within our country and the world at large” (2001, 27). The social turmoil he alludes to in this quote refers to social movements such as equality for women. For example, he states that, “as women began to assert themselves and demand equality in the eyes of their husbands and other men, their husbands became confused and insecure . . . These changes have had an adverse effect on marriage, the home, and sexual relationships” (27 – 28). As a result, the roles in the marital relationship have been altered due to the advancement of equality for women resulting in the disruption of a holy union. Implicit in this argument is a perceived commitment to and need for gender inequality for marital unions to be successful and holy. Conservative Protestant author, marital therapist, and pastor Tim Alan Gardner, states,

Sex doesn't make sense unless we understand that it is holy. We can't unlock the secrets of sex and enjoy its greatest benefits unless we approach it as a holy act. Only then will [married] couples truly experience the beauty and joy of great sex the way God intended (2002, pg.13)

⁶² Dr. Leman would be closer to the liberal end of the spectrum based on the context of this study which is discussed in the literature review section.

The reasons Gardner gives for the holiness of intimacy in the marriage are that:

- God created it.
- [Sexual intimacy] is practiced according to God's design.
- [Sexual intimacy] is given to married couples as a gift for them.
- It is an encounter with God.
- It is a spiritual event. (2 – 5)

Gardner argues that marriage, and the intimacy within it, are important to God because he created it and receives the glory in it. In essence, marriage and intimacy represent God. This point is further addressed by liberal Protestant author, psychologist, marriage and family therapist, and certified sex therapist Dr. Douglas Rosenau, who also emphasizes the importance and meaning of marriage and intimacy to God in his book, *Intended for Pleasure*. He writes,

Genesis 1:27 states, "God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them" (NKJV). Wow! God's image is reflected in both maleness and femaleness and the way they interrelate. As we better understand the Creator of man and woman and the interaction of the Trinity, we gain an intimate glance into the nature of gender and sexuality: differences and similarities within a complementary partnership and the needs for intimate relationship, excitement, and nurturing procreation and recreation. God wanted to reveal Himself and the value He places on intimate loving relationships, so He created sexuality. (2002, 1)

Therefore, marriage and intimacy were created by God as an expression of God. So the marital union is the ideal display of God's complementary relationship between humans and God. This point is further illustrated by licensed obstetrician/gynecologist Dr. William Cutrer and his coauthor and magazine editor, Sandra Glahn (2001).⁶³ They state, "Marriage, as designed and ordained by God, provides a picture of God's heart to a world in darkness, a world in desperate need of reconciliation in its most intimate

⁶³ They are closer to the liberal end of the spectrum than the conservative end.

relationships.” Furthermore, they state that “the marriage of one man to one woman for a lifetime pictures Jesus Christ and His bride, the church . . . He shows this in the deepest most personal relationship we as men and women can experience—a godly marriage” (122). Several things are implied from these various descriptions and depictions of marriage. One, these authors believe that marriage is between a man and a woman. Second, sexual intimacy is reserved for the marital institution, and, thirdly, women and men have roles they must play within the marriage for it to be successful.

Misinformed and Uneducated Protestants

Some authors wrote about marriage and intimacy because they felt that people have been misinformed and as a result, misunderstood the liberty that God has given humans in expressing sexual intimacy in and outside of marriage. As a result, some authors raise questions about marriage and intimacy and whether sexuality should be located solely within heterosexual marriage. For example, liberal Protestant author and religious scholar Philo Thelos (2002) argues that the monogamous heterosexual marriage is not the only location for intimacy. He writes that people have been basing their beliefs about marriage and intimacy on church standards rather than biblical standards. To make this point, he states that,

Having one automobile does not make it invalid to desire another. Enjoying one kind of meat does not make it excessive to desire other kinds. So on and on we could illustrate this principle. People automatically put sex in a totally exclusive category, then interpret the Bible in light of their preconceptions . . . Engaging in sexual activity with more than one partner, even if married, is allowed for both husband and wife if they are both willing to grant such liberty to each other, because doing so with the mutual agreement constitutes neither breaking the marriage bond (“adultery”), nor “fornication (unlawful sex).” (2002, 180)

He further indicates in his book that sexual intimacy can be found between people who are not married and people who are homosexual. Therefore, intimacy is viewed as a gift in itself from God for human beings and not necessarily just for those within a marital union. Another liberal Protestant author, Rev. Dr. Susan Newman (2002), who is an ordained minister, further indicates that sex and intimacy do not have to be solely in the confines of marriage if done responsibly and that they are a gift. In her book, she tells her audience that “as women of spirit, we can teach our children that their sexuality is a gift that they can experience with responsibility, when it is the most favorable time in their adult lives to do so” (5). Throughout her book she constantly states, “God wants us to enjoy sex” regardless of when we have it, as long as it’s done in a “responsible” manner (i.e., as an adult, without causing hurt or pain. [17]).

To fully understand these Protestant authors’ views of marriage in greater detail, we must analyze their views on the purpose of sex, their beliefs about nonmarital sex, and extramarital sex. In addition, how do homosexuality and same-sex marriage fit in? Lastly, what is the influence of gendered roles in regards to marriage and intimacy? The following sections will help us to better understand the differing views of these Protestant authors, how they relate to the larger framework of what some Protestants think about sexual morality in the U.S., and what they are saying about marriage and intimacy.

The Purpose of Sex

The purpose of sex is the key to understanding debates over sexual morality. There are three major findings concerning the purpose of sex in liberal and conservative

Protestant books. First, some Protestants, in particular conservative Protestants, at times viewed books written about sex (including those by Christian authors) as books that were focused on secular matters. For example, the well-known book on Christian sexuality mentioned earlier in this chapter (Morgan's *The Total Woman*) received some harsh reviews. Watt (1991) acknowledges that "fundamentalists called Morgan heretical and 'satanic'" (134), since she was discussing sexuality and presenting sex as pleasurable and worthwhile. This section shows that sexuality is viewed as a spiritual matter amongst all Protestants. Therefore, understanding the purpose of sex reveals how sex is viewed as sacred rather than secular for both liberal and conservative Christians. In this section, I also show that two concurrent themes inform the answers given: the influence of gendered beliefs/gender implications and the heterosexual norm. While across both groups sex is seen as sacred and necessary for intimacy, there is a range of differences between the ways in which the most liberal and the most conservative authors discuss the purpose of sex.⁶⁴ This section, therefore, is intended to give a better overall understanding of how liberal and conservative Protestants view the purpose of sex.

Liberal Protestantism

Sex Is For Pleasure

First, the purpose of sex is for pleasure. Some would argue that sexual pleasure is only purposeful within the confines of marriage. For example, Cutrer and Glahn state that "God intends sex to be not only fulfilling and unifying but also great fun *within* the bounds of marriage" (2001,18). From the authors' perspective, the idea that sex is for

⁶⁴ Some authors argue that sex is not primarily for procreation and is not necessarily sacred, but is more of a natural drive or urge (Newman 2002).

pleasure *within* a marriage is based on how God intended for sex to be utilized. This argument implies, from what they would see as a biblical perspective, that people were designed to have fun sexually; however, that fun is limited to the boundaries of heterosexual marriage. Implicitly, Cutrer and Glahn (2001), like some others, argue against the view that sex, as a form of pleasure, is permissible outside of marriage.

However, other liberal authors, such as Newman (2002), argue that sex for pleasure is permissible outside of marriage and is not necessarily sacred. In other words, sex in and of itself is pleasurable. Sex was created as a pleasurable experience inside or outside the confines of marriage. Newman argues that enjoying sex is not just confined to marital couples, but to human beings in general within loving relationships. She states, “God created us with wonderful, healthy natural drives—sleep, hunger, thirst, and sex—and God saw that it was good” (7). This author concentrates on the biological drives or urges of humans and states that it is natural for people, regardless of the type of relationship they are in, to pursue pleasure. Therefore, it follows that we are natural beings with natural drives and that anyone can enjoy indulging these drives. As a result, sex is not necessarily sacred but is a natural appetite like hunger or thirst. To make this point, this author relies more on how she perceived human nature as needing to find pleasure in sex, rather than on specific biblical scriptures or passages.

Sex Is For Unity

The second understanding of sex is that it provides unity between two people. Rosenau defines unity as “the spiritual and emotional merger of wife and husband”

(2002, 8). It might be implied from this statement that unity cannot be developed between people who are not married or same-sex couples. This unity is the coming together of two bodies to create one being through marriage from God's point of view. For example, Ferrebee (2001) and Dillow and Pintus (1999) indicate that sex helps to draw the couple closer together to become one. Furthermore, they state that unity allows two people to be likeminded or able to understand each other as one spiritual unit. Rosenau further asserts that sex allows both members of a married couple to become intimate with one another and create oneness physically, spiritually, and emotionally, writing, "Making love, of all marital activities, should be a powerful agent in creating a deeper intimacy in marriage" (Rosenau 2002,118). To validate this argument, Rosenau relies on a biblical passage from the Song of Solomon 5:16 and 6:2 -3 to demonstrate how the intimacy of sex creates unity for couples who read this book:

His mouth is most sweet, yes, he is altogether lovely. This is my beloved, and this is my friend . . . My beloved has gone to his garden, to the beds of spices, to feed his flock in the gardens, and to gather lilies. I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine.

From here, the author provides for readers the importance of what he derives from this passage as "pair bonding," which Rosenau presents to couples in the form of twelve ways to increase sexual enrichment and intimacy. These particular twelve ways are not extracted from scripture or the biblical passage that was used in the book, but rather from anthropologist Desmond Morris's book *Intimate Behavior*. Based on his observation of the courting behaviors of human beings, Rosenau presents the twelve ways, which Morris

indicates are evident in most couples, and applies it to how Christians should increase their unity sexually.⁶⁵

In building this unity, there are some gender role differences that are evident. For example, Cutrer and Glahn (2002) imply that it is up to a wife to meet the sexual needs of her husband, while it is up to the husband to meet the emotional needs of his wife. Sex is not necessarily for personal pleasure but to create intimacy. To support their ideas, Cutrer and Glahn argue that when it comes to building intimacy and unity in marriage,

Most men report that sex is number one. Most women report that their own primary needs are more closely related to having a partner who listens and converses intently . . . First Corinthians tells us that when we marry, husbands and wives relinquish solitary rights to their own bodies . . . Thus we have a responsibility to meet our husband's or wife's ongoing sexual needs. (2002, 71)

From this point, they argue that if a husband's needs are not met, then he will feel like a failure, unimportant, discouraged, unloved, or unwanted; and if a wife's needs are not met, she too feels unimportant, unloved, or lonely.⁶⁶ For this reason, it is up to the wife to make the husband sexually complete and up to the husband to make the wife emotionally complete (Cutrer and Glahn 2002; Rosberg and Rosberg 2000). Where they claim the wife is responsible for supplying the physical intimacy to build up her husband's ego and feeling of self-worth, they reason that it is up to the man to be sensitive to his wife's emotional needs (Rosenau 2002; Wheat and Wheat 2002). To these liberal authors, it is important that the husband make the wife feel she is the most important, listened to,

⁶⁵ The twelve steps begin with step one, "Eye to body" indicating to the spouse that their physical qualities are appealing. The last step, step twelve, "Genital to genital," is a direct result from earlier bonding behaviors (120 – 21). For further discussion of twelve steps see Douglas Rosenau's (2002) book, *A Celebration of Sex: A Guide to Enjoying God's Gift of Sexual Intimacy*.

⁶⁶ While no claims are made about biological differences between women and men, there is an underlying assumption from the book that the needs of women and men are innate.

respected, and valuable person in the world. For example, Rosenau (2002) states that husbands

have been instructed in Ephesians 5 to give yourself sacrificially to your wife, in the same way that Christ gave Himself to the Church. In other words, He loved the Church enough to die for her . . . You must give—give first, give generously, and continue to give—if you hope to experience the expanding joys of love. (36)

By focusing on giving to their wives first, husbands will fulfill their wives' emotional needs.⁶⁷ The differing needs of women and men according to this author are innate and God-given, therefore this assumes all women and men have these particular needs.

Sex Is For Procreation

Finally, according to these writers, sex is also intended for procreation. Some authors argue that sexual intercourse was designed by God to help create life. Sex, therefore, is considered a privilege and an opportunity for a couple to have children (Rosenau 2002; Dillow and Pintus 1999). For example, Dillow and Pintus (1999) state,

God formed Adam from the dust of the earth. Then He fashioned Eve from Adam's rib. He could have continued creating man and woman in this way or chosen from a multitude of other options available to Him. But in His perfect wisdom, God designed sexual intercourse as the best plan for man and woman to create a new life. Beginning in Genesis, we are commanded to "be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth" (1:28). This may be the only commandment given by God that His people have consistently applied. The gift of sex gives us the unspeakable privilege of creating a child from our love. How incredibly creative our God is! (6)

⁶⁷ Yet, other liberal authors really do not address gender differences, or view two people in a marriage as simply that, two people who both have to work together to make the marriage work (Rogers 2006; Thelos 2006; Myers and Scanzoni 2005; Miner and Connoley 2002; Newman 2002; Smedes 2001). While some of the liberal Protestant books either subtly or overtly discuss gender, others do not. This may be due to the fact that some liberal Protestant books are more focused on proving that traditional conservative beliefs are incorrect and/or invalid in today's society than on the expectations of a wife or a husband. Therefore, the woman's role or man's role are not evaluated.

By discussing the scriptural command to “be fruitful and multiply,” Dillow and Pintus connect sex with procreation, although procreation may not be the primary reason. Even though it is evident from some liberal Protestant perspectives that sex may be deemed acceptable for both homosexual and heterosexual couples, when viewing the purposes of sex, the focus on procreation can continue opposition to homosexuality. By using the Bible to validate why procreation is necessary, the above passage latently indicates that heterosexual couples are God’s design for having children. As a result, according to this author, God’s best plan for having natural children is through heterosexual intercourse.

Conservative Protestantism

The purposes of sex from more conservative Protestant perspectives are somewhat different from liberal Protestant perspectives. However, the sacredness of sex from the perspective of conservative Protestants is even more evident. Sumrall (2002) states that “the sex life of a Christian [married] man and woman can bring honor to God. This is another important function of sex. God says everything we do should honor Him” (51). Within conservative Protestantism, sex is seen as very important in the heterosexual marital relationship for several reasons: unity, mutual pleasure, and procreation. These reasons are the underlying themes within all of the conservative Protestant books (McBurney and McBurney 2005; Winner 2005; Arthur 2002; Elliot 2002; Gardner 2002; Sumrall 2002; Torode and Torode 2002; Wilson 2002; Anderson 2000; LaHaye and LaHaye 1998; Nelson 1998; Yandian 1993).

Sex Is For Unity

First, according to these authors, a purpose of sex is to produce unity within the marital relationship. Most authors base this on a scripture in Genesis 2: 24 that states, “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall *cleave* unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.” They argue that this unity is stronger than the unity between parents and children (Sumrall 2002; Anderson 2000; LaHaye and LaHaye 1998; Yandian 1993).⁶⁸ Through this unity, a couple becomes “one flesh,” or in a sense, one person (Sumrall 2002; LaHaye and LaHaye 1998; Nelson 1998). In addition, “God gave sex as a divinely unique and extraordinary gift to the original couple to share and enjoy with each other, to celebrate their oneness” (Gardner 2002,16). As a result, it is implied that heterosexual couples can and should unite more strongly than parental or other familial bonds. Also, it is implied that homosexuals cannot unite in the same way based on the Bible passage. For example, Sumrall (2002) states that homosexuals cannot unite because, “God still says it is sinful for two people of the same sex to “make love” to one another (Lev.18:22)” (pg.93).

Sex Is For Mutual Pleasure

Second, according to conservative Protestant authors, another purpose of sex is to provide mutual pleasure within the marital relationship. When discussing sex within marriage, P.B. Wilson (2002) says it is not only for procreation but for recreation as well. “Saved sex liberates us to enjoy marriage to its fullest extent” (12). This idea of “saved

⁶⁸ Liberal protestants also argue that sex is for unity, however, the books do not explicitly state that the bond that is created within a marital relationship is or should be stronger than a parental or other familial bonds.

sex,” Wilson argues, “is designed to be enjoyed by a Christian man and woman joined together by God in holy matrimony . . . Saved sex begins with recognizing that God is in the bedroom . . . What goes on between a married couple is sacred and holy and the marriage bed is ‘undefiled’” (10 – 11). Therefore, for sex to be for mutual pleasure according to this author, it could only be in the confines of what she calls, “saved sex.” Saved sex seems to refer to sex between couples that fulfill several qualifications: they have to be Christian, married under God, realizing that God is in the bedroom, and that *sex is sacred and holy* between a married couple. This author, therefore, validates the argument that sex is sacred for Protestants. However, she also implies that people who are not Christian cannot have “saved sex,” which produces mutual pleasure, even if they are married.⁶⁹ In order for true pleasure to be achieved, there must be a spiritual connection of the married couple to God, something that non-Christians do not have. This differs from more liberal authors because sex does not necessarily have to be in the confines of a marriage, heterosexual marriage, or between individuals considered to be “saved.” A couple does not necessarily have to be Christian. Instead, as Thelos (2002) argues, sex is available to people inside as well as outside of marriage and it is holy because God created it, not necessarily because of those who are participating in the act.

Regarding gender differences, some conservative authors insist that women must meet the sex drives of their husbands as long as they do not have health issues or are not

⁶⁹ Some authors argue sex is for pleasure with the partner in order to prevent the spouse from going outside the marriage. Monogamy is important because extramarital affairs can disrupt the unity between a man and a woman (Sumrall 2002; Anderson 2000; LaHaye and LaHaye 1998; Yandian 1993). This will be discussed more detail later in this section.

physically worn out (Sumrall 2002; LaHaye and LaHaye 1998).⁷⁰ For example, Yandian (1993) argues that a wife must “understand her husband’s sex drive and flow with it” (132). Therefore, unity in the marriage “requires the wife to see her husband’s point of view in sex. Understanding and accepting your husband’s sex drive and passion will only bless [a wife], not destroy [her]” (Yandian 1993, 133). However, there does not appear to be the same requirement that the husband needs to necessarily see his wife’s point of view in sex. The emotional needs of women and men are viewed as different and those differences are seen as innate. Yandian (1993) implies that by having a sexually gratified husband, a woman can make the marriage better and is able to make the husband feel secure by boosting his ego, turning him into a good provider and getting rid of his lust for other women. For example, LaHaye and LaHaye (1998) indicate, in the following story, that a wife who is sexual with her husband helps to fulfill his manhood in the midst of failure and bad circumstances:

One loving wife asked what she could do for her husband whose business had just collapsed. He was more depressed than she had ever seen him before, and she felt incapable of reaching him . . . I suggested that she make aggressive love to him, that she dress provocatively and use her feminine charm to seduce him . . . What every man needs, especially during a period of defeat, is to be convinced that his wife loves him for himself, not for anything he does for her . . . Later his wife reported that . . . within five minutes after lovemaking, [he] began to share a new business idea with her. Although that idea never materialized, it started him upward. He soon found his niche and today is enjoying a successful career. (37)

LaHaye and LaHaye indicate that a wife should be sexual with her husband because by having sex with her husband, she will “communicate her confidence in terms he [can]

⁷⁰ This view of women as being responsible for a sexually fulfilled marriage has remained constant since prior to the 1950s.

understand” (38). In other words, this point implies that a wife is supposed to meet her husband’s needs so that he will remain confident as a man. Sex is therefore a form of emotional support for men. Also, this statement surmises that husbands can only communicate or receive communication through the sexual expression of their wives.

At the same time however, a husband is supposed to be affectionate and caring with his wife by being romantic. LaHaye and LaHaye (1998) further indicate that

most women crave kisses of appreciation . . . To them a tender touch, a warm embrace, and the closeness of the one they love is almost as enjoyable as the more intimate contact. In fact, many wives respond to an approving look and words of commendation. It is a wise husband who breaks out of the routine [of just having sexual intercourse] frequently to voice approval of his wife. Such men do not testify to sexual starvation, for they have learned that their wives are ignited by the little expressions of affection that often seem meaningless to a man. (57)

So on one hand women are supposed to adapt to the sexual drives of their husbands and on the other husbands are supposed to be romantic to their wives and address their emotional needs of appreciation. The implications of such instructions are that men should be kind, gentle and show appreciation to their wives in order to receive sexual gratification. Showing affection and appreciation is not necessarily for the wife to receive the benefit, the end result still benefits men since, “such men do not testify to sexual starvation” (LaHaye and LaHaye 1998, 57).

Sex Is For Procreation

Lastly, sex is viewed as necessary for procreation by conservative authors. For example, Tim and Beverly LaHaye (1998) write that, “immediately after creating Adam and Eve, God blessed them and commanded them to ‘be fruitful and increase in number;

fill the earth and subdue it' (Gen. 1:28) . . . All of this tells us that the principal reason God gave us our incredible sex drive is to propagate the race" (66). The command to be fruitful and increase in number suggests that Protestants are commanded by God to have children; it is not a choice. Therefore, from this point of view, God endowed individuals with a sex drive in order to reproduce. As seen earlier, even though this purpose is not as important as it was in the past, it is still viewed as a purpose of having sex for conservative authors. For example, Sumrall (2002) states that,

Right after God created the first man and woman, He told them, "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth." God commanded the man and woman to have sexual relations with one another to bring children into the world. It would have been sinful for them not to have intercourse. They would have been disobeying a direct order from God if they had not conceived children through sex. (15 – 16)

However, Sumrall also states later in his book that based on a biblical passage from 1 Corinthians 13:4 – 7⁷¹ that

Your sexual relationship should express this kind of pure and selfless love for your mate. Otherwise you've missed the mark. "But wait a minute, Dr. Sumrall!" someone may say. "I thought you told us that sex was for bearing children." Yes, that is the primary reason God gave us our sexual nature. But He also expects us to use sex to express our love for our mate , , , A married couple should have sexual relations, not just to conceive children, but to show one another their complete love and devotion. (43 – 44)

Still, LaHaye and LaHaye (1998) argue that every married couple should have at least four to five children if physically possible. However, they do not state that that number is biblical but believe that every married couple should plan on having children. In addition, they endorse using birth control to limit family size. They write,

⁷¹ 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 NKJV states, "Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."

Every couple must prayerfully decide their attitude toward children and family size. It is best to have a plan; God will guide you to one as you seek His will. Make sure you are not unduly influenced by the humanistic philosophy of our day but seek the basic will of God as revealed in His Word. We feel every Christian family should plan on having children, if at all possible. How many they have should be based on the number they think they can adequately care for and train for a dedicated life of service to God. (274)

As a result, contraception is viewed as being acceptable to use as long as a couple has children or are planning to have children. LaHaye and LaHaye argue against opting not to have children if one is physically capable. They argue that the main reason why people opt not to have children is based on “humanistic philosophy” such as focusing on career goals, personal experiences, and “selfish ambition.” However, they are not implying that career goals and ambition should be avoided, especially for men, but that the career goals and ambition cannot be utilized as a reason not having children. Sex for procreation seems to be more central for conservatives than liberals, which is evident in their attitudes towards homosexuality, nonmarital sexuality, and extramarital sexuality.

CHAPTER 5

CONTENT ANALYSIS OF PROTESTANT BOOKS—THE PRACTICE OF SEX

Homosexuality/Same-Sex Marriage

As noted earlier, liberal and conservative views about the purpose of sex inform their views about homosexuality/same-sex marriage. The authority of scripture has been cited, questioned, or dismissed when discussing same-sex marriage by both liberal and conservative Protestant authors. While conservative Protestant authors argue that only the Bible informs them, liberal authors vary in their views. Most liberal Protestant authors see the Bible as incomplete, and so interpret the Bible by discussing historical context, using other sources, and disregarding some passages about sexual morality as inadequate to address today's culture. Further, some liberal Protestant authors question the validity of the Bible specifically surrounding the theme of homosexuality.

Liberal Protestants

Some liberal Protestant authors are reticent in the endorsing homosexuality and same-sex marriage, while others clearly argue that homosexuality and same-sex marriage are not sins and are acceptable between two people who truly love one another. Eight out of the fifteen liberal books examined in this study are in favor of homosexuality and same-sex marriage. One of those who argues that homosexuality needs to be controlled is Doug Rosenau (2002), a psychologist as well as a Christian sex therapist, who has dealt with numerous cases in which one partner in a heterosexual marriage realizes or reveals that she or he is homosexual. He advises the homosexual spouse to “ask God for the

strength to say no to [homosexuality] in your life that, left to your own devices, you are drawn toward. Then you will be able to say yes to other aspects of who you are as a person” (377). Therefore, he contends that homosexuals should control their behavior by not acting on their desires (Rosenau 2002; Wheat and Wheat 2002; Leman 2001).⁷² In other words, they should not act on their homosexuality but rather be abstinent, or if in a heterosexual marriage, be totally committed to and focused on that relationship.

A second group of writers argues that homosexuality is not a sin if homosexuals have and maintain a monogamous relationship with one person (Thelos 2006; Rogers 2006; Myers and Scanzoni 2005; Miner and Connoley 2002; Smedes 2001). Within this group, attitudes about homosexuality vary. Even though they do not view homosexuality as a sin, some authors see it as a blessing or “gift,” while others see homosexuality as a burden. For example, Lewis Smedes (2001) states in his book, *Sex for Christians*, that

homosexuality is a *burden* that homosexual people are called to bear, and bear as morally as possible, even though they never chose to bear it . . . It is a *burden* most obediently and creatively borne in a committed love-partnership with another” (italics added, 241).

So even though homosexuality is deemed a burden, according to Smedes it is a burden homosexuals are “called” to or given by God to bear. However, they should not just bear with their homosexuality, but live with it morally and honorably (Smedes 2001). This statement implies that heterosexuality is the correct form, and homosexuality is an aberration. Furthermore, Smedes states in his book that, “I think that homosexuality is not the sexual orientation that God intended in creation. It is a genetic lapse. It is nature gone

⁷² Interestingly, this argument is somewhat similar to that of the conservative Protestant authors and will be discussed later.

awry . . . homosexual people are called to live as morally within their tragedy as the rest of us are called to live within whatever tragedy may be ours” (243). Homosexuality for this author is a “burden” or “tragedy”; it is something that he dislikes and thinks one should “overcome” as a Christian. While this author argues for monogamous same-sex relationships, he still describes them as a burden, as something that can be looked at as something immoral, even sinful, and that one needs to deal with before one is overwhelmed.

Some liberal Protestant authors, however, argue that the Bible is not against homosexuality and same-sex marriage, despite what is often maintained by their conservative counterparts (Thelos 2006; Rogers 2006; Myers and Scanzoni 2005; Rauch 2004; Miner and Connoley 2002; Comstock 2001). In fact, throughout the liberal books within which homosexuality was not deemed a sin, authors emphasized some key points about the Bible to make their case. These key points are summed up by Myers and Scanzoni:

- The Bible has very little to say about same-sex sexual expression.
- The few verses that speak of same-sex acts must be seen in their context and in relation to the condemnation of idolatry, lust, promiscuity, and exploitation.
- Translators have muddied the waters in many cases, because the specific behaviors that were addressed in their cultural context don’t easily lend themselves to a succinct and descriptive rendering in modern English.
- Scripture does not speak to naturally disposed same-sex orientation, nor does it speak to loving, committed homosexual relationships.
- Jesus is not recorded as having said anything at all about homosexuality, but he said a great deal about loving our neighbor, being humble, avoiding judgmentalism, and caring about people who were hurting and regarded as outcasts. (2005,103)

Furthermore, Miner and Connoley call Bible passages that are used against homosexuality “clobber passages,” by which they mean “the handful of Bible passages that some Christians use to ‘clobber’ gay, lesbian, and bisexual people” (2002, 1). They argue that some Bible passages are being used and abused to vilify homosexuals.

In addition, a few authors argue that same-sex marriage should be allowed so the institution of marriage in general will be strengthened. For example, Myers and Scanzoni state:

Because marriage is inherently healthy, same-sex marriage will be healthier than its less permanent alternatives. It will likely not accelerate us down a slippery slope to promiscuity and polygamy . . . It can prompt heterosexual men and women to appreciate marriage in a new way . . . Indeed, if implemented as part of a pro-marriage initiative, inviting gay couples to say “I do” may help reverse the growing tendency for straight couples to say “We don’t.” (2005,130)

So, while there is some range of views on homosexuality, it is evident that some of the liberal Protestant authors do not see homosexuality as detrimental to society but as beneficial. In fact, it seems same-sex marriage would be just as beneficial for society as it would be for homosexuals. These authors are therefore pro-marriage, not in the traditional sense of heterosexual marriage, but in the sense of the union and bond that it represents between two people. As a result, a good marriage for these authors does not focus on the sex of the individuals involved but the commitment made by two individuals. Jonathan Rauch furthers this argument to show how the institution of marriage is necessary not only for heterosexuals but for homosexuals as well. He states:

I think it’s a safe bet that marriage and the prospect of marriage would improve gay people’s health and happiness and general welfare much as it has improved straight people’s. I believe it will ennoble and dignify gay love and sex as it has done straight love and sex; I believe it will close the

book on the culture of libertinism and liberation and replace it with a social compact forged of responsibility. In all these respects—physical, spiritual, cultural—gay lives will be improved, at least somewhat but probably immensely. (2004, 71)

According to these authors, allowing same-sex marriage will help mitigate some societal ills and improve the strength of the marital relationship in general. Interestingly, these authors do not use much of a biblical argument, but rather, take more of a mental and social health approach to viewing the acceptance of homosexuality and same-sex marriage. Overall, many of the liberal books promote the idea that Christians must accept homosexuality. Instead of denouncing homosexuality, the liberal Protestant authors argue that Protestants should show God’s love to homosexuals.

Conservative Protestantism

As expected, conservative Protestant authors take what they consider a “literal” approach when discussing the “sin” of homosexuality (Anderson 2002; Arthur 2002; Elliot 2002; Sumrall 2002; Ferrebee 2001; LaHaye and LaHaye 1998). Conservatives argue that since God created man and woman first, as people of opposite sexes, only that pairing will serve the true purposes of sex, and anything else is damnable (Sumrall 2002; Torode et al. 2002; Wilson). Conservative authors such as Sumrall base their argument on an interpretation of the biblical passage 1 Corinthians 6:9 and argue that “homosexuality is just as perverse as prostitution; both warp the purpose God intended for sex” (2002, 90 – 91).⁷³

⁷³ 1 Corinthians 6:9 in the New International Version states, “Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers, nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders.” However, newer translations of the Bible also include cultural constructions that were not in existence when the Bible was written. For example, “homosexual” is a fairly new concept in language and the word was not used in original biblical texts and early translations.

Using the Bible to justify and support their beliefs, conservative Protestant authors make arguments based on what they believe the Bible says and more specifically what they believe the New Testament tells us that Jesus said. For example, Robert Gagnon uses the message of Jesus as indicated by writers of the Bible to argue that Jesus always focused on heterosexual marriage, thus indicating that heterosexuality is ideal. For example, Gagnon states, “Jesus adopted a ‘back-to-creation’ model of sexuality,” and argues, “In contending the indissolubility of marriage, Jesus clearly presupposed the one explicit prerequisite in Gen. 1:27 and 2:24; namely, that there be a male and female, man and woman, to effect the ‘one flesh’ reunion” (2004, 17).⁷⁴

In the March 2004 *Christianity Today* article, Fuller Theological Seminary President and noted author Richard Mouw was quoted stating that marriage is not for homosexuals because marriage “isn’t created by human contracts, but it is something that was created by God as a lifelong faithful partnership between a man and a woman”⁷⁵. Therefore, marriage is not for homosexuals because it serves “to propagate the human race and to promote healthy families within that propagation, but also to model the mental faithfulness between God and his people, and Christ and his church” (29). Thus these authors argue that homosexuality goes against God since procreation will not result from a homosexual union and does not represent the model of the connection between the church and Jesus Christ (McBurney and McBurney 2005).

In the King James Version (older translation of the Bible) instead of the word homosexual offenders, the phrase used is “nor abusers of themselves with mankind.” Refer to literature review for further discussion.

⁷⁴ Genesis 1:27 says, “So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (NIV). Genesis 2:24 says, “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh” (NIV).

⁷⁵ Moll Rob. “Civil Unions: Would a Marriage by Any Other Name be the Same.” *Christianity Today* web version, March 2004, Vol 48.

In fact, most conservative authors argue that human nature is intrinsically riddled with evils, and one of those evils or sins is homosexuality. They contend that homosexuality, like every other sin, should be rejected, and that those who are living a homosexual lifestyle cannot receive the same benefits (i.e., marriage) as those who are doing what the Bible directs (McBurney and McBurney 2005; Sumrall 2002). In fact, based on Sumrall's position quoted earlier, homosexuality is viewed as a perversity, like prostitution, which should not be accepted, but instead, corrected. He writes,

Homosexuals and lesbians cannot fulfill God's first commandment regarding sex. They cannot 'replenish the earth' through their perverse cavorting. In fact, if everyone thought homosexuality was the ideal model for a sex life, humanity would die out in one generation (2002, 93).

Nonmarital Sexuality

Nonmarital sexuality is another social issue concerning sexual morality that has been debated by Protestants. There are varying responses on this issue not only between conservative and liberal Protestant authors, but also amongst liberal Protestant authors as a group. Liberal Protestants back up their varied opinions on nonmarital sexuality with specific views of the Bible, science, and popular culture.

Liberal Protestants

As could be expected, there seems to be a great range among liberal Protestant authors in their view of the morality of nonmarital sex or, as it is described in many of the books, premarital sex. In fact, four of the fifteen liberal Protestant books analyzed are in favor of nonmarital sexuality. For example, Newman states that the religious right has caused sexual guilt and shame for Christian women. She further states:

If God did not want us to enjoy sex, She would not have made Barry White. If God did not want us to enjoy sex, She would not have made the Isley Brothers, Stevie Wonder, Smokey . . . She would not have let us ever hear and slow drag to “Stay in My Corner,” Stairway to Heaven. (2002, 17)⁷⁶

This belief that God intended sex for pleasure, unity, and intimacy allows some liberal authors to argue that nonmarital sexuality is acceptable within certain conditions. One main condition is that one cannot have casual or random sex with anyone, but must engage in sex with someone to whom one is committed and for whom one has feelings.

Newman further explains this in her distinction between “having sex” and “soulful sex.”

When you have sex with someone, you may enjoy a momentary thrill, but without the soul of love, you are only having sex, not making love. Lovemaking involves the offering of total surrender to the beloved, for the purpose of mutual pleasure—this is soulful sex. Soulful sex is not selfish. It desires the fulfillment of the beloved. Soulful sex is not satisfied with “getting some,” but with sharing all of oneself with the other. Soulful sex is not the act of “hittin’ it and quittin’.” Soulful sex lovingly nourishes the beloved with care and affection long after the physical act has ended. (96 – 97)

The expression “having sex,” therefore, is similar to casual sex, whereas making love is not. Newman implies that making love goes beyond just a physical thrill. Rather, it allows two people to share a special, even spiritual, bond, even if they are not married. This type of sex evolves into what she calls “soulful sex,” in which two people are nourished through the genuine care and affection of one another beyond intercourse. Therefore, she argues, as long as both members of the couple are in monogamous relationship with the other, nonmarital sex is fine because God created the sexual passion. The sexual passion is a sense of sharing and not getting. Newman, however, does limit

⁷⁶ Newman refers to God in the feminine rather than the traditional masculine.

the argument by stating that people should refrain from casual sex because it is not intimate and also to prevent health problems like sexually transmitted diseases. Some authors continue this argument by explaining that nonmarital sex is not a sin if it is responsible and consensual (Thelos 2002; Gruber 2001). Thelos argues,

Standard church dogma remains “thou shalt not.” Yet not even in [Old Testament] theology is such stringency mandated for the single person . . . the Bible does not directly address this issue, and the word “fornication” does not address this issue. In other words, the Bible does not contain a law, an example, or a word that designates sexual activity by single people. Therefore it is impossible to honestly state that “the Bible condemns sex by single people.” . . . If sex is a gift from God it is as much a gift to single people as to married people. It is neither compassionate nor Biblical to tell them that they must “be celibate or be damned.” Sex is “good” for the single as for anyone else . . . Today young people are refusing the church’s and society’s taboos on pre-marital and extra-marital sex. And well they should. We are not saying that people have license to run amok and exercise no restraint. But single people have no responsibility to honor taboos that have no genuine foundation in God’s word. (2002, 155 – 157)

Therefore, according to Thelos, nonmarital sex is not classified as a sin in the Bible, but rather is classified as a sin by traditional beliefs and church norms by which sexuality is limited to the marital relationship. Based on this argument, our societal norms and taboos have been influenced greatly by Protestantism. However, those norms about marital sex and taboos about nonmarital sex are incorrect according to Thelos. In what Thelos would consider a biblical argument, he has described how conservative Protestants have interpreted the Bible incorrectly and actually infiltrated their own personal values into society.

However, some of the liberal authors would agree with conservative authors about the “problems” with nonmarital sexuality. In fact, liberal Protestants who argue against

sexual relationships outside of marriage say that any relationship that involves nonmarital sex is flawed and lacks true commitment. For example, Smedes argues that a sexual relationship outside of marriage

is an infantile solution because it grabs the goodies of life without the long-term responsibilities of life. It achieves the instant closeness but avoids the tensions and conflicts that are built into a life-partnership that is achieved only by a love that is willing to struggle” (2001, 121).

In other words, according to Smedes, nonmarital sexuality does not have the same level of commitment or love that a marriage can have. This will be discussed more in the next section along with conservative Protestant authors’ views.

Conservative Protestants

While there is a range of beliefs about nonmarital sexuality among liberal Protestants, conservative Protestants tend to agree that nonmarital sexuality is immoral and sinful (Lockner 2004). This includes not just sexual intercourse but other forms of sexual play as well.⁷⁷ However, not only is nonmarital sex immoral and sinful according to these authors, but it is also assumed to disrupt the unity of later marriages and the oneness these authors believe should be confined to a marriage. According to these authors, sexual morality is displayed only when sex is confined to the marital union of one man and one woman, and anything else is against the will of God (Kay 2005; Lockner 2004; Gardner 2002). For example, Tim Gardner states that people who have sex “outside the bonds of marriage . . . dishonored God with [their] bodies by becoming one in the wrong way” (2002, 34). Therefore, it is important for conservative Protestant authors that the connection between husband and wife, which sexual intimacy helps to

⁷⁷ Other forms of sexual play refer to masturbation, oral sex, fondling, etc.

maintain, represents what they describe as the oneness of Christ and the church. This point aligns with conservative views of marriage as mentioned earlier in this chapter; that marriage and intimacy exemplify the bond and love that Jesus Christ has for the church (those who believe in Him). This is further illustrated in the following quote.

Within the protective boundaries of the wife-husband relationship, sex brings incredible honor to God. But for the oneness that is established in sexual intimacy to be truly representative of the mystery of Christ and the church, it must include—albeit marred by our selfishness—the kind of sacrificial love described in the verses leading up to Ephesians 5:32 where Paul declares the mystery. Marital sex creates oneness. Marriage is holy as husband and wives humbly and earnestly seek to let their whole love fully represent Christ’s love for His bride [meaning the church]. And it has been that way from the beginning. (Gardner 2002,34)

Marital sex, then, leads to oneness or unity, according to the conservative argument, while nonmarital sex does not. In the following passage, Tim and Beverly LaHaye present a further argument as to why people should not have nonmarital (or premarital) sex.

For years now, amoral advocates of premarital sex have encouraged young people to gain sexual experience as an aid to future marital adjustment. We who believe the Bible and its timeless principles for happy living⁷⁸ have advised that such a practice is harmful . . . premarital sex is not necessary and, according to statistics, may hinder sexual adjustment . . . No wonder the Bible calls it a “sin against your own soul” (1998, 291)

From this quote, it is evident that conservative Protestant authors consider nonmarital sex immoral and destructive, especially to young people. In fact, according to the LaHayes, those who advocate nonmarital or premarital sex are wrong in doing so, not only because of biblical injunctions, but also because of statistics. To further validate their point, they

⁷⁸ This author argues that the Bible contains “timeless principles for happy living.” This implies that, according to the author’s view, nonmarital sex has not and will not lead to happy living.

cite statistics that “show” that premarital sex “hinders sexual adjustment” for marriage,⁷⁹ referring to the period in which a married couple adjusts to having sex with one another. Furthermore, LaHaye and LaHaye argue that nonmarital/premarital sex does not follow God’s intentions, maintaining that even though sex is beautiful, it only remains so within the institution of marriage. According to Kay Arthur (2002), the woman’s body is a gift from God to man, and her vagina was especially created to remain “untouched” until after she was married. Focusing more on the woman’s body than on the man’s body, she writes, “Within her vagina is a hymen, a mucous membrane that partially seals the entrance into the vagina, leaving only adequate space for the woman’s menstrual discharge.” During biblical times a marriage would only be consummated or considered official if there was evidence in the form of “the blood on the garment or cloth [that would] attest to her virginity, as the covenant of blood was cut ‘by passing through pieces of flesh’” (25 – 26). As a result of this practice, women’s sexuality was always more in question than men’s sexuality. In fact, this focus on women’s bodies rather than men’s implies that a woman’s virginity is more important than a man’s.

According to Arthur (2002), men are not to indulge in nonmarital sex either. Strikingly, the term *virgin* is used less often in regards to men both in the Bible and in society. For example, Arthur states:

Proverbs 5:15-23 “Drink water from your own cistern and fresh water from your own well. Should your springs be dispersed abroad, streams of water in the streets? Let them be yours alone and not for strangers with you. Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth. As a loving hind and a graceful doe, let her breasts satisfy you at all times;

⁷⁹ It seems at times that more conservative Protestant authors use statistics and other research to validate and even justify a biblical point whereas more liberal Protestants use research as the starting ground or as a compliment to the Bible to make the point.

be exhilarated always with her love. For why should you, my son, be exhilarated with an adulteress and embrace the bosom of a foreigner? For the ways of a man are before the eyes of the Lord, and He watches all his paths. His own iniquities will capture the wicked, and he will be held with the curse of his sin. He will die for lack of instruction and in the greatness of his folly he will go astray.” What is God saying in proverbs 5? He’s telling a man that he’s to satisfy his sexual desire at home. The breasts of his wife are to be his satisfaction, not the breasts of some stranger, some prostitute, or some immoral woman. He’s to drink water from his own well, his own wife, when he thirsts for sexual satisfaction. His springs—his semen and sperm—are not to be dispersed all over town, up and down the streets, given to one woman after another! His life, his DNA, his genes are in his sperm... If you want to be blessed by God, sow your seed the only place it should be sown—with the wife of your youth. (32 – 33)

From this passage, it seems that men must not give in to the temptation of sex with a “foreigner” or “stranger” for several reasons. According to Arthur, in this passage, a married man who sleeps with a woman who is not his wife might as well be sleeping with a prostitute or an immoral woman. In essence, all women outside of the marital relationship are viewed as bad and immoral women (i.e., stranger, prostitute, immoral woman). In addition, she argues that the husband’s “life, his DNA, his genes are in his sperm,” and it is not to be shared with random women if the husband wants to be “blessed by God.” Lastly, Arthur argues that the only person with whom a man should have sex is his own wife. Arthur states that the husband is “to drink water from his own well, his own wife, when he thirsts for sexual satisfaction.” Still, however, it is not clear in this passage whether Arthur thinks that men should be virgins, or simply thinks that they should not participate in nonmarital sex. So, whereas women are assumed to be virgins, more emphasis is given to a man being monogamous and not necessarily to his remaining a virgin until he gets married.

The “problem” with nonmarital sex, according to Jimmy Williams (2000), is that it interferes with the intimacy that is involved in marriage by giving others what should be saved for a future spouse. According to Williams, “A superior sexual relationship exists where the bonds of mutual communication, understanding, affection, and trust have formed, and two people have committed themselves to each other in a permanent relationship” (2000, 47). Therefore, he further argues “virginity should not be viewed as something that must be eliminated as soon as possible, but as a gift to treasure and save for a special unique person” (54). From this, the authors argue that virginity should be prized as a gift to one’s spouse, and there are several consequences that result if it is not saved.

The first consequence, according to conservative authors, is that nonmarital sex is a sin, and anyone who indulges in it will be punished for their sin. Second, nonmarital sex has a negative effect on intimacy during marriage. Third, conservative authors argue that nonmarital sex is unhealthy.⁸⁰ What is interesting is that not all of these consequences are biblical justifications against nonmarital sex. This is further shown by a section of P.B. Wilson’s book (2002), *God is in the Bedroom Too*, in which she tells a story of talking to her daughter, who saw a sign on someone’s door that stated “It’s not premarital sex if you don’t plan to get married!” at college during her freshman year. At first her daughter thought that it made sense, but after thinking about it, she found it to be problematic for a Christian. Wilson wrote a list and asked her to consider the

⁸⁰ According to conservative Protestant authors, nonmarital sex elevates the chance of a person contracting a sexually transmitted disease.

consequences of what she called “unsaved sex” (i.e. nonmarital/premarital). The list reads:

1. It will break God’s heart.
2. Sin will enter the relationship and negatively alter it.
3. The man will lose respect for the woman (usually unspoken) no matter what he says.
4. God created man to be the pursuer. Once a woman has been conquered, an element of fun and excitement leaves the relationship.
5. You’ll lose your “specialness” (even though he’ll swear differently).
6. There’ll be nothing to look forward to on your wedding night.
7. Once you start down that road, what will be your reason for stopping? Use that reasoning now.
8. Sexual activity will come to be expected.
9. Pregnancy is very possible.
10. Guilt will enter the relationship.
11. Self-control will be destroyed. You will need this in your marriage to ward off behaviors like rage, lust, and adultery.
12. Your Christian testimony will be tainted.
13. Your younger sister is following in your footsteps. Is this what you would want for her?
14. You’ll lose your testimony with your children. What will you tell them when they reach their teenage years and ask what you did when you were young?
15. You’ll weaken your potential husband’s walk in Christ, and he’ll be your spiritual leader one day. (2002, 14 – 15)

Therefore, according to Wilson, nonmarital sexuality will cause not only personal problems, but also problems for a future marriage.

Gendered beliefs are evident in this passage as well. While this list was written specifically for Wilson’s daughter, many of her points that express traditional beliefs about gender roles and values. For example, this list gives a great deal of importance to what the man thinks, and it automatically assumes that “the man will lose respect for the woman,” thus indicating an expectation that women remain virgins, while the same expectation does not exist for men. Wilson also implies a belief in traditional gender roles

by writing, “God created man to be the pursuer. Once a woman has been conquered, an element of fun and excitement leaves the relationship,” and, “You’ll weaken your potential husband’s walk in Christ, and he’ll be your spiritual leader one day.” Here, it is evident that Wilson views the man as dominant, and as a result he is supposed to be the pursuer while the woman is to be the pursued; he is supposed to be the spiritual leader while she is supposed to be the spiritual follower. In addition, Wilson emphasizes how the woman’s sexual life will negatively affect her future husband’s sexual life since she did not remain “untainted.”⁸¹ Thus, differences in gender continue to be evident in discussions of nonmarital sexuality.

Extramarital Sexuality

Both liberal and conservative Protestant authors disapproved of extramarital sexuality, with two exceptions.⁸² These authors offer Biblical as well as social reasons for their refusal to even consider extramarital sex. In contrast to other sexual acts, extramarital sex or adultery is considered capable of destroying a marriage (Sumrall 2002; Gardner 2002; LaHaye and LaHaye 1998; Sumrall 1993). Protestants see extramarital sex as a sin because of the commandment that states, “Thou shalt not commit adultery” (Exodus 20:14). Most of the liberal and conservative authors who discuss extramarital sex emphasize it as a sin that disrupts the unity within marriage. To these authors, extramarital sex negatively affects the spouse and one’s relationship with God by disrupting an established trust (Gardner 2002; Sumrall 2002; Wilson 2002;

⁸¹ Refer to numbers 3, 4, 5, 6, and 15

⁸² Only Tom Gruber’s and Philo Thelos’s books approved of extramarital sex. These books will be discussed later in this section.

LaHaye and LaHaye 1998). Regardless of the situation that may cause a person to seek out a paramour, most liberal and all of the conservative Protestant authors deem extramarital sex wrong. In fact, Smedes argues that no matter what may be sexually wrong with the spouse, or the specific circumstance, adultery

is always wrong . . . it is precisely in hardship cases that adultery may do the most hurt. The sick wife, the impotent husband, the ineffective lover may be humiliated and depressed because the spouse's escapade rubs salt into wounds that hurt badly enough as it is. (2001, 184)

He further argues that “adultery itself breaks the marriage bond” (193). Smedes implies that there is no reason for someone to go outside of the marital bond to seek sexual pleasure since it can cause great pain for the spouse and a disruption of intimacy within the marriage. Significantly, he does not necessarily base this view on the Bible, but rather on experiences he has had from counseling couples that have gone through marital unfaithfulness. Therefore, the reasons emphasized by the two groups of authors are slightly different. Conservative authors are more likely focus on extramarital affairs as sin against God, whereas liberal Protestant authors are more likely to focus on the disruption in the marriage.

While most of the authors, liberal and conservative, argue against extramarital sex, a few argue that the meaning of extramarital sex, or adultery, as it is termed biblically, has changed over time (Thelos 2006; Gruber 2001). For example, liberal Protestant author Tom Gruber argues:

To adulterate means to pollute or defile. The main concern [during biblical times] was to keep the bloodline of the Hebrew race unadulterated. A woman became adulterated if she engaged in extramarital intercourse. Why? Simple—she might become impregnated with an illegitimate child. Therefore, the prohibition against adultery was given as a deterrent against

illegitimate propagation [and] . . . for keeping the bloodline pure . . . to insure proper transfer of the covenant promises made to Abraham (2001, 16).

Gruber argues that consensual extramarital affairs are not sin and that non-monogamy or "polyamory" is validated in scriptures due to numerous stories of men with concubines.

One other liberal author agrees with this point. Philo Thelos argues that an "open-marriage" should be accepted and states:

Open marriages are monogamous: the couple maintains the primary one-to-one relationship based on mutual commitment intended to last a lifetime. But it does not exclude the possibility of other intimate and sexual friendships . . . Open-ended marriages . . . [encourage] the warmth and joy of love without anxiety. It fosters the extension of affection beyond only one person in the universe . . . Open marriage makes it possible to be fully alive in every encounter with other people. Christians desperately need an ethic of sex for enjoyment, pleasure and interpersonal enrichment, all of which aligns with the "goodness" of sex as God created it and as it is seen practiced throughout the Bible. (2006, 120)

However, others argue that open marriages are often based in patriarchy. For example, in Thelos's model, which he validates using Old Testament Bible references, women would still be in a subservient position to men, since they would have to share men instead of being granted the equal "advantage" of having a harem of men. However, regardless of this argument, the more typical argument of both liberal and conservative Protestant authors is that once a marital commitment is made, sex needs to remain within the confines of that committed marriage. Otherwise, extramarital sexuality will cause problems—such as disunity, lack of communication, separation, and divorce—within the marriage and with one's relationship with God (Gardner 2002; Sumrall 2002; Wilson 2002; Smedes 2001).

Many of these arguments against extramarital sex are gendered as well. These authors assume that men have stronger sexual desires than women. For example, when it comes to extramarital sex, conservative Protestant authors such as Anderson (2002) argue that men seem to make up the largest number of perpetrators, while women are often hurt by the act. Women usually have to forgive men, according to these authors (Anderson 2002; Sumrall 2002; Wilson 2002; LaHaye and LaHaye 1998). Liberal authors also argue that men are usually seen as the persons responsible for committing adultery, and women are the ones who have to forgive and try to make the marriage work. Like the conservative Protestant authors, some liberal authors portray women as being able to control and limit their sexual appetites better than men (Cutrer and Glahn 2002; Rosenau 2002; Wheat and Wheat 2002). From this point of view, women should serve men sexually by meeting their desires, realizing that men are more likely to have sex outside of marriage. Therefore, if and when extramarital affairs do occur, women should forgive.

Forgiveness or Divorce

The sexual transgression of a spouse due to extramarital affairs can have differing results. One result could be forgiveness, while another could be divorce. However, there are issues and religious proscriptions that make these results more complex in their execution. This section discusses what Protestant authors believe should happen to the offending party in regards to their relationship with God and their spouse. In addition, this section will indicate what happens to the spouse that was offended and how that spouse should respond from the Protestant authors' perspectives. How these authors view

the issue of forgiveness provides additional insight to the view of marriage held by both conservative and liberal Protestants.

Conservative Protestantism

When referring to forgiveness from God, many conservative Protestant authors would say that God forgives with conditions. For example, LaHaye and LaHaye (1998) write, “Jesus Christ’s sacrifice on the cross is sufficient to cleanse a person of these or any other sins . . . Further evidence of God’s pardon of this sin appears in Jesus’ forgiveness of the woman taken in adultery and of the woman with five husbands who was living with still another man” (1998, 325). Conservative Protestants argue that forgiveness from God is only possible if one repents and stops having extramarital affairs. Therefore, the authors imply that adultery or extramarital affairs are sins just like other sins (e.g., murder, robbery), and are in need of forgiveness. However, it is evident these authors believe that God could forgive a person as long as one asks. Furthermore, LaHaye and LaHaye also write that they

do not recommend telling the offended partner about the [extramarital affair] when the following conditions are met:

1. General repentance and confession of sin to God.
2. Severing the illicit relationship and avoiding any contact with the other person.
3. The establishment of spiritual safeguards, e.g., a daily prayer and quiet time, regular church participation, and an honest talk with one’s minister. (1998, 326-327)

Such an argument about receiving forgiveness from God while not necessarily telling the spouse leads to an interesting paradox. There is a tension developed by such an argument. The wayward spouse can confess and speak to God about what they did,

they can put into place safeguards to avoid the illicit relationship, they can even talk to their minister about it and go along with their life as normal, but the offended partner is never told. While it is argued that God will forgive the spouse who engaged in an affair as long as the spouse repents and confesses the “sin” to God, it doesn’t give the spouse an opportunity to forgive. Therefore, even though a person may feel that God has forgiven them, it is not necessarily the case that the partner will forgive them or even that the offended spouse believes that the partner is deserving of forgiveness. It would be interesting to know if the offended partner will feel that once the offended spouse follow the steps provided by Lahaye and Lahaye, if they will be able to forgive and go back to “life as normal.”

For the spouse, the issue of forgiveness is different. Conservative authors see forgiveness as a necessity within marriage, not an option. Therefore, although divorce is permissible if someone’s spouse cheats, conservative authors urge the couple to try to make the relationship work. These authors argue that as Protestants, they should forgive. For example, Wilson tells married couples that the Bible gives people an opportunity to leave a marriage. She also notes, however, that “I know many couples that have made the decision to stay together, and it is amazing how God has restored them, even after such an infraction to the relationship” (2002, 64). According to this point of view, it is up to the offended spouse to continue the marriage. Adding to this point, LaHaye and LaHaye were asked how someone could forgive their adulterous partner. They state that “our Lord taught us the necessity of forgiveness . . . Divorce should always be the last resort

after many sincere attempts at reconciliation” (1998, 325 – 28).⁸³ In relation to conservative views of marriage, divorce in the marriage would not represent the connection between Christ and the church, so it is not condoned. Forgiveness, however, reflects how Protestants believe that Christ has forgiven those who accept and trust in him.

Liberal Protestantism

Liberal authors see divorce as a disruption in the unity and bond created in marriage. Therefore, forgiveness for liberal Protestants is similar to that of conservative Protestants. The similarity is that forgiveness from God can be gained, but only with conditions. These conditions are the same as were stated by conservative Protestants (confess sins, ask for forgiveness, and believe that it will not happen again). Forgiveness from a spouse is also similar in that it is up to the offended spouse to make the decision to try to restore the relationship (Rosenau 2002; Ferrebee 2001). For example, Smedes argues that a marriage tainted by adultery does not have to end in divorce. He states, “In no way is adultery able, in itself to destroy marriage; it depends on how weak the marriage is—and how strong the partners are” (2001, 200). As a result, there is a chance for forgiveness and reconciliation in marriage, depending on the strength of the marital bond.

Overall Findings

⁸³ Some questions remain unanswered by these authors. If marital infidelity is the only reason for people to get divorced, does that mean that women who are being physically abused must stay in the marital relationship? In addition, should there be reconciliation if one spouse continuously commits adultery, physically or sexually abuses children, or commits a host of other problems (e.g., spouse commits felony, marital rape)? These authors do not clearly address these issues.

The five themes chosen emerged from the analyses of Protestant marriage and sex guides. These themes—the purpose of sex, homosexuality, nonmarital sexuality, extramarital sexuality, and forgiveness—generated varied responses amongst liberal and conservative Protestant perspectives. From this section of the study, after analyzing the differences and similarities of Protestant authors about sexual morality and family values, four major findings of my research provide answers to my research question in this chapter.

Major Finding One

Traditional gender beliefs inform both liberal and conservative Protestant authors' worldviews about sexual morality. While there is variability in the beliefs of liberal and conservative authors, views about sexual morality and family values are indeed gendered. For example, some liberal and all conservative Protestant authors argue that when it comes to extramarital affairs, women are better able to control their sexual appetites than men and as a result should meet the sexual needs of their husband so that they will not stray (Cutrer and Glahn 2002; Rosenau 2002; Wheat and Wheat 2002). However, this finding is closely related to the view that women must be submissive helpers to the husband. Therefore, even sexually, it is part of the women's role to meet the sexual needs of her husband so that he will not "fall to temptation." However, changing gender roles in the U.S. may have influenced the gendered implications of sexuality, specifically within conservative Protestantism. For example, some conservative Protestant authors discuss the importance of men meeting the needs of their wives by being more willing to talk and being romantic.

Major Finding Two

Sexuality continues to be seen as something spiritual or sacred, primarily between a husband and wife, in which they should indulge and enjoy. No longer are Protestants focused on solely “sex for procreation,” but more often we see that sexuality is an ideal form of intimacy and “holiness” between a wife and husband. For example, Beresz states that “Christian sexuality is not essentially about eroticism, power, or propagation; it is primarily about maintaining boundaries that enhance family structure and promote psychological intimacy. For Christians, sexuality is a search for intimacy” (2002,141). Both liberal and conservative Protestant authors agree that sex is for spiritual intimacy. However, as discussed in the results section, there are differences in what each means by spiritual intimacy.

Major Finding Three

Both liberal and conservative Protestants interpret biblical texts to make their arguments. In fact, while conservative Protestants argue that their interpretation is based solely on the Bible, at times the conservative authors will refer to statistics or health information to further validate or supplement what was stated in the Bible. Liberal Protestants argue that their interpretation is informed by a deeper analysis of the Bible through discussing historical context, using other sources, seeing the Bible as incomplete, regarding some passages about sexual morality as inadequate in addressing today’s culture, and viewing modern English translations of the Bible as errant. For example in discussing homosexuality, Myers and Scanzoni argue that “translators have muddied the waters in many cases, because the specific behaviors that were addressed in their cultural

context don't easily lend themselves to a succinct and descriptive rendering in modern English" (2005,103).

Major Finding Four

Many books blatantly or subtly disregard same-sex relationships in addressing sexual morality issues. In other words, there is a heterosexual assumption or norm that is evident in discussions of sexuality largely for both liberal and conservative authors. While conservative authors see same-sex relationships as sinful, liberal authors vary in their position. Some see it as sinful, while others see it as a burden to bear, and still others as a gift given by God.

Another interesting and unforeseen finding is that the liberal Protestants use the Bible as an authority in much the same way as do conservatives; however, they use it with different interpretations. A good example of this was Philo Thelos's book, *Divine Sex*, in which he used scripture to support almost every point that he made. Also, both groups used non-biblical justifications to validate their views. In addition, the liberal Protestant authors argued that many conservatives were interpreting the Bible incorrectly or just basing their sexual proscriptions on church dogma.

In addition to these major findings, it is noted that when it comes to the purpose of sexuality, there are several reasons these two groups arrive at similar positions. First, the authors may have similar interpretations of the Bible. Second, the authors may be basing their views on traditional social norms more than on actual interpretations of the Bible. Lastly—this is also a limitation of this research—authors who may have been coded as liberal based on the criteria in the methods section of this chapter may not

consider themselves as liberal but rather conservative (and vice versa). Multiple steps were taken to reduce this possibility. However, since I analyzed books that were endorsed by liberal and conservative Protestant institutions and pastors, it is possible that a few authors may have been categorized as something that they would not claim themselves to be.

As mentioned earlier, discussions and debates about issues of sexual morality are linked to, and include, discussions of the family. Arguments about family values and ideas presented such as “the breakdown of the family” allows for some to correlate sexual morality or immorality to the break down of the family to larger issues such as crime rates or disparities in education. Protestant spokespeople have a lot to say about the family. The next chapter focuses on interviews with pastors of both liberal and conservative Protestant churches in hopes of addressing these issues in greater detail.

CHAPTER 6

INTERVIEW ANALYSIS: THE FAMILY

The prior chapter focused on the differing views of sexual morality of one group of Protestant spokespeople: authors. From studying the differences and similarities of liberal and conservative Protestant authors and the views they presented in sex and marriage guides, sufficient information was found to answer the research question: how do liberal and conservative Protestant spokespeople view sexual morality in the U.S? The research discussed in this chapter looks at another influential group of spokespeople for various groups of Protestants: pastors. This section of the dissertation, therefore, focuses on what liberal and conservative Protestant pastors have to say about issues of sexual morality and the family.

Pastors are often spokespeople for their particular belief systems. In addition, Protestant pastors may be influential in advising their congregants how they should view their families and live their lives sexually. In fact, Robert Wuthnow finds that “most Americans trust the clergy, at least more than they trust leaders of government and industry” (2002, 385). However, it is difficult to know whether parishioners actually follow their pastors’ teachings. While studies indicate that people are more likely to attend churches that agree with their own views, once they choose a pastor of their liking, some seek him or her for instruction and direction for life (Johnson 1998).⁸⁴

Understanding differing Protestant pastors’ positions does provide some understanding of how Protestant Christians, who are a diverse group in America, portray and interpret

⁸⁴ It can be argued, however, that just because people select certain people as pastors and seek them for instruction and direction in life does not necessarily mean that they follow those instructions or do as the pastors say.

family values and sexuality as a way to make sense of perceived social changes in the family and gender roles. In addition, family values and sexuality have been used as a way to measure, gauge, remedy, or even to understand other concerns in the United States (e.g., population control, disease, and crime). For example, Twila L. Perry (1996) states that the “decline in [family] values . . . has been blamed for a myriad of social problems, including unemployment, poor health, school drop-out rates and an increase in juvenile crime.” In this chapter, while I continue to focus on different Protestant positions on family values and sexual morality and how they are supported and defended (e.g., Biblical interpretations, traditional views, science), I also identify how assumptions about gender are influential in what Protestant pastors have to say about contested issues of sexual morality.

Sexual morality debates include debates over gender roles and family values. For example, some conservative Protestant pastors argue that traditional gender roles are necessary for a family to function properly, whereas some liberal Protestant pastors argue that gender roles are not necessary for a happy, functioning family. Understanding the arguments given by Protestant pastors and what they reference to validate those arguments clarifies the question of whether answers are influenced by gender or traditional views as evidenced in social debates over family values and sexual morality.⁸⁵

Therefore, the research question I address in this chapter is this: how do liberal and conservative Protestant pastors view sexual morality? To explore this question, I examine the statements given by various pastors in response to interview questions about the family. Understanding the views of the family from both liberal and conservative

⁸⁵ This point is discussed thoroughly in the literature review section.

Protestant pastoral perspectives will help us to understand not only the differing Protestant views, but also some opposing American cultural attitudes influenced by Protestantism toward issues of sexual morality and the reasons why they are held and defended publicly.⁸⁶ Also, to explore this question, I consider whether these views are gendered. In other words, are Protestant prescriptions given differently based on perceptions of gender or are assumptions about gender and gender roles built into religious views? Therefore, in the rest of this chapter, I will explore the research problem and discuss the methodology. Finally, I discuss the results and conclude with limitations for this research and suggestions for future research.

Methodology

My main research question in this chapter is: how do liberal and conservative Protestant pastors view sexual morality? As mentioned in the literature review, the significance of this research will give us some understanding of the worldview of a select group of people who may influence individuals as well as social debates. In understanding the view of these Protestant spokespeople, we will gain a better understanding of larger debates about sexual morality in the U.S. and some of the voices or representatives of those voices. Therefore, I interviewed ten liberal Protestant and ten conservative Protestant pastors about their views on family and sexual morality. Three of the pastors were white females, three were black males, and the rest of the pastors were

⁸⁶ The reasons refer to the biblical/doctrinal and social reasons that are given in this study to support the particular view.

white males.⁸⁷ Each pastor interviewed has a growing membership, ranging from at least 500 people to a maximum of 26,000 members.⁸⁸ This is an indication of influence. I have chosen these pastors based on several factors. First, I located them based on denomination or religious movement. Then, I had them self-identify as liberal or conservative and asked them how they viewed the Bible. Using this multistep approach, I was able to code the clergy as either liberal or conservative more accurately based on the definition given for this study.⁸⁹

The interview questions are based on the themes in this study, which were discussed in chapter 3.⁹⁰ While I had prepared questions, I also allowed the pastors to freely elaborate in their answers. In addition, I included supplementary or more probing questions as the conversations developed to clarify or add to the research. The goal was to identify the pastors' views and what they would teach others, based on their standpoints as liberal or conservative Protestants. Doing this part of the study helped me to understand what people who have the job of interpreting the biblical positions on sexual morality believe, and how those beliefs shift with their alignment on the liberal/conservative spectrum. It must be noted that these pastors may not always be trying to interpret the Bible. They may just use the Bible as a justification for their own

⁸⁷ All of the women were liberal pastors and all of the black men were conservative pastors. My research in regards to how the interviewer or interviewee's own gender and race may affect their views is ostensibly problematic because there is no way to know for sure if their answers are influenced by race or gender, or if it is ideological for their particular group. This is a limitation of this work that will be discussed more at the end of the chapter.

⁸⁸ While a 500-person church may not seem as affluent or growing as a 26,000-member church, time must also be factored in. For example, one pastor interviewed became the pastor of the church he is currently pastoring 3 years ago. When he arrived, the church only had about 35 members. In his 3 years there, this church has grown to a membership of approximately 500 members.

⁸⁹ A person is coded liberal or conservative based on their view of the Bible and how they believe it should be utilized. For example, a conservative is coded such because they believe that the Bible is the literal word of God, without error, and that their interpretation of the Bible is what was meant by God.

⁹⁰ The interview questions are in the appendix of this dissertation.

personal views. What they claim as an interpretation of the Bible is based on their own personal feelings and/or convictions, and they are using the Bible as a form of justification.

In this part of the dissertation, the topics that will be analyzed are: the meaning of marriage and family, appropriate gender roles in the family, and attitudes toward homosexuality/same-sex marriage. While these topics are evident in the Protestant literature I reviewed, a number of them came up in the interview before I mentioned them. For example, when I was discussing marriage with many of the conservative Protestant pastors, they would often bring up their disdain of same-sex marriage without any questions specifically referring to either heterosexual or same-sex marriage. This finding provides more support for the use of these issues as topics of debate when discussing family values and sexual morality.

View of Marriage and Family

I started out by asking respondents, “What comes to mind when you think of the word family?” This is a broad and open question, and it allowed the respondents to give me their main ideas about family without forcing them to focus on particular issues. The differences between liberal Protestant views of marriage and family differ greatly from conservative Protestant pastors, specifically when it came to the questions of who can be included in a marriage, or what can be defined as family.

Liberal Protestants

Liberal Protestant pastors allowed for a variation in what constituted family. Their responses indicate that anyone who desires a family can create one.⁹¹ For example, this answer, given by a pastor of a church in Philadelphia with a congregation of approximately 800, is typical of liberal Protestant pastors.

Well, that could mean a lot of different groupings of people; I think families are people who choose to identify themselves as family. Sometimes that's blood ties, and sometimes it isn't. It can be marriage ties with blended families of heterosexual couples, but I think a family can be made of people who decide that they're families. I think households could be quite various, so I don't think of a narrow nuclear family definition.

From her answer, one can assume that a family can include same-sex couples, blended families, single parents, and other family forms. In addition, what is implied from this statement is that religious proscriptions or societal ideals are not the point of determining who can or cannot be a family. For this pastor, it is the individual or individuals within the unit that determine that they are a family, not one particular cultural norm or biblical interpretation. Therefore, when asked whether there is an ideal family type such as the traditional family form, she states:

No, not necessarily. I do think to raise children, they need loving adults, but I don't think a nuclear family is the only way. In fact, it's pretty clear that the nuclear family is not the majority in the United States anymore. We have an ideal of what that is supposed to be, but in fact it's much more complicated.

As long as there are loving adults to raise children, this pastor argues that many family forms are acceptable. In fact, she argues that "the nuclear family is not the majority in the United States anymore." She does not necessarily invoke a biblical passage or reference

⁹¹ However, many of the liberal Protestant pastors' arguments are based on modern views of society and culture and current trends that are taking place in society.

God when she makes a statement against the traditional ideology of the family. Another pastor of a suburban church with approximately 800 members states:

It's not just parents and siblings [that represent family], but also aunts and uncles and cousins and that whole network of blood and marriage relationships. Unfortunately, the culture has been restricted now to what we call a nuclear family. So, I do see family as that whole network of relationships, and, I also, I think this because we're such a transitive society, where people kind of have to form their family wherever they are. It may not be blood and marriage relationships; it may be kind of their community of intimate relationships, but not according to the strict definition of family.

Again, it is stated that the family is much more than the nuclear family, which may be a biblical position. Also, this pastor invoked her own view of family as she sees it currently in society as being enough to validate her statement.⁹² While this is not a brand new finding, what is interesting is that these pastors may be more informed by current societal trends and norms than they are by the Bible, as they invoke these trends more than the Bible or their interpretation of the Bible in their answers. It is important to note that those who quote the Bible, however, cannot be assumed to be indifferent to family trends. They may just have different views. In addition, those who do not quote the Bible do not necessarily indicate that their views are not based on their own personal religious convictions as Protestants. According to this pastor, the definition of a family goes far beyond the "restrictive" boundaries of the nuclear family and includes different family forms. For example, she indicates that due to society's growth and "transitive" nature, other family forms are necessary than the traditional form of family. This idea of a

⁹² While it seemed that the female pastors had similar beliefs, it may not be a result of their gender but more a result of their ideological positions.

network of relationships can be also found by a suburban Philadelphia pastor who states:⁹³

A whole host of different things come to mind [when I think of family]. I think of my own family, which right now is just my wife and I—our child is gone. I think of the church as a family. I think of the faith family; I think of the family of men and women that bring all of us together. So I have varied definitions of it. Specifically, I think of those people who choose to live together in some kind of committed structure.

According to this pastor, a family can include any kind of committed structure, which goes beyond blood line and kinship group. This pastor is one of the few who includes the church, or people of faith, as a family. However, this pastor agrees with other liberal pastors and goes along with social norms by indicating that as long as there is commitment, there can be a family. Another pastor of a suburban Philadelphia church with 500 members continues this line of argument by detailing different acceptable family forms, saying:

I think there can be families with that configuration [of a traditional family] that are extremely un-ideal in terms of what happens within the family and the ways that people are treated within those relationships. There may be other nontraditional, “nontraditional” families. Maybe same-sex parents with kids who have a much healthier way of relating, and they may be closer to an ideal. In terms of when I think of family, I also ideally . . . think of family as an atmosphere of intimate, and supportive, and nurturing relationships where people can grow to be their fullest selves and live into the image of God that is in them to bring forth their own gifts. So, to me, an ideal family is that it gives that; it offers that. So, I think that an ideal family would have less to do with the sex and gender of the members and more to do with the quality of the relationships.

The main argument made by this pastor is that a family’s quality of relationships are much more important than its design. As noticed, this pastor argues that as long as there

⁹³ This pastor has a membership of over 800 people.

is an “atmosphere of intimate, and supportive, and nurturing relationships,” people can be who God designed them to be and represent the God that is in them. The argument presented by this pastor, unlike other liberal pastors interviewed, introduces how God influences people to exist in different family forms. What is implied by this pastor is that the *quality* of the relationship is much more important than *who* is in it. As a result, these pastors accept same-sex marriage and other forms of marriage as well because they have the potential to be loving environments.

Conservative Protestants

Among conservative Protestant pastors, there are some differences in their responses to the question of what they thought about when they heard the word family or even what they consider a family to be. Most of the responses centered on the necessity of a husband and a wife as the ideal for a family. In addition, some responses looked to Adam and Eve as an ideal picture for what a family is.⁹⁴ For example, a pastor of a large Philadelphia church with well over 10,000 members states:

What comes to mind is the social structure, which God created in the garden. The family started with Adam and Eve, a husband and a wife. He did not create any direct children, what he created was two direct people, and from those two people procreation came. So, there’s only been three people that we know that’s been directly, uniquely created by God: Adam and Eve, and the Lord Jesus himself. The difference between those is that the Lord Jesus was uniquely formed into a baby, whereas Adam and Eve were mature in their creation, which gets to the core of family because I take the Bible literally . . . I believe family starts with husband, wife, and from there, they procreate.

⁹⁴ Many Conservative Protestants generally believe that Adam and Eve were the first humans and also the first married couple.

This conservative pastor connected biblical characters to his explanation of the reasons for his definition of a family. In focusing on Adam and Eve, several assumptions can be made. First, it can be understood from this pastor's statement that the family must include a man and a woman who are married, even though there is no reference to formal marriage in the story of Adam and Eve. Also, the couple must procreate. In addition, since this pastor describes Adam and Eve as the first family on the planet, they also function as the paragon of family. This point is further illustrated by a pastor of a rapidly growing church in the suburbs of Philadelphia when he states:

When I think of family, I think of Genesis chapter 1 and 2. I think that's what God was creating when he put man on this earth. Adam and Eve were told to be fruitful and multiply. I think God's plan was for two people to experience oneness, and the gift of children was to show them the oneness. And I think every child was meant to look at a mom and a dad.

These pastors reference the Old Testament creation story solely to validate their beliefs of what a family should entail.⁹⁵ For example, the story of Adam and Eve is used as validation by this pastor for his idea of the family and relationship between the parents and the children. However, one could argue that Adam and Eve's children were not ideal themselves and in some cases, may have been more of a burden than a gift (i.e., Cain). These pastors' statements exemplify one of the major conservative Protestant beliefs about family, which is that one can look at the "first family" in the Bible to see how God designed the family. However, these conservative pastors' usage of the Old Testament characters of Adam and Eve may show that they may not be interpreting the Bible per se, but instead asserting their own ideas and using the Bible to validate them. For example,

⁹⁵ Of course, these pastors are applying their interpretation of the creation story to their views of the family in the US..

arguing that Adam and Eve represent the first family could be problematic because the Bible does not call Adam and Eve in the creation story a family. However, some argue that they can be considered husband and wife due to the scripture in Genesis 2:24 that says, “A man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.” As a result, conservative pastors argue that this “first family” includes a male and female who are “fruitful,” or have children. One question that arose out of the research was, “What about those families who may not fit their description?” Two perspectives were found in this research to provide answers for that question. One perspective expounds on some of the conservative Protestant pastors’ quotes previously discussed and views the family as being marred by sin and social moral decay. Another perspective that was evident was the view of “a different kind of family.”

Distorted By Sin And Moral Decay

Some conservative Protestant pastors argue that the family has been *distorted by sin and moral decay*. In other words, the family is not the way it should be due to humans’ own disconnection to and disobedience of God’s ways and the acceptance of what the respondents see as being morally wrong in our society. For example, a pastor of a large suburban Baptist church in Maryland states,

Can family be broadened to include all the varieties of households? Probably so, because sin has affected everything. So, whatever family started out and fully intended to be, sin entered the picture and destroyed or marred or contaminated that structure. So, that’s why you have divorces; that’s why you have men marrying men, women marrying women. That’s why you have all the different family structures today, because of sin. Sin forces kids to be born out of wedlock; sin forces husbands to desert their wives or wives to desert their husbands. So it’s

hard to come up with the definition of family to cover all of the living structures that you have. But if you get back to say in the beginning, in the beginning, we know what God intended. He intended husband, wife and from them to come children because that was his command to them: to be fruitful and multiply.

While in the previous section the liberal pastors say the family includes different forms because that is what we see in our society and thus should accept, these conservative pastors argue that the difference in family is an aberration and distortion from the way the family should be. Thus, this pastor argues that there has been a contamination of the family largely due to disobedience of what God intended for the family. According to this pastor, the results of the contamination of the family include single-parent households, divorced families, homosexuality, and children being born outside of marriage. Due to this contamination, according to this pastor, it is difficult to define the family or the varieties of families we see today. This myopic view of the family may be problematic in the sense that there have always been manifold family structures. If one was to take a historical analysis of the family, the “traditional” form is more recent than some of the other forms of family. In other words, sociologists and historians have shown that the “traditional” family is not really that traditional. Coontz (1992) argues that the idea of the traditional family was started in the 1950s with the influx of sitcoms that focused on the family. However, the family has always taken on various forms.

Still, however, conservative Protestant pastors argue that if one looks at the way God *intended* the family to be, then one knows what a family is. This point is further addressed by a pastor of a large suburban church outside of Philadelphia. He states,

Now sin has marred [the family], and now we’re a mess and dysfunctional and all that. But I think it was God’s intention that before there was ever a

worship entity, before there was ever a government, before there was ever any other institution on this earth, God gave us the institution of marriage and bearing children, and God created the family. A community was to be a family of families. You know when Hillary [Clinton] talked about [how] it takes a village, I think it takes a community. Then the worship community is to be a community; you know the church is just a family of families. We're just a bigger family when we get together. So, family was God's original design.

Overall, neither of these pastors are citing the Bible but are instead implying that they know God's intention without stating how they know. From this implied knowledge of God's intentions, this particular pastor argues that the family is God's original design that ended up being marred. What is interesting is that this pastor ties the family to the community—what he calls a “family of families”—and thus implies that society needs traditional families to survive. A traditional family, these conservative pastors imply, indicates the nuclear family. But even more, according to this pastor's standpoint, this type of family identifies “God's intention” for the family. Therefore, it can be argued that this pastor views the traditional family as God's design and that this family form is necessary for society's and even humanity's benefit. He continues by stating:

I think we all watched the Brady Bunch in the seventies because we all wanted to live in that house. I think anytime we talk about marriage, sex and family, we never take the child's point of view. I'm a product of a divorced family and alcoholism, but we all wanted to live in that home. We all wanted to live in a home where the dad came in and sat down at your bedside and walked you through problems, and mom and dad were affectionate in front of the kids; and that was really God's plan. [Marriage has] been marred [since supposedly] man has a better way. But every time man goes the other way [from God] it gets worse and worse and worse. People call the Bible archaic, but if we go back and live by those values, they're tremendous.

Even though this pastor uses an example of a blended family to discuss his position, he still argues that the traditional family form is very necessary. Interestingly, he references

the Brady Bunch and the idea that everyone “wanted to live” in a home where the father was able to solve the problems, identifying a patriarchal family structure. Within the patriarchal family structure, the husband/father has authority sometimes to the point of autocratic control of his family. As a result, in the most extreme sense of the patriarchal family, wives/mothers would be left out of any decision-making in the family and relegated a subservient role.

Nevertheless, based on his own experience, this pastor was able to discuss what he felt were the problems with not having a “traditional” family or, as implied by his answer, a patriarchal family. By focusing on one form of family, it is obvious that this pastor linked his own personal experience to an interpretation of “God’s plan” for the family, instead of referring to a biblical story or scripture. Arguably, the pastor’s mentioning of his own personal experience may confirm the fact that he was using validating statements such as “God’s plan” to support his personal definition of the family. His connection of his understanding of God to his personal life experience allows him to pose problems with other family forms and then validate his understanding with something that happened in his personal life. For example, the pastor felt that he had missed out because he did not have a prominent role model as a dad and was unable to see his mother and father being affectionate.

A Different Kind Of Family

Some of the conservative pastors, however, don’t see the diversity in families so much as a distortion but more as a *different family form*. Their view that the family takes a variety of different family forms is the closest conservatives come on this position to

their liberal counterparts. However, there is still some difference between the liberal and conservative pastors, such as the way conservatives rank the traditional family form as better. For example, a pastor of a rapidly growing rural Pennsylvania church states:

Of course, you know some families, some couples aren't blessed with children, and there are plenty of families today that are single parent families, and that's a big, big thing. Now I still call it a family but not the same way.

The nontraditional family is not the same as the nuclear family because all of the Protestant pastors interviewed define the family by what they call "the original form" represented by Adam and Eve. While there are different types of families, this pastor implies that those different families are not of the same quality. But still, these pastors argue that the family types are different without condemning some forms of family or even recognizing them at all. Another example of this is from the answer of a pastor in the Philadelphia area with a large membership. He states that the family

has changed its meaning through the years because of the circumstances and situations that have affected the family. But idealistically, I look at family as a male and female who are married, who have for procreation sexual intimacy. Not only bonded together out of that act and privilege that they have as a married couple in sexual intimacy, they produce children. So a family is a unit, idealistically, as a male and female with or without children, that's idealistically. But practically in our day, family could be a grandmother and granddaughter with a baby or could be an uncle or aunt who's raising a sister's son, or it could be a young man raising his daughter or son apart from the mother, and he's in a unit with his mother and father, or just him and his daughter. That is family to me.

This pastor makes an interesting comparison between the "ideal" and the "practical" forms of family. While he argues that the ideal form of family includes heterosexual marriage with or without children, he, like his liberal counterparts, states that, practically, we see many different family forms in society. However, what was evident in all of the

conservative answers was that each pastor focused on heterosexual marriage as ideal, and none indicated that same-sex marriages should be considered families. In fact, they thought quite the opposite. In some of the quotes above, in discussion of what a family is, a number of pastors make sure to indicate that same-sex marriages cannot and should not be considered families. For example, in his answer about what constitutes a family, a pastor of a mega-church in Delaware states that when he thinks of family, he thinks of

the traditional family. Husband, wife, we call that marriage, and then we call it a family when the first child comes along. But everyone is a part of some general family unit. But for teaching purposes in the pulpit, I will speak to individuals, to married couples, and then I speak to the family. I speak to all three distinct groups, yet I combine them all together because we're a family of somebody, but we don't think of family under a roof is a family until they have their first child, and then they become a family. And that's our thinking. For preaching purposes I do that, so they know who I'm identifying in a sermon. But yes, husband and wife. We are against, you know, same-sex marriage. We definitely are against that. We don't see it supported in God's word; we don't see God even endorsing it in God's word, and we see the opposite. So we have no problem loving the person, but we do have a concern about what they do. You know Christ died for everyone no matter what they do; he died for everyone.

This pastor differs from the others by defining a family as only a married heterosexual couple with children. In addition, this pastor is similar to the previous pastor in that, without being questioned on his position, he stated that same-sex marriage goes against what he interprets as God's design for marriage. This pastor argues that he doesn't see same-sex marriage ever being supported in the Bible, which he refers to in the above quote as "God's word," and, as a result, is strongly against it. However, he makes it clear that he is against the action of homosexuality, not the people. Protestant views of homosexuality will be discussed later in this chapter.

It was obvious that gender roles are evident as well when discussing the marital relationship, so either different pastors spoke about gender roles in a marriage without being questioned first, or I asked them if they thought gender roles were necessary to maintain the family structure. Therefore, the next section will discuss both liberal and conservative pastors' thoughts on gender roles in marriage.

Gendered Marital Roles

Liberal Protestant Pastors

Liberal pastors were asked if there were, or should be, gender roles in the marriage. One of the main responses from liberal pastors is that there should not be any gender roles, due to perceived inherent problems about how roles should be executed. For example, one pastor states:

I don't think there are roles because I think it's very confining if it's always the man does this and the woman does that, but I think it has to do with personality and special gifts. I think where it gets really and has been difficult [over] the last 30 to 40 years [is] because the roles were set and [now] to have it all be up for grabs and be negotiated has put a lot of stress on relationships. So, in some ways it's easier to live in a closed traditional society. You know what's expected; you do it, and the few people who don't get punished severely. So that's simple in a way, but it's more complicated when you have to negotiate. You have to negotiate everything I think in relationships these days. And ultimately if you negotiate that successfully, I think the relationship's stronger. If it's not negotiated successfully, it's just one crack in the relationship and then another crack. You recommit on a regular basis, or if you don't, you pull yourself apart.

What is interesting about this pastor's statement is that he says there should not be any roles tied to gender and argues that there needs to be a negotiation of the tasks within a relationship. This pastor is able to view societal changes in the family and make a distinction between roles, which are not necessary, and tasks, which are. This pastor

argues that there is a “negotiation” where each individual family can negotiate who will take care of certain tasks. While it may be easier to have a rigid system of gender roles in the family, it is not ideal. Another pastor commenting on this question lays out how convoluted this idea of roles can be by stating:

Well, they’re about a zillion roles I think in a marriage, you know. You know like who’s going to pay the bills, and who’s going to do the dishes and who’s going to do the grocery shopping. There are a zillion roles: who’s going to take care of the kids, who’s going to pick them up from their soccer games; you know, they’re all these different roles. I do not think there’s any need or divine justification or obligation that those particular roles fall to one party or another. I think ideally all those roles and responsibilities are shared in an equitable way.

What is interesting so far about the liberal pastors’ responses is that they each speak from personal feelings and beliefs of current cultural norms instead of a personal interpretation of biblical scriptures. For example, as a result of the multiple roles and tasks that are in play, this pastor argues that they all should be shared in an equitable way, regardless of which gender does which particular task. He is able to make this argument without any reference or validation other than personal feelings. However, this pastor does mention the lack of “divine justification” that is evident in fulfilling certain roles. Therefore, it is beginning to become evident that liberal Protestant pastors argue for shared roles from personal beliefs, and also that they do not think that the roles have to be based on gender. For example, the same pastor continues by connecting family values to the sharing of roles by stating:

All those things are important—attending, being there for the kids and having enough money to provide for them. And that’s where we get into the whole social dynamic and social justice and economic justice that are family values. For me, when I think of that term family values, we have to think about how are we structuring our society to support what families

have to have in order to provide nurture. So just wages, reasonable working hours, family leave, medical care, education. You know, all of those things are factors that go into helping the family do what it needs to do to foster and nurture healthy individuals. So, all of those roles, the quote breadwinner, the nurturer, the child care provider, all of those roles are important, and we as a society, we have to make sure that collectively we are building a society where those things can happen. And what's too often the case is that people are out working two or three jobs just to pay the rent and buy the groceries. How are you going to take care of the kids? You know it's not a doable scenario. It's not tenable; it's just not, it's undoable. So, we have to think beyond it's the family, quote family's responsibility to see to these things. I'm thinking about, it's a collective responsibility, to make sure all families can provide these things for their members.

This pastor, in focusing on gender roles, does something that is different from the other pastors. While answering this question, she takes a social justice approach to arguing about roles. Instead of discarding the roles, she states that the traditional roles of nurturer and provider are necessary but are much more than individual families can manage on their own. According to the pastor, there are societal influences and hindrances that make people unable to carry out these roles for the proper function of the family and society, like "just wages, reasonable working hours, family leave, medical care, [and] education." If all of these pieces were in place, this pastor implies, the family and society would be healthier. However, gender plays a small part in the necessity of assigning particular roles. Again, what is noticeable in the interviews with liberal pastors is that there is more of a social and/or personal approach to answering this question, which may coincide with how they perceive religion as something that should be utilized, rather than taking an interpretation of a biblical passage to understand and define family. However, another liberal pastor critiques biblical interpretations of roles by stating:

In terms of if the male is the head of the household and all that kind of stuff, to be really truthful, I think those kind of descriptions [are taking] a first century worldview and placing it over the twenty-first century, and that has a whole different meaning, I think, in the first century than it does today. I think submission in this day and age is often abusive. I would look at it this way: couples are called by God to marriage, and those that got called got gifts, and each person in a marriage relationship gives certain gifts to that marriage, and these gifts are to be used and to be celebrated. And those gifts that God gives for marriage to individuals determines what they do in marriage.

From this pastor's statement, he implies that the validating statement conservative Protestants use, according to which the Bible says the male is the head of the household, is outdated and not useful in the marriage during this modern time. What was meant for the first century cannot be used in the same way in the twenty-first century; thus, he locates biblical proscriptions in an historical context. At the same time, however, he argues that people do not come into a marriage and connect to already preconceived roles, but instead that each person has gifts that add to the marriage. He validates his statement by arguing that those gifts are given by God and that people are "called" to marriage. So this pastor does not argue that there are gender roles or even that people should abide by roles that some argue are listed in the Bible, but basing his claims on his view of God and his view of modern society, he argues that people who are married brings gifts into the marriage. His argument that people are called into marriage and that they have gifts given by God for the marriage may be similar to conservative Protestant pastors' views of gender roles.

Conservative Protestant Pastors

Conservative protestant pastors argue that gender roles are given by God and that these gender roles are necessary for the marriage for two major reasons. First, gender roles represent the relationship of Jesus Christ to the Church, and second, they allow things to function properly in the family. These pastors adamantly believe—and base their beliefs on their interpretation of scriptures— that gender roles are not only embedded in a marital relationship but are also necessary for the relationship.

Demonstration Of The Relationship Between Christ And The Church

Some of the conservative pastors argued that the gender roles that should be observed in the family were a demonstration of Jesus' view and care of the church on earth. The husband would be similar to Jesus and the church would be similar to the wife. This is elaborated on by a pastor with a church in a suburb of Baltimore, Maryland. He states:

Marriage comes from God. It is to lead us back to thinking about him; it is to reflect something about him and his love for us. That's why in Ephesians 5 it says, "Husbands love your wives as Christ loves the church, and wives submit to your husbands as unto the Lord." *Why? Because your marriage is a reflection back on God.* So God wanted to reflect order in the marriage because there's order in the Godhead. See, whenever anyone talks about the trinity, for example, you never hear them say Holy Ghost, Son, Father. But proper biblical thinking always says Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. The great commission, Matthew 28, says, "Go ye to all the nations baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost." My point is while there is oneness, there's also diversity, and while there's diversity in the Godhead, there's order—Father, then Son, then the Holy Spirit. Same thing is reflected in marriage. Therefore, one thing in making a good marriage is understanding the nature of the Godhead.

This pastor uses his interpretation of the Bible and references God almost immediately as validation for his answer. According to him, couples are to in a sense mimic the

relationship of Christ and the church, and if married couples play their roles correctly, the marriage becomes a form of worship to God, reflecting the order of God. He also notes that the order of God refers to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, which is known by Christians as the trinity. This pastor argues that there is a certain order to the trinity, which can relate to the order of a family. In addition, according to this pastor, men are supposed to demonstrate love for their wives in a way that shows how Jesus loved the church. Therefore, in understanding the order of God and the relationship between Christ and the church, one will understand the order and structure of the marital union and how the roles are not only necessary but assigned by God. Another pastor continues in this vein of argument by stating:

In fact, Ephesians 5:21 said, “Submit one to another out of the spirit of Christ.” I know he’s talking to the church people there, but then in verse 22–33 of Ephesians 5, he goes right into how a marriage should be, and people sometimes don’t understand that context. It’s comparing to Jesus being the head of the church. And as Christ gave his life for the church so a husband must do the same for his wife. If a husband gives his life for his family, that’s not a dictator, that’s a servant; that’s not a terrorist, that’s a supporter and encourager, one who leads by example. [The Bible] does say that a woman should respect her husband. Now, he has to earn that respect, and the way he earns that respect is through love, and if you look at the definition of love in the Greek it means one based on, not emotions, but based on one’s will, the act of one’s will. It’s a choice to love and you’re supposed to love as Christ loved the church; and it says that he gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word and to present her to himself as a radiant church without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. That’s what a man’s supposed to do with his wife—present her to God in this fashion. How’s he going to do that if he’s a dictator?

The pastor seeks to validate his beliefs in marital gender roles through his interpretation of several Bible verses. As a result, several key issues are addressed by this quote. First, as discussed earlier, gender roles in a marriage are a reflection of Christ and the church as

indicated by the quote, “And as Christ gave his life for the church, so a husband must do the same.” However, it is implied that this does not apply literally since that would mean that men would kill themselves, or put themselves in the way of being killed. Instead, the husband is expected to give himself to pleasing his wife and taking care of her. Second, the pastor argues that the husband is not supposed to be a dictator or controller but must be the one who makes the final decisions. This argument implies that the wife’s feelings are supposed to be considered and heard. Even though the man makes the final decisions, this pastor asserts that gender roles are not roles that work to the detriment or domination of women but are roles that allow for the marriage to be functional and more successful.⁹⁶

Same Value, Different Function

Another theme that is evident amongst conservative Protestant pastors is this idea that women and men have the *same value but different functions*. The pastors argue that these functions come from what they consider to be a literal interpretation of the Bible. However, each of these pastors uses some sort of team example to demonstrate how the roles are different in function but equal in value. For example, the pastor of a large Philadelphia Baptist church discusses how a husband and a wife are the same in essence but are different in function, saying:

This isn’t politically correct, but I think it’s biblically correct. I think God’s primary roles for the institution of marriage and the two categories between a male and a female and the male’s role is to be, the word calls it, in the headship of his family, to be the head of his family. I don’t mean it by servitude. I don’t mean it by a woman being in slavery. I don’t even

⁹⁶ It must be stated that Jesus lived prior to the advent of the Christian church. However, this pastor, as well as other conservative Protestant pastors, make inferences from the writings of Paul in the New Testament, which mentioned for example in Ephesians 5:25, “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” (NIV).

mean she is incompetent. I just simply mean that they're equal in essence but different in function, and that's the simplest way I could put it, what makes roles what roles are. Equal in essence, different in function, and I think it's just like in the military: you have a sergeant, and you have a private. The sergeant might be over the platoon, but the private is no lesser a man than the sergeant or no lesser a person than the sergeant. His rank causes him to have a different function. It's because of his office; his position causes him to function differently than a buck private would function. I think the same in marriages, I think the woman is equal to a man in essence, but I just think they're different in function. And the way God lays out what the function of a woman is and what the function of a man is, so it has to do with the issue of not understanding this whole thing about function and convoluting equal in essence with servitude.

Again, according to this pastor, function is the main difference in types of roles, but it is not cause for women to be viewed as less than men. However, one cannot deny that implicit in the type of roles that women and men are stated to have, there is still a hierarchical arrangement. The focus on function more so than the obvious power differentials in roles may add leavening for women who attend and support the church more than men. The pastor who made the above statement even used the example of a sergeant and a private. While they may be in the same platoon, the sergeant is still superior to the private and gets more respect, benefits, prestige, and honor than the private. In addition, the private does not get to talk back to the sergeant without some form of penalty. Stating that there is a "rank" implies and confirms inequality. Even though the different pastors state that the roles of women and men are equally valued, one could argue that due to the hierarchy embedded in the roles (i.e., the husband is the head of the family), they are actually valued differently. Regardless, this hierarchical arrangement is shared by other pastors as well. For example, another pastor of a large suburban ministry in Pennsylvania states:

Yeah, Galatians says, “There’s no male or female, there’s no black or white, there’s no bond or free.” We’re all one in God’s eyes. Same value different functions. [Like a] football team, if the Eagles win the Super Bowl, is Donovan McNabb going to get a trophy and a ring? Yeah. Is the offensive line going to get one, the punter going to get one? Yeah [because they have the] same value, different function. Men’s skin is harder; they’re stronger. They were meant to go out to provide, to protect. Women were going to bear children. Their skin is softer; they can feel a child’s fever; they can nurture. I think God took the female side out of Adam, not that we don’t still have those tendencies, but I think the union now brings us back. That’s why opposites attract. You know your wife has those gifts you don’t have, but they match. I think women’s lib; I think we got it all messed up. If you think back to the Greeks in Jesus’s day, we always look at them like they were an advanced society, but women had no rights. Women weren’t educated. Women were kept in the house; they were property. Jesus liberated them, right, more than anybody that ever lived. Wherever Christianity went, women were liberated. Yeah, I think there are functions. I think man and woman were meant to walk side by side. I think God gave man the headship because he was stronger, doesn’t mean he’s any better. I think the functions are different, but the same value, and I think when two people work together and understand their functions, I think that’s where families flourish.

Here, instead of using an army metaphor, this pastor uses a metaphor of football and argues that even though all of the members of the team receive the same results, they all have different functions for the team to win. However, even in football, there is still a hierarchical arrangement implicit in the positions. The quarterback for example is much more important and necessary than the punter. Also, the quarterback is paid more, given more respect, and even calls the plays. The punter may not get in the game. Again, what is not said in the statements is that the roles may not be as valued as implied. In addition, both of the previous metaphors compare marriage to very male-dominated settings.

Another finding is that this pastor starts off using his interpretation of a biblical argument and then ties in a pseudo biological argument—for example, his anecdote about the difference in softness of skin—to further validate the idea that men and women were

created for different functions. However, he argues that it is these differences that allow males and females to make a great team. He states, “same value, different function,” but it’s the difference in functions that may allow “outsiders” to think that women are being subjugated or oppressed. One may argue that he uses biology in support of a moral judgment just as he uses the Bible. However, the pastor also makes an argument to show that women have been liberated by Jesus and thus valued by him.

Going back to the football metaphor, even though everyone is on a team, it takes a certain body type to play a position, and that body type is valued more than other body types. In addition, the football metaphor itself is a masculine metaphor. So, perhaps one can argue that while in conservative Protestantism the people may be theoretically valued equally, this equality may not exist in practice. This argument is evident from the underlying assumptions of the metaphors used by the differing pastors. These metaphors or analogies do not include the Bible, but are argued to be extensions of the Bible. This indicates that those who use such metaphors have incorporated a “same value, different function” belief system about gender roles within a marriage. Each analogy and metaphor allows men to be in the position of dominance, while at the same time creating the impression that women are somehow still equal because they are on the same “team.” In addition, every time an analogy is used, the Bible is not. This “same value, different function” model of gender roles is used in an argument by another suburban

Pennsylvania pastor, as well:

I don’t believe that one, a man or a woman, either one has more value, more capability, or more worth, but I do think that God established roles. I do believe that he established the husband as the leader in the home. I do believe that even though a woman might be more gifted in the leadership

area...there are certain things that my wife does far better than I, and I don't think you can take this and put some template down that says every marriage has to look like this . . . Like for instance, every man should do the bills. Obviously if a woman is more gifted, that's where I think that teamwork comes into play. I think that they both are mutually responsible to each other, mutually exclusive to each other, but . . . as a Christ follower, I believe God established an order that when men . . . follow him, statistics prove that family is different.

Again, we see in this quote the “teammate” metaphor, in which each person is valued but has different as well as flexible roles, as long as the husband is the leader. While it is evident that men are in a leadership role, and women are in more of a supportive role, what is not clear in every quote is whether there is an exact assignment for men and for women. In addition, this pastor, like the previous one, utilizes science to validate his arguments by referencing statistics that imply that families are “different,” and presumably better, when men follow God and fulfill their roles. While no other scientific data are given, he cites “statistics” to add support for his personal beliefs and moral judgments. However, there are some variations or differences amongst conservative Protestant pastors as to what a wife should do and what a husband should do. In other words, while many of the pastors may argue that men are the head of the family and women are to serve their husbands, it is not evident how that hierarchy should be displayed.⁹⁷

We have seen that some of the pastors have argued that women should be the primary caretakers of the children, while men should be the primary financial supporters of the family. For example, another suburban pastor of church in a Pennsylvania suburb agrees when he states,

⁹⁷ This pastor does not discuss a reciprocation of roles. In other words, if the wife picks up a “man’s chore” does the husband then take on a “woman’s chore”? How would this work out, and should there be balance?

So they are of equal worth before God, but they don't have the same function, and so we see male headship and leadership in the home, and we see women called to serve their husbands in the context of the families, for the good of the families and for the good of the church.

However, amongst these pastors the prevailing thought is not necessarily that the husband is the sole breadwinner and that the wife is the sole caretaker in the team. In addition to the teammate metaphors that are being used, these prior quotes given by these conservative pastors also draw their validation or support of their arguments from their own personal beliefs. Therefore, they do not necessarily cite the Bible but often use “I believe” and “I think” statements and then proceed to talk about their position on gender roles. While all of the pastors, both liberal and conservative, use statements like this, it's problematic because the conservative pastors often reference the Bible without providing specific citations to support their statements. This fact provides evidence that what these pastors are teaching are based out of their own personal beliefs and convictions. They may have been influenced more by their cultural surroundings, norms, and upbringing than by biblical knowledge. For example, another conservative suburban pastor argues that roles in marriage are not necessarily “cut and dry” by stating:

I think the Bible presents two kinds of marriages: traditional and contemporary. The traditional marriage is where . . . the man is the breadwinner. The wife is at home working with the family. Now, a healthy traditional family is when the husband comes home, and he pitches in. He doesn't just pop his feet up, the stereotype of kicking his feet up, saying where's my tea and my newspaper. A healthy traditional family is that when he returns home from work, he takes off his clothes and puts on the fun clothes, and he's family man. A healthy contemporary marriage is that both people have to work and they're team players at the end of the day. It's not even a question, “What are you going to do tonight”; they just know their role. It's in our family. My wife works here at the church too. I've done this for years; I do the dishes every night. If she cooks, I clean. I straighten up the house almost everyday, almost 365 days a year. The only

day I don't worry about straightening the house is Sunday. But what does my wife do? She does the extensive cleaning and the laundry. I do the straightening up so that she can dust. She doesn't have to worry about picking up this and picking up that. But you see my point; it's a shared vision . . . we just pitch in together. That's a contemporary healthy marriage.

In a manner that is similar to the statements of the previous conservative pastors, this pastor argues that a successful marriage requires teamwork. However, he uses a validating statement that the *Bible* presents two forms of marriage, but never discusses a specific verse or passage as a reference. He differs from the previous conservative pastors by providing specific tasks. So while each person has a function, according to this pastor, they each have to support one another. This quote indicates that even though they have different functions, the husband and the wife are supposed to be supportive of one another by trying to help each other out when possible. What is interesting is that he distinguishes two types of marriage—traditional and contemporary—but, in both cases, he states that men should “help” their wives in housework and childcare. However, the “help” that the husbands are offering in these scenarios may not be 50 percent of the housework and childcare duties, and wives are still delegated those duties as a part of the team. Furthermore, they would still have to do those jobs that are not as privileged and honored socially by others, such as housework. Even the “contemporary” family is problematic. Based on his argument, while the husband comes home and “helps out,” the wife comes home after work and is still responsible for household tasks. This contemporary family is one in which the wife/mother would work a double day or “second shift,” whereas the husband/father can come home to put on fun clothes (Hochschild [1989] 2003).

Another issue that is evident in the responses of these pastors is the idea that same-sex couples cannot be defined as a family. Unlike the liberal Protestant pastors, none of the conservative Protestant pastors view homosexual partners as a type of family and never mention this possibility. It is necessary to see the specific reasons why homosexual relationships are and are not viewed as a family by the various Protestant pastors. As a result, the next section will look at reasons why homosexual relationships are or are not considered when these pastors talk about marriage and the family.

Homosexuality and Same-Sex Marriage

Liberal Protestants

The liberal Protestant pastors interviewed for this study gave a variety of arguments about homosexuality and same-sex marriage. For one, some liberal pastors state that homosexuality deviates from the norm, while others state that their position has “evolved” over time and has become more accepting. Still, others argue that God created homosexuals, and, as a result, they should be accepted in the church just as they are, with no need to change, and without being seen as sinful. While the liberal pastors did not mention Jesus, God, or the Bible when focusing on the previous issues discussed in this chapter, surprisingly, they mentioned Jesus, God, and the Bible just as much as conservative Protestant pastors when discussing homosexuality. One reason this is done, it seems, is to critique conservative pastors usage of the Bible as a justification for their own personal views, and more specifically to combat conservative pastors who seek to validate the idea that homosexuality is a sin through their interpretations of the Bible. Therefore, liberal pastors may feel more pressure to validate their views of

homosexuality using the Bible and its lack of discussion on the topic to counter the views of conservative pastors.

For example, one argument made by some liberal pastors is that homosexuality deviates from the norm, but gay and lesbian people should be shown love just as Christ showed love for others. A suburban Philadelphia pastor of a large church states:

I'm not gay so my views are by observation. I have no idea what the experience of being gay is like. I think that one is born with it, or if not born, I think it's hardwired into one's consciousness. I do think that it's different, not as a deviant thing, but deviates from the norm. Because it's different, I have all types of suspicions of it. I think that as a Christian we are called to be compassionate. Jesus chose to be with lepers, to be with the deviant, to the different, to the outcasts of society. He chose to be with harlots. He chose, like the woman at the well, the Samaritan woman that he talked to who was married five times. Whatever few suspicions that I have about homosexuality, I think the church is called to minister in love to these individuals and to minister without judgment, and I think that's hard. That's hard.

Several interesting points about this answer are prominent. The first of these is this pastor's possible discomfort with "being gay." In providing his answer, he made sure to distance himself from homosexuality even though that did not add much to the answer. Also, he argues that homosexuality is innate and thus cannot be changed. Therefore, gays should be treated the same way that Jesus treated deviants. While he had suspicions about homosexuality, he was unwilling to talk about these suspicions. However, in his comparison to lepers, harlots, and social outcasts, he positions homosexuality as deviant.⁹⁸

⁹⁸ Using the terms such as lepers and harlots in current society may belie the pastors liberal position on homosexuality.

Another pastor of a large suburban Philadelphia church continues with the previous argument that homosexuality is innate; however, she differs in her current perception of homosexuality. She states:

At one time, I really thought that homosexuality was wrong in the eyes of God. And that understanding got challenged along the way by people and situations, and I really have come 180 degrees on that. I really believe that sexual orientation is not as clear cut as we in Western Eurocentric culture have thought, and in fact in some indigenous cultures, there's a much more nuanced understanding of sexual orientation . . . God doesn't make mistakes in the way that they are; they're as much children of God as a heterosexual person is.

While employing God initially in her answer and throughout her answer, she also gives a lot of weight to her personal experience. In fact, her personal experience is more evident than biblical proscriptions, and from that point of reference, she is able to argue that not only is homosexuality innate, but also that homosexuality was created by God. Through her "evolution," this pastor also argues that the domination of heterosexism may be a Eurocentric Western cultural ideal and grounds this argument in her study of different indigenous cultures. Therefore, this pastor combines her belief in God's actions with what she knows about culture in order to give her an understanding of homosexuality.

She continues in a discussion of same-sex marriage when she states:

Well, I really do believe that since I think there's merit in marriage and in making that commitment to another person, and there's merit in having that intimate companionship over the course of one's life, I think that it's unjust and it's unloving to deny that to two people who want to make that kind of commitment to each other, but happen to be two people in love of the same sex. So, I think that it's important that people of all orientations will be allowed and encouraged to make those sorts of commitments to each other because that's how we grow, I think as people, is by making those kind of commitments in relationships and sticking with them.

Again, this pastor utilizes personal beliefs as validation for her views of homosexuality more often than a biblical interpretation. This connection between what is believed about homosexuality is further expressed by the pastor of a rural Pennsylvania church who continues with the argument that homosexuality is innate and same-sex marriage should be allowed, even though she is at odds with most of the people of her church and of the Methodist denomination. She states:

I'm totally at odds with this congregation and the official stance of the Methodist church because I don't believe it's a sin, and I don't believe it's unnatural. I think God created gay and lesbian people the way they are just like God creates heterosexual people the way they are, and because they're a minority numerically, one out of ten or whatever, doesn't mean that they are unnatural in anyway. So I have a very different view from the official view.

Here we see the contrast between the individual pastor's position, the church, and the denomination's views of homosexuality and same-sex marriage. Due to personal convictions, she is willing to go against her denomination to argue that homosexuality is just as natural as heterosexuality. However, her personal views clashes with her denomination's views, raising a number of questions. For example, are her personal convictions merely personal beliefs or are they based on what she perceives as biblical? Or, is it only the denomination's interpretation that can be considered an official biblical view? Isn't that based on someone's interpretation as well? She continues by stating:

Again, I'm totally out of the mainstream on that, I think that it is unjust that gays and lesbians are denied the right to marriage. It's unjust on a social level for all the reasons—health insurance, inheritance rights, being able to take responsibility for their partner if they're ill, et cetera, et cetera—all those civil rights, which actually the Methodist church, in the last five years, passed legislation that we protect the civil rights of gays; not marriage, but we protect the civil rights of gays and lesbians. So we don't approve of violent beatings and things like that. But more than that I

think that gays and lesbians want to raise children and have a family as much as heterosexuals do. Some do and some don't just like heterosexuals, and so I think it is part of human nature regardless of your sexual orientation to live in family and groups. We're not solitary people by nature, I don't think. It's a shame.

This pastor sees issues dealing with homosexuality as not only a religious issue but also a larger political issue or even a civil rights issue. Her focus is on the lack of equality that we have in the United States in regards to same-sex marriage and gay and lesbian rights. So while she did not discuss the Bible, other liberal pastors did. For example, the following pastor of a large suburban Philadelphia church discusses the way people that have used the Bible to justify slavery, and currently the way people are using it incorrectly to justify the wrongful treatment of homosexuals. For example, she states:

But, okay yeah, of course they [conservative Protestants] use the Bible, but they also used the Bible to justify slavery. So there's a long history of reading into it what you want to pull out of it without understanding the social context. Just to use the slavery example; Paul tells Philemon the slave to go back to your master, and that was used for hundreds of years to justify slavery. And of course in the Roman Empire there was slavery, and you didn't go against the Roman Empire. He was not ready to take that issue on. The references in the scripture on homosexuality are so few and far between. And the final thing, Jesus never said a word about homosexuality. So I think that it's partly that literalist, fundamentalist [method of arguing that] this is what it says [and] means without taking the context [into account] . . . just looking for justification on views we already hold. It was used against women . . . and until little past 50 years ago, it kept women from being ordained. So you have to look at the whole thing, and say he probably said that because it was 2,000 years ago, and that's what was going on. The Holy Spirit overcomes what the social conventions are.

This pastor critiques conservative interpretations of the Bible in regards to homosexuality and states that conservative pastors have misused the Bible to validate views against homosexuality just as they once misused it to justify slavery. Therefore, she sees

arguments against homosexuality as flawed and outrageous. Even when people use the Bible to make arguments against homosexuality, she states that they are flawed because they do not focus on the social context within which the passage was written. Even though conservative pastors argue that their interpretations of scripture are correct when it comes to the subject of homosexuality, this pastor argued that they are absolutely wrong in their views of homosexuality and in the interpretations of scriptures that are being used to argue against homosexuality. Similarly, she argues, some interpreters of scripture were wrong in trying to use it as a validation of slavery. Interestingly, even though she focuses a lot on the cultural perspectives of homosexuality, and the mishandling of scripture by conservative Protestants, she invokes a religious symbol, the Holy Spirit, “as necessary for overcoming social conventions”. This shows that, like her conservative counterparts, she promotes the need for a supernatural power to overcome these issues. Overall, while the liberal Protestant pastors vary in what they believe about same-sex marriage and homosexuality, all of the liberals focus on accepting gays and lesbians just as they are.

Conservative Protestant Pastors

While liberal Protestant pastors are accepting of homosexuals as they are, conservative pastors accept them as people but desire them to change their lifestyles because these pastors view homosexuality as a sin. While all of the conservative pastors see homosexuality as a sin, they do not all justify their views in the same way. Some of the pastors focus primarily on their own interpretation of scientific knowledge to validate their view of homosexuality and to add validity to what they believe the Bible says about

homosexuality. These pastors at times do not focus on the Bible as the source of their knowledge about homosexuality and are often willing to use other sources to validate their beliefs. For example, a Philadelphia Baptist pastor states that

it has been proven, contrary to what [liberal Protestants] say, that homosexuality is not a genetic thing; it's not something that we are born with. It is a process in which one becomes. There are people that have been born with an imbalance of hormones, and they may feel a certain way about being more feminine than masculine, but they have a penis. I think the man has to look at the equipment that he comes with to help him determine what it is he ought to be, and then get the hormones to balance out whatever it is that you're lacking. It's not something I personally think but they've proven that homosexuality is not a genetic disease. It's more of choice and circumstances have made women lesbians and men homosexuals. There is something that is dysfunctional in the family, something in the way they were brought up, but I don't think we're born homosexual.

This pastor is basing his knowledge on what he views as a scientific argument; however, he also elaborates and argues that not only is homosexuality not biologically determined, but he does not use a biblical argument first. He contends that it can be corrected if a person just “get[s] the hormones to balance it out.” What is interesting about this argument is that he argues for gays and lesbians to get some sort of medical treatment to “fix” their sexuality. Even though this pastor argues that homosexuality is a choice, he contradicts himself by arguing that medical measures are necessary to “cure” homosexuals. If medical treatment is necessary, one can only assume that homosexuality is innate or at least triggered genetically. In addition, his argument implies that something that is spiritual should be treated naturally. This can be problematic if it implies that one could treat a sin naturally instead of by simply repenting of sins and asking for forgiveness. In addition, it is evident that he sees homosexuals as being deformed, lacking, and subhuman. Since they are not heterosexual, they obviously have a deformity

that needs to be addressed.⁹⁹ Still, unlike the liberal pastors, he argues that homosexuality is a choice and is formed out of life's situations (e.g., by having a dysfunctional family) even though his remedies fail to support his position. However, he does continue in his statement that not only should something be done medically, but also spiritually.

Number two, I think it is what the scripture says it is, and that is a sin in more than one way. I just think that the very act and how it's done verifies that that was not God's intention on how things needed to be done, but I also believe that the homosexual is a person and, with he or she being a person, we as a church need to treat them as a people and not second class citizens. And via the word of God and discipleship and nurturing, I think homosexuals can turn around, I think they can be delivered like any of you who have been liars all our lives. I think that it's not the unpardonable sin, and I think they need Christ too.

This pastor takes what he believes are God's intentions to point out why he thinks homosexuality is wrong, while in the same statement argues for the fair treatment of homosexuals. Even though previously he argued that homosexuals need hormones to balance themselves out, he states that they should be treated fairly because they can be delivered. This implies that they should be accepted only because deep down they are fully human, are heterosexual, and can change. However, it must be noted that this conservative pastor provides support for the argument that conservative Protestant pastors are interested in changing homosexuals into heterosexuals and not necessarily in accepting their lifestyle even though they may accept them as human beings. This argument is further supported by another conservative pastor who also has a large church outside of the Philadelphia area who states:

Well, I think anytime you get away from the word of God, you don't understand the plan. God created us; he wired us. He knows how we're made. The reason we have problems today is because we don't want to

⁹⁹ These critiques are evidence of heterosexism.

acknowledge the word of God anymore. Okay, well before anything else God said these “two shall be one.” It was Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve. It was a man and a woman; if you knew nothing about God, you just have to look at anatomy and know how it works. That’s the way it is.

As in the previous quote, we can see some merging of a biological argument with references of God and the Bible. The pastor believes that all humans are made by God to be straight, but some (homosexuals) don’t act straight. Then he concludes that a person “just ha[s] to look at anatomy and know how it works.”

From a biblical standpoint, I believe that homosexuality is a corruption. Romans 1 talks about how they burned in lust for one another. I think it’s always a corruption of the original intent, but I’m of the camp that believe that...[as]...human beings, first of all we’re fallen. I think in a fallen world we all have a bent towards something. You line ten guys up and show them a picture of pornography; maybe two will become sex addicts. If you give ten guys a drink, maybe two will become alcoholics. I think there are some men who have a bent, like, you know they’re eight or nine and they feel more aligned to the female end, but here’s the bottom line, if I feel like killing people at twelve, I don’t. If I feel like setting fires, I don’t. I think people who are homosexuals maybe saw themselves in that light and never had someone to steer them the right way. To me, same-sex marriage is ludicrous, even if you took God out of the picture.

The pastor validates his argument by referencing an interpretation of scripture; however, at the same time he argues that same-sex marriage is outrageous beyond what God says. These statements indicate that this pastor possibly was against same-sex marriage and used the bible to validate that position. What is interesting, however, is the comparison between homosexuality and “other sins and addictions”. He performs what I call an “equalizing of sin” approach by implying that every kind of sin is just sin. In addition, he states that homosexuality is a sin or a “corruption”. However, when he notes that all human beings are “fallen”, he then softens his stance on homosexuality. He does this by stating that all human beings may have some sort of addiction or sin that they need to

control or resist, and it is all comparable. In essence, each person, if not controlled, has their own issues. For example, he argues that some people are sex addicts, some are alcoholics, and some are homosexuals. Here, he lists homosexuality as one of several addictive behaviors. In addition, by making this comparison, he is further implying that some people are prone to homosexuality since it is available, like becoming a sex addict, or an alcoholic, or even committing murder. This equalizing of sins or problems is also identified by a suburban nondenominational pastor when he states that homosexuality is not God's plan for anyone's life, just as "there are plenty of straight people in my church that I know have sexual addictions in their lives, and I don't believe those are God's plans for them either." This idea of God's plan or order for the family is also discussed by a Philadelphia pastor who states:

I think that same-sex marriages basically are not of the Lord. They're immoral. When you think about same-sex marriages, you basically look at people who are in rebellion against the things of God, and it's a selfish act. They don't have the ability to reproduce, and it undermines God's order for the family. One of the keys that God taught Abraham when he established a covenant with him is that he taught him how to think generationally. When you think in terms of generation, you know that you're going to pass something down to your children's children. Homosexuality or same-sex marriages will interrupt generational blessings. So you can see why God established certain principles; they just make sense. These other things deviate from fulfilling the plan that he established through Abraham that all the families in earth will be blessed.

This pastor asserts through his own biblical interpretation that generational blessings only occur through biological offspring, not necessarily through the process of parenting. Therefore, he asserts that blessings can only be passed down through the bloodline similar to genes. As a result, according to this pastor, same-sex marriage would not allow generational blessings to be passed down, since two people of the same sex cannot

procreate together. Therefore, this pastor makes a connection between biblical interpretation, biology, and God's blessings.

A major reason these pastors give to justify their moral values about the problems with viewing same-sex marriages or homosexuality as a part of life rather than an aberration is based on their interpretation of the Bible and God's views. Interestingly, their main approach to the problems they see in homosexuality is to discuss what these pastors believe is a biblical interpretation of marriage. For example, a suburban pastor of a large church argues that God made marriage, that marriage is heterosexual, and that we cannot change it regardless of benefits and circumstances.

Marriage is something that God defined. "Therefore, a man shall leave his wife and the two shall become one flesh."¹⁰⁰ To make the definition more man-centered to be what we want it to be is to tamper with something that God designed. So what marriage stands for needs to remain what God intended it to be: between a man and woman. Now marriage in society provides certain economic benefits. That's outside of the scope of what God's designed. So the debate as I heard [it] is homosexual couples who want to be treated the same; they want to be able to get health insurance for their partner [and] financial gain. So I would say that's wrong. Outside of that, I think that there is the issue about [whether] a homosexual relationship [can] be similar or on par with a marriage relationship; it can't because it cannot provide for procreation. The act and the lifestyle are sinful according to what the Bible presents [that] God says. But it doesn't mean that those people are evil, or they should be ostracized, or they should be punished for who they are, which is what's happening in some groups of people. I don't think that's right. The Bible doesn't say that you should judge the person, but the Bible definitely judges the activity.

By referencing a scripture verse and making an interpretation of what marriage was "designed to be", this pastor incorporates several distinct arguments in his description of marriage. First, according to this pastor, homosexuality should not be allowed because, in his view, it is going against the God-given command and design for marriage. This pastor

¹⁰⁰ Genesis 2:24

then continues his argument and indicates that because God did not create homosexuality and it is a choice, there is and can be a chance to change from that lifestyle for a person who is homosexual. However, according to the pastor, because we live in a society that is accepting of everything, we accept this lifestyle, which in turn has a negative affect on homosexuals. He then distinguishes between the “sin and the sinner,” thus trying to argue that people should not hate homosexuals.

Overall Findings

In this analysis, there are several findings about liberal and conservative Protestant pastors that should be identified. One major finding is that liberal Protestant pastors validate their arguments about the family and gender roles within the family by using arguments about social norms and personal views. Very seldom do the liberal pastors refer to God during this portion of the interview.¹⁰¹ Conservative pastors also describe their views of the family while referring to their own personal views. Arguably, many of the pastors start out with different ideological stances and utilize Protestantism as a way to buttress their beliefs and worldview. Even when using a scripture reference, the conservative pastors often state that they “think” or “believe” that God wanted the family a certain way. While all pastors are interpreting the Bible and speaking about what they perceive to be Christian ideals and issues, conservative pastors are more likely to choose certain interpretations of the Bible and certain passages (i.e., Adam and Eve,

¹⁰¹ This study raises a number of questions that may be unanswerable. Where do we draw the line between personal beliefs and biblical views? Can they be blurred, or are they distinctively different, especially when we consider the affect that varied pastoral interpretations have on so-called “biblical views”? In the lives of pastors, what comes first: the chicken “biblical views” or the egg “personal beliefs”? Are they truly distinct, and how do they relate to each other?

Romans, Ephesians), than are liberal pastors, and as a result, conservative pastors are more likely to portray their approach to the Bible as a literal interpretation or as speaking on behalf of God than are liberal pastors, who more readily acknowledge that they interpret the Bible in a modern context. This finding leads to four additional major findings in discussions of family values.

Major Finding One

Both liberal and conservative Protestant pastors interpret biblical texts to make their arguments. However, conservative pastors cite particular biblical passages more frequently than the liberal pastors and quote scriptures more often as they respond. The conservative pastors overwhelmingly use biblical texts as validating statements to support their answers. For example, when they discuss the purpose of the family marriage and arguments against homosexuality, they often refer to the story of Adam and Eve in the Old Testament book of Genesis. In addition, conservative pastors differ from liberal pastors in their answers because they not only mention God but feel that they speak on his behalf, by making statements such as “this is according to God’s word,” or “I believe God’s word says this.” On the other hand, the liberal pastors are more likely to look to cultural norms in order to answer questions about family values rather than the Bible or church doctrine. In fact, liberal pastors argue that their interpretation is informed by an understanding of the sociohistorical contexts during biblical and current times. Therefore, they were much more likely to make arguments based on cultural standards rather than biblical proscriptions.

Major Finding Two

Traditional gender beliefs inform conservative Protestant pastors' worldviews about sexual morality. While there is variability in the beliefs of conservative pastors, views about sexual morality and family values are highly gendered. In addition, in this case references to scripture were rarely used. For example, when it comes to gender roles in the family, the conservative authors argue that gender roles are necessary for the success of the family. However, the gender roles they describe are closely related to the view of women and men in which women are viewed as the helpers to the husband. There is, however, an argument by conservative Protestants that men are supposed to be examples to help their wives in tasks that they view as appropriately assigned to women.

Major Finding Three

The conservative pastors overwhelmingly disagree with same-sex relationships in addressing family values and sexual morality issues. While conservative pastors view same-sex relationships as sinful, liberal pastors vary more widely in their positions. However, none of the liberal Protestant pastors view homosexuality as a sin. Instead, some see it as a different form of sexuality, while others see it as a gift given by God.

Major Finding Four

In comparing discussions of homosexuality discussions of other themes, there are some major differences. Liberal pastors do not refer to the Bible or God much when

talking about the issue of sexuality except when they are discussing homosexuality. They use the Bible, or at least the historical context of the Biblical accounts, and mention God to defend homosexuality. In addition, the liberal Protestant pastors often directly critique conservative pastors' interpretations of the Bible. They say that their own liberal views have evolved with the changes in culture while conservative views have not. On the other hand, the conservative pastors are more likely to refer to science and environment when discussing homosexuality than any other theme. For example, they allude to the anatomical differences that allow females and males to mate and also the lack of a biological capability for homosexuals to reproduce together. It is likely that the differing Protestant pastors are defending or validating their positions on homosexuality by utilizing what they believe their opponents would utilize or have utilized most in defending their positions.

In the next chapter, I continue the analysis of Protestant pastors' interviews, focusing more on in-depth in issues of sexuality. In addition, the next chapter will provide information in regards to the differing pastors' view of sex, nonmarital sexuality, extramarital sexuality, and forgiveness. The next chapter will also discuss the limitations of the interview sections of the dissertation.

CHAPTER 7

INTERVIEW ANALYSIS: THE PURPOSE OF SEX

The previous chapter, which focused on views of family and marriage by liberal and conservative Protestant pastors, discussed the ways in which all pastors interpret the Bible and speak on their perceptions of what is acceptable for the family, and how they base their interpretation on particular Protestant standpoints. However, this chapter also found that Conservative pastors are more likely to choose certain interpretations of the Bible and certain passages (i.e., Genesis, Romans, Ephesians) than Liberal pastors are, and as a result, conservative pastors are more likely to present their approach to the Bible as a literal interpretation, speaking on behalf of God, than are liberal pastors, who more readily acknowledge they interpret the Bible in a modern context. Consequently, validating statements were employed by numerous pastors to attempt to justify their views on the family

This section of the dissertation continues to focus on what liberal and conservative Protestant pastors have to say about issues of sexual morality, specifically issues surrounding the purpose of sex, which show how both groups of pastors utilize validating statements to justify their arguments. As noted before, pastors are often spokespeople for their particular belief systems. In addition, pastors are also viewed as people who have the ear of their parishioners, guide them, and are viewed as or assumed to be their “spiritual advisors.” While, in the scope of this study, I have been unable to find out whether the parishioners were following the teachings of their pastors, I have

been able to show what particular pastors believe and what they utilize to validate their beliefs (i.e. the Bible, personal experience, scientific data).¹⁰²

Therefore, I continue to analyze statements given primarily about sexuality from liberal and conservative Protestant pastoral perspectives. Understanding sexual morality from both liberal and conservative Protestant pastoral perspectives will help us to understand not only the differing Protestant views, but also some opposing American cultural attitudes influenced by Protestantism, specifically, views about the family and sexuality and the reasons why they are held and defended publicly.¹⁰³ As a result, the topics that will be analyzed are the purpose of sex, nonmarital sexuality, extramarital sexuality, and forgiveness of marital indiscretions. All of these topics are frequently discussed in Protestant literature, and a number of them came up in the interview without my asking. For example, in discussing the purpose of sexuality and marriage with both liberal and conservative Protestants, discussion of nonmarital and extramarital sexuality would commence without my asking questions about these topics. This finding provides more support for the common use of these topics as issues for debate when discussing sexual morality.

Debates about sexual morality abound in political discussions. As mentioned in the literature review, these debates have also occurred within Protestant circles. In addition, differing positions about sexual morality are continually being endorsed by various Protestant groups. As a reminder, the aim of this dissertation is to find out what

¹⁰² I am able to show what these pastors proclaim to believe. There may be differences in what a pastor believe and what they state.

¹⁰³ The reasons refer to the biblical/doctrinal and social reasons that are given in this study to support the particular view.

differing Protestant spokespeople are declaring about sexual morality and how they are supporting their claims. With this goal in mind, Protestant pastors were asked about their view of sexuality in general, and, as a result, several themes became apparent that are in line with the scope of this research. These themes include the purpose of sex, nonmarital/premarital sex, extramarital sex, and forgiveness of extramarital sex. However, in the pastors' arguments, one can also find evidence of defined gender roles, stereotypes, and biases, as well as some evidence of heterosexism. For example, when a pastor of a large Philadelphia church is asked about what sexuality meant to him, he states,

For me, it triggers some things for me. Sexuality is what one is, be it male or female, as well as when one marries and enters in[to] an intimate relationship with the person of the opposite sex. I know that may not be politically correct, but that's more biblically correct, and that's my Christian view of sexuality. A male and female in a relationship, that's what sexuality triggers for me, those images.

In this quote, we can see several underlying arguments that will be or have been already explored by this statement. The emphasis on sex being between a male and female highlights this pastor's view that sex should be limited to a heterosexual relationship. In addition, he states that sexuality should only be a part of intimacy in a heterosexual relationship, thus elevating heterosexual marriage as the sole domain for sexuality. Another pastor of a large suburban church continues arguing for sex only within the confines of heterosexual marriage and gives an example of what his church teaches about the difference between healthy sex, which he describes as sex inside a heterosexual marriage, and what he terms "easy" sex.

We just had a meeting with our teens, and we talked about “Easy Sex versus Life Long Love.” What we’re trying to present to them is what biblical love looks like. Traditionally in our culture, sexuality is hidden away so you don’t see good biblical marital sexual love. When my wife and I were going to be going away recently, our kids said “Oh, are we coming?” [It was the] perfect opportunity; we just looked at them and said “No, no, we are going to be alone, just the two of us, and we can’t have any kids present.” Now for my two thirteen-year-olds, who we’ve had the chance to take away when they were ten, explain sexuality, [and] talk to them about the hope of saving their purity for their husband, they knew what was going to happen. They were embarrassed, so I kissed my wife in front of them, and I said, “You know, you don’t even know half of how much fun we’re going to have,” and they’re like, “Oh, no.” But, what it says to them is I have something to hold out for and look forward to. We need to promote what . . . healthy sexuality [does] look like because here’s the truth, nobody does sex better than God.

This pastor views sexuality as something that is hidden away. In other words, sexuality is explained as “good biblical marital sexual love.” This pastor highlights the need for and importance of “biblical love” by using his own personal life as a demonstration. This pastor emphasizes the importance of sex within marriage and has even talked to his children about what he feels is the “detriment” of sex outside of marriage. He implies that a couple in a heterosexual marriage would fare much better than a couple outside of one, since they are expressing their sexuality in God’s way, and “nobody does sex better than God.” These answers prompted me to ask the different Protestant pastors what they believe to be the purpose of sex.

Purpose of Sexuality

Liberal Protestants

While there are some similarities between the purposes of sex given by liberals and conservatives, there are a number of differences in the way it is explained and

expressed. For example, all of the liberal Protestants interviewed indicate a “*leaning*” toward *pleasure more than procreation*.¹⁰⁴ They also tend to assume—with some validity—that conservative Protestants argue that sex is for procreation. In addition, many of the liberal pastors’ answers are connected to *changes in societal norms*. Both of these points are indicated in the following quote.

The purpose is for pleasure and also is for procreation. I don’t think you can say it’s for one or the other. I think, primarily, especially in this day and age, I would say, I would lean more towards pleasure than procreation.

This pastor argues that the pursuit of pleasure is a suitable purpose for sex. He argues this point in view of current structural factors in society such as overpopulation. Therefore, his beliefs may vary based on the conditions and factors of society. This “leaning” toward pleasure more than procreation is further validated by another pastor of a large suburban church stating:

This is where I would probably differ from most people in the congregation. I think that sexuality has a dual purpose. Obviously it’s for procreation, but I think the church, all varieties of Christian churches: Roman Catholic and Protestants, get it wrong when they say that procreation is the only purpose. I think that it’s a basic part of who we are, and it’s a beautiful part of being a human being. So, sexuality is a part of all that we are, and it’s not limited to procreation. Especially now, I think children are no longer an economic unit for families. Meaning fifty and sixty years ago, we needed children as part of just keeping the families alive to take care of the elders when they got older and help[ing to] work the farm and all that. But our society is so different now, and our society reflects that.

While he argues that sex is “obviously” for procreation and that its purpose is for procreation based on changes in societal norms, for him it is not only limited to

¹⁰⁴ Some of the conservative Pastors also lean toward pleasure more so than procreation as the purpose of sex.

procreation but is also a source of pleasure for its participants. Therefore, he argues that society has changed, and this is reflected in families and sexuality. This pastor has focused more on the evolution of society for validation of his answers than biblical proscriptions. Another pastor states that:

Well, one purpose clearly is reproduction, but that's not the sole purpose, in my opinion. It's also an opportunity for two people who are in an intimate and loving relationship to express that love to one another in a physical form. So, I do see it as a divine gift, and, you know, if it were just for reproduction, it wouldn't have to be pleasurable. But it is; it's physically pleasurable, which to me says it's not just about fertilizing an egg. It's about more than that; it's about an intimate and loving connection between two people.

This pastor takes sex from being an *act* to a *gift* that is given. Not just any gift but a divine gift for two people in a loving relationship to express their feelings to one another. Therefore, it can be assumed that since it is a divine gift it is a God-given gift, or at least a spiritual gift provided for a couple. While procreation is considered, it is not the only reason or purpose of sexuality for liberal Protestant pastors. The main reason for sexuality is pleasure. This reason can be reflected in the perceived correlation between societal change and social views of sexuality. With the main reason being that sex is for pleasure, sexual relationships are not limited and confined to people within a heterosexual marriage but are open for those who mutually desire a sexual relationship.

Conservative Protestants

Some of the liberal Protestant pastors assume that the conservative Protestant argument would be that sex is solely for procreation. However, while this statement is one of the answers given, it was not seen as the primary purpose. Other purposes seem to

be more important or necessary in a sexual relationship. One answer that is given by conservative Protestant pastors but less often by liberal pastors is that sexuality is *to offer praise and worship to God*. One pastor argues that

it's God-ordained, God created it, I think God made the man with the chemical in his brain to be attracted to the opposite sex so there would be marriage, so there would be gratification. I believe God intended sex between man and the woman to be of a gratification nature because they are wired that way.

This pastor believes that sex within marriage is God's design, and Christian married couples are honoring God through their marriage. In addition, he references God to support and validate his answer. Another pastor elaborates on this point when he states that "when God created the family and marriage, he wanted to create an institution that is not only good for us as mankind and society, but he wanted to create an institution that will reflect him, because everything he's done is to get us back to him." So therefore, sex may be seen as a duty for a married Christian couple to fulfill because it can be offered as worship to God. Sex is for God, according to this pastor. "So sexuality, whenever you talk about sexuality, in my opinion, you should always start with God, because God gave it, he created it. Now watch this, not only starting with God, but start with the purpose that it's for God." Referencing God as validation, this pastor also argues that God has made us to be sexual solely inside the marital relationship because it brings him glory.

However, many pastors add a second purpose for sex, which is *to create and maintain intimacy and unity*. For example, a pastor in the Maryland area clarifies the previous point by stating:

When God creates man and he creates woman, he has brought them together, and he's allowed them to enter into a physical relationship based

on the spiritual and social dynamics of that relationship, to experience what it is to be intimate. Jesus made a statement: “No man knows the father but the son, and no one knows the son except the father.” On another occasion he was saying in John 10 that the “Father and I are one,” meaning there is a unique oneness that’s ontological that only they share. So when he creates family or specifically marriage, that then is only to create a social relationship that gives us a taste of what is going on between the Father and the Son on an eternal level. Furthermore, that gets to sexuality because sexuality is that aspect of a relationship that is so restricted that only one person, theoretically, only one person in a lifetime is to share that with another person, saving death of one of the parties, and then they may remarry. Therefore, sexuality from God’s standpoint is right there in a marriage to say, I get some idea of what is of God.

This conservative pastor mentions God and the Bible to make his argument, which is that there is a connection between the unity created or strengthened within a marriage through sexuality and the unity of the trinity. According to one pastor, sexuality is established to reflect the bond and unity of the trinity. Therefore, this pastor states that “sex helps to fulfill that role of intimacy, which reflects back to God.” It seems evident, as mentioned earlier, that he is arguing that this intimacy should only exist between heterosexual couples who are married. He also implied that, while it is not practical in all cases, “theoretically” two people should marry and enjoy intimacy together for a lifetime. The importance of intimacy is further argued by a suburban pastor who states:

To me marriage is two people living under the rule of God but living in intimacy. You know when Adam looked at Eve, he said, “This is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh.” Think about it. He was created out of the ground. He goes to sleep. God creates Eve out of his side; he looks at her, and it’s almost as [if] he said, “Oh my gosh, it’s the same bone structure; it’s the same flesh. She’s like me, but boy there’s something different.” And I think what Adam began to understand is there can be intimacy with this person that I can’t have with anybody else. I can know another man, but I can never know him like I know this woman because we can be intimate.

This pastor utilizes the biblical story of Adam and Eve, which in most conservative Christian communities is viewed as the story of the first family, to exemplify intimacy. Therefore, this pastor views the creation story of Adam and Eve and their relationship to each other as a paragon of true intimacy. He uses Adam and Eve as a validating statement for his position on sexuality. However, he embellishes the story with his own idea of what is going on to add to his argument that sex is for intimacy. Therefore, he references the story of Adam and Eve while providing his own interpretation and embellishment of the story rather than quoting from the bible passage. Another pastor also utilizes biblical stories to argue that intimacy reflects back to God's intimacy with his son Jesus. For example, a pastor of a large church in Maryland states:

No, sex is not the summation of a marital relationship; it is only a part of that relationship. So sex is for unity; it's for pleasure. In Proverbs 5, it talks about enjoying the wife of youth [instead of going] out and drink[ing the] waters of a strange woman because that's like going out there and drinking from a sewer. So, why [are] you going to drink from the sewer? Go home; get some fresh water. The imagery is just so wonderful, you know. Sex helps to fulfill that role of intimacy, which reflects back to God. It helps to solidify that oneness because oneness is what marriage should be about.

This pastor, using a metaphor from the Bible of fresh water (a wife) and sewer water (a mistress), indicates that intimacy is one of the main purposes for sex in marriage. According to him, this intimacy is an intimacy that a person cannot have with anyone but their spouse because of the sexual relationship. However, this pastor also indicates another purpose for sexuality, which was mentioned by other conservative pastors as well as the liberal pastors: *sex is for pleasure*. In other words, as mentioned in the above quote, this conservative pastor argues that God gave humans something that was

pleasurable. However, he adds that to get the full pleasure, people must be married to “the wife of their youth.” Another pastor references God and states that

I think God made it for it to be pleasurable. It is a form and fleshing out of intimacy at such a level than at a different level than it would be if a person would just be talking. It’s a different level, it’s the ultimate level of intimacy between a man and woman in sexuality.

So he draws a connection between intimacy and pleasure. Another conservative pastor details just how God made sexuality pleasurable and why. He states:

God created everything with a dual aspect. A woman’s breast, why is it there? Because they have to nurse children, but the book of Proverbs, say may her breasts satisfy you all the days of your life. So, as a man, you know when you look at a woman’s breasts, there’s something pleasing there in looking at it. But, yet it has a natural function also. So there’s a duality in all of life. God created everything. You know a river is beautiful to look at, but we can also drink the water. So, [through] sex we procreate the race, but there’s also a physical enjoyment.

This pastor refers to God and utilizes the Bible in arguing that God created things for a dual purpose. So, for example, while sex is enjoyable and for pleasure, there is also a natural component like reproduction. He implies that something is natural when it serves a specific function to meet a physical need such as eating, but pleasure is not natural. This leads to a third purpose cited by a pastor of a large suburban church. He states that sex is for procreation:

So that we might reproduce and continue repopulating for the purpose of maintaining [for] what’s going to happen in the days ahead and maintaining the earth. I mean, God did put Adam and Eve there to take care of the garden. He did place man to be responsible for the creation, and that’s what he wants to continue to do is re-procreate so we can take care of the creation that God gave us.

Citing the “first family,” this pastor employs the Adam and Eve story to state that procreation allows us to repopulate the earth so that the human race will continue. Many

conservative pastors feel that the purpose of sex is procreation. However, for them it still connects to intimacy and the idea that sex is a gift for intimacy. Therefore, conservative pastors do not see the purposes of sex as mutually exclusive, nor do they hold that there are just one or two purposes. For example, a pastor in a suburban Philadelphia church states:

The purpose of sex is multifaceted. There's the obvious purpose of sex for procreation. Apart from sex, you don't have babies. The Bible says: "be fruitful and multiply, subdue and fill the earth." So there's that purpose of sex where it's the way that God works to bring forth children. But, sex is not simply mechanical. The way that the Bible describes the sexual relationship between a man and a woman, particularly in the Old Testament, it uses the word that we translate in the English, knowing. You know, this man laid with his wife, and he knew her. So, sexual expression in the context of marriage is a wonderful intimate gift that God has given a man and a woman.

As mentioned before, the conservative pastors validate their views of the purposes of sex by utilizing the Bible and taking what they believe is a literal view of the Bible as well as speaking as if they are the spokespeople for God. For example, while the above pastor quotes the scripture, he gives the interpretation that "be fruitful and multiply" only refers to having children. In addition, he makes the statement, "It's the way that God works to bring forth children" again, not only implying that he seems to be a spokesperson for God but that sex is functional; sex was given to create children. However, this pastor does argue, like a liberal Protestant pastor interviewed, that sexual expression is a divine gift from God for intimacy and not just an act that is done. One pastor sums it all up by stating:

I think [of] probably three or four [purposes] that are outlined in the scriptures. One of the purposes of sex is obviously procreation. Another one is the unity factor between the husband and the wife, and I've just

quoted from Genesis 2:24, “for this reason a man will leave his father and mother, cleave to his wife and the two become one flesh.” There’s a kind of a unity factor of their becoming one flesh. That does speak of the physical union, but it also speaks of a spiritual union; even emotionally, intellectually, there’s a union, [of] two becoming one. There is also the fact that sex was intended for pleasure, too. A lot of Victorian age thinking would say that the only purpose [of sex] was procreation, [that] it was dirty. We don’t teach that sex is dirty at all. We teach that sex is something that God gives, and when used properly, it’s intended for pleasure. It says in Hebrews 13, “marriage is honorable, and the bed undefiled.” Sex is a good thing. It’s pleasurable; it’s enjoyable. So the purposes of sex I think [are that it’s] procreation, it’s a unity factor, and it’s also for pleasure.

Interestingly, these pastors do not even mention other forms of sexual experience outside of marriage. Everything about sex should be inside of the marriage, according to these pastors. As expected, there appear to be differing views of sexual morality between liberal and conservative Protestant pastors . While liberal pastors’ views vary even amongst themselves in terms of different themes and arguments that are based in current social norms, the conservative pastors argue that their views are strictly from the Bible, which they view as providing what God has to say about sexuality. The conservative pastors, as implied by their answers, view themselves as being spokespeople for God. Many continue to base their approach on what they believe the Bible, or God, have to say about all forms of sexuality and argue that because the Bible, or God, states it, it is enough validation for them. For example, a pastor of a church outside of Philadelphia indicates that when it comes to sexual morality, the Bible has a lot to say and show about it. He states:

In 1 Thessalonians 4:3, it says, “It is God’s will that you should be sanctified,” which means basically holy living or righteous living, “that you should avoid sexual immorality.” Now that word for sexual immorality in the Greek language is the word pornea. The word pornea, is

a catch all word for any sexual sin, which would include sex outside of the bonds of marriage, before marriage, or adultery; or any type of sexual sin, that's what pornea is, and it says that it's God's will that you should be sanctified that you should avoid sexual immorality. That each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and is honorable not in passionate lust like the heathen who do not know God.

The Bible, it seems, is the main source of evidence that conservative pastors use to inform people about issues of sexuality. They believe the themes that were discussed in this section are strictly biblical. However, it is difficult to know exactly if what a minister says is in the Bible, without quoting a scripture, is actually in the Bible. In addition, they may be selecting only passages that support their position. They also never address perceived contradictions in the Bible that may problematize their arguments. Unlike liberal Protestant pastors, conservative pastors rarely speak directly about changing notions of sexual morality in American culture, except when condemning those changes, or arguing that they circumvent their own reading of the Bible.

Nonmarital Sexuality

Liberal Protestant Pastors

In discussing nonmarital sexuality, liberal pastors exhibit a wide range in views. While some of the pastors may argue that sex is acceptable for two consenting but unmarried adults, others believe that there should be a marriage or at least a deeper commitment before sex. For example, a Suburban Philadelphia pastor states in regards to nonmarital sexuality

I don't think it's a great idea. I think that sexuality is such a powerful force, and it has tremendous power for enjoyment and fulfillment and that same power also can lead to hurt or destruction and pain. So I think that sexuality really needs a container of sorts . . . where it can exist, and I

think a committed relationship is the best place for that. [A] committed relationship is to get married. I can tell you a story that my daughter when she was eleven or twelve loved to watch the show *Friends* with us, and when she put it on, a couple was jumping in and out of the bed with each other. My daughter's there while we're watching this, and I said to her and my wife also thought [that] we needed to have a family discussion. She said before we started [the family discussion], "I just want you to be aware that I affirm your values. And to me those values are: [I] know that couples have sex outside of marriage, [but] I don't think it's a great idea." I think it's destructive, but it also happens. And, because it happens, I've become a realist about things, and I'm not a crusader by any means to try and stop sexuality from occurring. It does happen. I think we need to be real about that.

This pastor argues that he is against nonmarital sexuality; however, he does not talk publicly against it because he knows that it does happen. He prefers that people would be in a committed relationship. However, he also states that he is realistic and knows that this will and does happen, and with that realization, he argues that discussion should be more geared to talking about how powerful sex can be, that it can be pleasurable and can also cause emotional pain. Therefore, this pastor employs a "being realistic" position. By looking at society, he is aware that nonmarital sex is happening, and he argues that instead of trying to stop it, people should be aware of and acknowledge it. This point is further discussed by a pastor of a different suburban Philadelphia church.

I think that's a little tricky because it depends on who we're talking about. Junior high kids, definitely not. Senior highs, I have problems with it because I think that sexuality is such a complicated intricate part of who we are. They're still really finding out who they are. Their brains are still developing in terms of making good judgments and figuring out what love truly is and how they want to be treated and how they want to treat other people. I really wish that kids in high school will be celibate, but I know that's not the case. I just think environmentally in a highly sexualized society; I don't think it's a good thing. When you get older, that's not so simple. I don't think a simple yes or no about whether to be sexually active or not is appropriate; it's a lot more complicated.

This pastor, in answering this question, includes age as a significant indicator of sexual responsibility, and therefore thinks the appropriateness of sex outside of marriage should be judged based on the age and maturity level of the individual. In addition, this pastor continues to argue within the persistent theme of “being realistic” by arguing that she is aware that nonmarital sex happens because we live in a hypersexual society. This idea of *being realistic about the existence of nonmarital sex* in our culture is continued by another pastor of a Philadelphia church when she states:

Yeah, I think it depends. Yeah, even at the college level because I’m realistic, and actually my opinions have changed you know. Thirty years ago I would have said even college age kids should wait, but I think what’s hard is that people bring so much to the relationship. They bring their whole family history; they bring how they’ve been treated by their parents. So, I just do not rank [nonmarital sex] as simply it’s either okay or it’s not okay. I know that most college students are sexually active, and yet it seems to me that just adds another layer of complication. And you got this whole academic world out there.

A number of liberal pastors seem to struggle in answering the question because of the variation in lifestyles of the people who live in American society, specifically when it comes to the age of the participants and their own desires to respond to the realism of what goes on sexually within society. However, one pastor actually cites the Bible and discusses the differences between marriage during biblical times and marriage today to consider nonmarital sexuality when she states:

Our understanding of marriage has evolved over the centuries. We think two people who are married are two people that had a wedding ceremony—white gown, attendants, clergy person there, or a marriage license. That is a modern day construct. Marriage initially was something that was more of a state. If you go back into the Bible, like the Old Testament for example, it says Solomon took so-and-so to be his wife. Well, first of all, he had about a zillion wives. So, biblical marriage does not conform with modern day sensibilities about marriage. Secondly, what

it meant for Solomon to take a woman as his wife—it meant he took her sexually. He didn't go to the temple and get a blessing. So our understanding of what marriage is has become codified in modern times in a way that it never was. So I think the fundamental again is that it be a loving relationship and a committed relationship.

This pastor focuses on the argument that “biblical marriage does not conform with modern day sensibilities about marriage.” In other words, if one compares marriage now to the way marriage was during biblical times, there are drastic differences. This pastor implies that the Bible is invalid in this area and is unable to address the current norms of nonmarital sexuality. She states the fact that in the Old Testament, biblical characters often practiced polygamy and bride snatching, which is radically different from the state of marriage in the U.S. today, and therefore, Bible passages may not offer the best definition of marriage.

Conservative Protestant Pastors

While liberal Protestant pastors focus on how sex *is* done within our culture, conservative Pastors focus more on their view of how sex *should be* done. From a conservative Protestant standpoint, it is evident and clear from the interviews that all of the conservative Protestant pastors are against nonmarital sexuality. They offer differing reasons, however, for their position. For example, some argue that nonmarital sexuality is not good because it is *conforming to the sexual environment* of this society, due to vast sexual temptation. For example, a pastor who has a large church in a suburb of Pennsylvania argues:

First of all, it's a battle within the mind. The Bible is very clear, “Be not conformed to this world but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Rom 12:1-2). With all the temptation, the availability and the

accessibility of all the different attractions—if one doesn't keep their thoughts clean and pure and on the right thing and on the right person they're to be with in life, I think it creates a great deal of havoc and temptation. It causes adultery and fornication. Premarital sex creates serious trust issues. When we do counsel with couples, it's not uncommon for them to go back to the beginning and realize that they were too close before they got married and when they got married, it actually develops serious trust and forgiveness issues over themselves and towards the other person that they feel may have pressured them to go into that lifestyle. It spoils the first night when two people get married and want to enjoy each other. I think overall it breaks down an understanding of the value and beauty of sex.

This pastor utilizes scripture and applies his interpretation of it to what he believes is the current situation in society. By making this connection, he implies that nonmarital sex is a result of this societal focus on sexuality, which can be a huge influence on the minds of people and how they think about sex. In addition, he uses his personal experience in counseling to argue that two things occur from nonmarital sex: trust issues once married, and the breakdown of the value and beauty of sex, which, according to this pastor, can only be experienced in the confines of marriage. From this perspective, he believes that there is social pressure toward nonmarital sexuality that must be resisted. Another reason that is given by conservative pastors against nonmarital sex is that it goes against "God's design." According to the previous pastor, there is a battle between what God designed for sexuality and how this society views sexuality. Other pastors also focus on how God designed sex versus how we "do sex" in America. For example, another pastor states:

The bible presents marriage as an opportunity for a lifelong commitment and an opportunity for sacrifice. God designed [marriage] to be the most single, pleasurable experience in human existence. Premarital sex says, "I want all of the joy and none of the commitment. I'm going to take from you, but I'm not going to give you my life." So . . . in the history of America . . . promiscuity has grown and recreational dating has come into vogue. [When keeping sex within the confines of marriage] the family's

preserved, the children are preserved, and ultimately there's treasure in heaven for those people. But that's not what a promiscuous lifestyle promotes. So God in his Word says that fornication, sex before marriage is evil [and] it is wrong. It can't deliver the very thing the Bible and God had designed marriage for: lifelong enjoyment in this wonderful haven.

In referring to God, this pastor focuses on God's design for sexuality, regardless of what is actually occurring in society. He argues that sex according to God's design is supposed to be limited to the confines of a marriage because he believes that that is where it would be most beneficial for all who are involved. Again, while in this previous quote a scripture passage may not have been used, this pastor's reference to God's "word" implies that he believes that what he says is from the Bible. A Philadelphia pastor continues with this view of the Bible as the ultimate authority and nonmarital sex as sin, and he also provides an interpretation of God's design of sexuality. He says:

Again, the Bible is what I believe. It has to be my guide, my source, and my reference. It was God's design that a male and female under the auspices of marriage would participate in the sexual act. And if one does [have sex before marriage] and they do—I have before I became a Christian—the Bible calls it fornication, immorality, and, therefore, it is forbidden. It's not God's original plan to be carried out that way because [of] the level of intimacy and the fusion of the souls that take place. If you [have sex] with five or six different people, you are fusing five or six different personalities and souls with your soul. That causes a confusion [of] what love is and you are not able to discern which one is the one that [you] ought to be with for the rest of your life. [Sex is] like a fire. A fire's good in a fireplace, fire is good on the stove, but when it gets out of its context it could burn up the whole house. The same thing, I think sex is good in the marital bed. The Bible says, "Marriage is honorable and the marriage bed undefiled," but when it gets out of its context it begins to consume things and just messes us up as human beings. And i.e., goes level of morality and i.e. goes venereal diseases, i.e. you know those major ones like AIDS and all that kind of stuff.

Mentioning God and his own personal experience, this pastor believes that nonmarital sex goes against the "biblical blueprint" or "God's design" for sexuality. From this

vantage point, he states that sex before or without marriage is both forbidden and immoral because it is not part of what he interprets as God's design. He then adds several points to his argument that identify what happens when people go against God's design. First, he says that a person who is promiscuous will fuse themselves to many souls and that that will end in confusion and disruption if that person gets married. Unlike other pastors I interviewed, he reveals that he participated in nonmarital sex.¹⁰⁵ However, this nonmarital sex occurred before he became a Christian, which can imply he believes that being a Christian or becoming a Christian can help to defuse those bonds or purify one's past, even though the effects may remain. He uses a metaphor of sex as fire and argues that sex in marriage will allow the "fire to stay on the stove." Second, he states that nonmarital sex will always be in the mind and may affect the marital relationship as a result. Lastly, he connects biblical proscriptions of nonmarital sexuality to natural occurrences. For example, he states that nonmarital sex is correlated to the lowering of sexual morality, which is correlated to venereal diseases and sexually transmitted diseases. It can be assumed from his argument that he believes that without nonmarital sexuality, there would not be the high prevalence of what he sees as sexual immorality and sexually transmitted diseases. Here he is using more of a scientific argument against nonmarital sex than a biblical argument.

A pastor of a large church in the suburbs of Philadelphia argues that sex outside of marriage is wrong based on his understanding of the Bible. However, he provides an

¹⁰⁵ There were no similar revelations in the Protestant books that were used in an earlier part of this study. The authors did not reveal any past behavior that they would consider a "sin" or inappropriate for Protestants.

argument that none of the other pastors make as to why there is nonmarital sexuality amongst teenagers. He states:

[Nonmarital sexuality is a] massive problem. I think premarital sex is a problem today because we elongated adulthood. In biblical days, [by age] 13, 15 you're a man; you're married. Today we stretch that to almost thirty, we created a teenager, which never existed. Marriages were arranged in biblical days, [which] made it somewhat easier. I think Mary and Joseph are a great example; that Mary was pregnant and Joseph had self-control all that time for nine months. The scripture that says that two shall become one, that's true, even in the sense of two people sleeping together. They form an unnatural bond. The scripture says every time you have sexual relations you give a piece of yourself away, and God wants that saved for the person you're going to live the rest of your life with. God's looking for your protection because now you have unwanted pregnancies; you have people who were never meant for each other. You have people that marry people, but they have all these memories of the past. So, again it's not God taking away your fun; it's God saying, you know what, this is what's best for you. Just look in the world we're in; it certainly has not worked out for the better.

In his argument about God's design for sexuality, this pastor differs from other pastors because he correlates the prevalence of teenage nonmarital sexuality to the extended adolescence that is typical in American society and the creation of the category of "teenager." He argues that as people wait until they are close to thirty to be married, they are less likely to postpone sex until marriage. Sex within the confines of marriage in the biblical days, according to this pastor, was easier to achieve because people were married at age thirteen or fifteen.¹⁰⁶ Therefore, when the God-given urge for sexuality was evident, people were already married or very soon to be married. However, this pastor still insists that, as the Bible says, people must wait until they are married for sex. If they do not, he argues, every time a sexual experience occurs, it's like giving "a piece of

¹⁰⁶ "Biblical days" is a bit of a vague time period. The term could either refer to the time period in which the Bible was written, which would span over 1500 years, or it can refer to the time period in which it is argued that particular stories and incidences took place.

yourself away.” According to this pastor, waiting until marriage is not God’s way to prohibit a person from fun, but rather, God’s way to protect human beings from having unwanted relationships, unwanted children, and as the previous pastor argued, from having memories of past experiences that may affect the marriage.

In looking at all of the interviews, it is evident that the conservative Protestant pastors all argue that the Bible and God are against nonmarital sexuality. They articulate a variety of reasons for this. The validating statements that are given to justify their arguments were based on biblical interpretation as well as scientific. First, they argue that nonmarital sexuality is deemed a sin in the Bible. Based on their interpretation of certain passages, they argue that God does not want people to be sexually involved outside of marriage. Second, they argue that nonmarital sexuality goes against the design that God has for sexuality. Often, the conservative Protestants utilize the Adam and Eve story as a validating statement for their arguments that God originally designed sex for a heterosexual marriage. Third, they construct a scientific argument, saying that nonmarital sex takes us outside the bounds of protection from unwanted pregnancies, people, and diseases. Often, some of the conservative Protestants argue that nonmarital sex is wrong because of what they interpret as God’s word, but then state that there are also natural consequences as a result. Lastly, they add that nonmarital sex may hinder a person’s future marital relationship by allowing for thoughts of previous experiences or current consequences to interfere with the marriage. Again, this point is argued to be a consequence of going against God’s design or will. By using both the “spiritual” and the “natural” to argue why nonmarital sex is wrong, they attempt to proclaim or imply a

relationship between what they perceive as disobedience to God's will and the consequences of such disobedience (i.e., AIDS, social problems, etc).

All of the conservative and liberal pastors agree that the reason why nonmarital sex occurs so much is due to influences of the society in which we live. According to these pastors, we live in a society that allows for and creates an environment of sex. It is hard for some people to go against this influence. While the conservative pastors, like the liberal pastors, realistically see nonmarital sex as a common occurrence, they argue that it is a problem in our society that goes against God's design, whereas the liberal pastors see it as a part of our cultural evolution. One area where liberal and conservative Protestant pastors do agree, however, is the issue of extramarital sex.

Extramarital Sexuality

Liberal Protestant Pastors

Liberal Protestant pastors' arguments on this subject are very similar to conservative pastors' arguments in that both groups are strongly against extramarital affairs. Reasons that are given for this are that extramarital sex represents the breaking of a commitment, the separating of a family, and can have a negative impact on children. Liberal pastors, however, do not utilize biblical prescriptions to argue why they are against extramarital affairs, but discuss more of the social and personal ramifications of such actions. However, with these similarities in mind, liberal pastors raise several issues that are different from the types of issues that the conservative pastors raise, such as the idea that an extramarital affair may be acceptable if it is a mutual decision. For example, one liberal Protestant pastor argues:

I think they're devastating to people. I think that, unless people got into it with a casual attitude towards sex to begin with, I think a lot of it depends on what your attitude is towards sexuality in the first place, but I think that if you're in a committed relationship, and someone breaks that commitment without that being a mutual decision and goes off and has an affair, I think that that's very difficult.

So, here extramarital sexuality is a question of mutual decision and trust. This pastor implies that extramarital affairs may be allowable if agreed upon by both spouses.

However, another pastor extends this idea and raises other questions about where extramarital sex may be allowed. She states:

It's never okay if things are happening behind the back of another. [However] this brings to mind someone. The wife was in a horrific car accident and became essentially a vegetable and is now in an institution for the rest of her life. What would you do in a situation like that? Does her husband need to divorce her in order to have a life? If he divorces her, what does that mean for her care? Would that affect her care in this institution? If he needs to maintain that marriage relationship with her so that she gets the care that she needs, does that mean that he can never again have an intimate relationship with another woman? It may be that there are instances where that kind of intimate sexual relationship would be appropriate outside the covenant of marriage.

This pastor views the realities of life as taking precedence over the "covenant" of marriage and raises the question of what should be done in instances in which the spouse is no longer responsive. She implies that there may be some valid reasons for extramarital affairs, beyond the idea of betrayal. In other words, in certain situations, there may be times where extramarital affairs are necessary. Overall, however, liberal Protestants tended to view extramarital affairs as a betrayal of the commitment to the marriage union.

Another liberal pastor sums this point up by arguing,

Chances are when those two people entered into the covenant of marriage, they did so with the understanding that it would be a monogamous relationship. Chances are they both had that assumption. So, that basic

tenant of their relationship has been violated, and there would probably be a sense of betrayal. And to me, extramarital affairs are probably less about the sex, as injurious as it is, [than] about the betrayal. Certainly, because sex is such an intimate act, to have that kind of betrayal is very hurtful to the spouse.¹⁰⁷

Conservative Protestant Pastors

When it comes to extramarital sex, all of the conservative pastors speak against it. Conservative pastors do not bring up any circumstances where it might be acceptable. Among conservative pastors, again, the main reason why they are against extramarital sexuality is because they argue that it is prohibited in the Bible, but they stress also that they are against it because of the damage that it can do to a family unit and the individuals involved. In addition, some of the conservative pastors present gendered arguments as well as some gender stereotypes when discussing extramarital affairs. One pastor argues that adultery or extramarital sexuality can go beyond the physical but could also include addiction to pornography. The results of this extramarital sexuality, according to him, are devastating. He states:

We even believe that pornography is adultery. If a man or a woman is looking at something on the internet, and they use that to stimulate themselves to go have sex with their spouse, then really their spouse wasn't the stimulus. Somebody else was. Jesus said when a man thinketh of a woman lustfully in his heart, he's committed adultery, when he thinks of a woman lustfully or looks at a woman lustfully. Now you are having this activity going on in your heart and in your mind, and you're carrying out the scene in your mind with this other woman: that is a form of adultery. That would be adultery, because you're being pulled away from the proper thing. So that opens the door with adultery and trust factors.

¹⁰⁷ Coincidentally, when this pastor was interviewed, she revealed that she just went through a bitter divorce in which her husband was engaging in extramarital affairs and, as a result, felt that she was able to discuss from first-hand experience the feelings that occurred within her as a result of feeling betrayed.

Interestingly, to this pastor, anything that takes a person's mind away from their spouse sexually, and instead introduces another into the mind sexually is also a form of extramarital sex. In order to argue this point, he references something that Jesus said about feeling lust being the same as performing adultery.¹⁰⁸ In addition, he focuses on the problems that can occur as a result, such as breaking the bond with the spouse, losing energy for the spouse, having a lack of trust, and the tearing apart of a marriage. The argument that extramarital sex can even take place in the mind is echoed by a suburban pastor who states:

I would be against that. You go back to the Bible, the Bible teaches that sex is between a husband and a wife. Sex outside of marriage would be adultery, which goes back to being one of the original Ten Commandments, which were under the law. Or some people would say that's the Old Testament; it's not in the New Testament because in the New Testament Jesus said the law is not here anymore that now there's grace. Well to that I'd say that anything law did, grace takes farther because the law said to have sex outside of marriage is adultery. Jesus quoted that but he took it a step further, and he said "But I say if you look at another woman that's not your wife in a way as to want to have sex with her in your mind, then that's adultery." Like the Old Testament says you shouldn't kill, Jesus said that if you have hatred in your heart, you're guilty of sin. So I would be totally against it.

Unlike liberal pastors, both of these pastors argue that since Jesus said to look at a woman as if to have sex with her is adultery, then extramarital sexuality transcends physical actions. According to these conservative pastors, extramarital affairs come with more problems than benefits. They say that extramarital affairs disrupt the covenant of marriage and disregard a sacred promise that was made from one spouse to another. So, as a result, a spouse may become unable to trust their mate as they may have previously.

¹⁰⁸ This pastor is referencing and translating a passage from Matthew 5:28.

When it comes to gender, when responding to the question of who is more likely to cheat in a marriage, most pastors say men; however, they also argue that there is a growing percentage of women who cheat, and some state simply that it is hard to tell during this current era. In addition, various reasons were given as to why one gender “cheats” versus another. For example, a pastor of a Philadelphia church replies to the question of who is more likely to cheat as follows,

Both, I've seen both in my situation. I can't say it's been a majority of men and little women, not these days. I find it to be almost fifty/fifty, equal. If not sixty/forty, and that can swing either way. But women tend not to be the one that's aggressive about it when it takes place. I think they get stonewalled. I think men are a little more susceptible to some things because of the side of the brain he thinks on, his whole anatomy, his makeup, the drives that God has placed in him to do certain things and to be certain things so I cannot say that there are more men or women today. Maybe ten years ago I could say the scale's tipping a little bit, but this new millennium woman is something else. She is a piece of work. She's major and she will—as the kids say—she'll creep, too, just like I've seen men creep.

This pastor combines his view of biology with his perception of how God has designed men. Therefore, he implies that biological difference contributes to one's predisposition for affairs. In addition, he invokes a new conceptualization of womanhood by arguing that there is a “new millennium woman.” When further asked, “Why do you think that's the case, that there's such a change in women?” he states:

I think there's an alteration, and this might not be politically correct, but I think it's biblically correct. I think it's an alteration in the needs or in the roles of the relationship between men and women. I think they've changed, they've altered, and I think in some instances it's backwards or reversed; and I think that's one of the causes of this thing happening, adultery and all that kind of that stuff. Because a lot of women today are very aggressive and very determined, they are going to do what they do, but when it's at the expense of the relationship, that's the problem.

This pastor demonstrates the salience of gendered beliefs amongst some conservative pastors. He draws a connection between the elevated number of women who cheat on their husbands to the “reversing” of gender roles. This argument assumes that there are distinct and appropriate gender roles for women and men. He also believes that women are more aggressive than they used to be and are taking on what he sees as traditional male roles, which come with “traditional male faults.” This implies that cheating is a traditional male fault but women are now more likely to cheat as they move toward what he calls a “male’s role.” This point is also argued by another pastor of a Suburban church who states:

It seems to me that it’s coming closer to being [that] you could go either way. Both gender sides are involved in [extramarital affairs] now and I think a lot of that has to do with the media and the changes. It use[d] to be that men were almost always initiators and aggressors, and I can’t pretend to know what reality is because reality isn’t on TV and the movies and things but if it were? I mean, just look at *Desperate Housewives* and some of these things. If that’s even close to real, then we’ve seen a closing of that gap between the two genders in that regard. In my own personal experience, which is limited, I find that it is still truer that the guys are more inclined, but I don’t think it was the same as twenty years ago. I think it’s changing.

Again gender is pervasive and evident in conservative discourse of extramarital sexuality.

This pastor argues that it is not necessarily a role reversal, but we are seeing women being encouraged by the media to be sexually aggressive and perhaps cheat. In other words, because the culture has made it seem acceptable by showing women who cheat in media representations, it has become more likely that women will also cheat. He feels that men are still more apt to cheat, but women are becoming more willing.

Several pastors hold that men are still the ones who are likely to cheat, and they provide various reasons. One such reason that men are more likely to cheat, according to a pastor of a rural Pennsylvania church, can be attributed to what he calls the “undressing of women.” He states:

I think in our culture, men stray away from marriage relationships more than women, and I think part of the reason for that is the undressing of the women in our culture. For instance, if you were to open up the Sunday paper, the women depicted in immodest lingerie would be the equivalent of about a 1950s centerfold. [This is] what we’re confronted with every single day in movies, which celebrate sex outside of marriage. Men are attracted visually in sexual relationship, women are more attracted emotionally. A woman is going to be most susceptible to engaging in an affair when her husband has abdicated his role to love his wife. Whereas the man is tempted more by what he sees. In Pollard’s book, *The Public Undressing of America*, he gives this illustration: how many women would go onto their front lawn in the middle of the year in a bra and a half slip. They would be completely embarrassed, and yet swimsuit manufacturers have so established that it’s perfectly normal to wear less than that parading in public on a beach. Well, what is that shame that they feel in their underwear? Well, it’s the same original shame that caused Adam and Eve to get clothed and if women are dressing modestly, [men] are more likely to be attracted to their wives who they see completely naked in the privacy of their own bedroom. In our culture where so many people are so poorly dressed [and] undressed, many men are distracted and fall to temptation.

So, several pastors frame the portrayal of women as sexual objects as a reason for the phenomenon of extramarital affairs. Also, women, according to this pastor, are to blame for dressing in provocative ways leading men astray. This pastor supports his argument using a book called *The Public Undressing of America*, which argues that women have been viewed in advertisements over time wearing fewer clothes, thus making it more acceptable for women in society in general to wear fewer clothes. This pastor invokes a highly dichotomized view of gendered sexuality when he argues that men are tempted by

what they see whereas women are tempted to cheat by what they feel. For instance, he would argue that if a man is not affectionate and does not give his wife attention, then she is more likely to have an extramarital affair with a man who is willing and able to fill that void. This argument assumes that what stimulates women and men sexually are completely different and mutually exclusive (i.e. emotional stimulus versus physical stimulus). Overall, it is pretty clear that the pastors believe that men are more likely to stray, but women are catching up to men in their likelihood of extramarital affairs. This then raises the question: if an extramarital affair occurs in the relationship, should there be forgiveness?

Forgiveness

When it comes to discussions of forgiveness, there is relatively little difference in arguments made and how the differing pastors validate their arguments. All of the pastors mention God, Jesus, or the Bible in discussing forgiveness, specifically forgiveness from God.¹⁰⁹ Both liberal and conservative Protestant pastors argue that God can forgive anyone and that family members should forgive, even though the aggrieved spouse can also divorce. All agree that God will forgive. For example, a female liberal pastor states that “there’s always forgiveness from God. Always, always. I mean if Christ on the cross can say ‘Father forgive them,’ then that’s what it’s all about; it’s all about forgiveness.” However, three liberal pastors stated that they would not push for reconciliation because it is between the offended spouse and their partner. A liberal pastor states:

¹⁰⁹ The pastors’ tendency to reference God, Jesus, or the Bible could be a result of the question asked in the interview—“Is there forgiveness from God for marital indiscretions?”

I do not seek reconciliation. A spouse should forgive, but being forgiven, that relationship is forever changed. It is no longer the relationship that it once was, ain't nothing you can do about it. Whether that marriage can survive an extramarital or indiscretion, well it's related to issues of trust and rebuilding the trust and how committed that couple is to rebuilding the trust. I do think that we are called to forgive one another. You are called to forgive those who hurt us to our core. Whether that saves the marriage or not, that all depends on them and the marriage itself.

This pastor does not seek reconciliation because he realizes the agency of the individuals in the relationship. In focusing on the individuals as well as the ostensible marital problems that occur as a result, like trust issues and marital commitment, this pastor is able to indicate his limitations in pushing for reconciliation in a marriage. Another liberal pastor argues along the same lines and states that she “thinks [the couple] should make that decision themselves. I don't think just and I know some pastors do that, you got to get them back together whatever cost, but I don't think so. It is the couple's decision.” Like the previous pastor, this pastor acknowledges that the onus falls on the individual couple to decide whether or not they want to continue the marriage. Getting the couple back together is not necessarily the pastor's responsibility.

Another liberal pastor, however, argues that a couple should stay together due to Jesus' view of marriage. What is interesting is how this pastor juxtaposes the social differences between the current time and “Jesus' day” as validation for his argument about divorce. This liberal Protestant pastor states that

Jesus' teaching on divorce is pretty strict, especially in the gospel of Mark, where he talked the most on this. Jesus said, “You can't do it.” It's pretty interesting later on in Matthew and Luke, he kind of loosens that tension there and allowed divorce if a women committed adultery. I think a couple things we need to be very realistic about is that the average age [life-expectancy] was mid-thirties in Jesus' day and the average age for us is seventy-eight. We try to keep these relationships together for a much,

much longer time. So I guess I would say that divorce is a failure; I think it is certainly evidence of our sinful condition and the fact that we have failed at something. I think God forgives and we all are called to forgive. It is up to the church to do everything that they can to support both those individuals and children if they have them regardless of their decision [to divorce].

In answering this question on forgiveness, this pastor argues that Jesus has ostensibly altered his views. At one point Jesus states that divorce is unacceptable, and at another point he says that divorce is allowed if a woman commits adultery. In answering this question, this pastor critiques writings about Jesus' view of divorce. However, he also allows that there may be a lot more pressure or difficulty on couples in modern times since people live longer than they did when the passage of the Bible that he references takes place. He then sees divorce as evidence of a "sinful condition" and "failure." Thus, he combines references to the Bible and Protestant jargon with social differences as to why divorce takes place. However, he is in agreement with all of the pastors when he states that God forgives and the couple should forgive as well.

Conservative pastors differ from liberal pastors when it comes to forgiveness because all of them state that they would seek the reconciliation of the married couple and the forgiveness of the spouse who was offended. For example, several pastors exemplify the response to seeking reconciliation and urging forgiveness so that the marriage will be healed and continued for similar reasons. Here are several examples of the answers given when conservative pastors were asked if they seek for reconciliation or divorce:

Yes, absolutely. One of the things we guarantee them is that it will be hard. There's a saying that someone said, "The devil shows us the pleasure for the moment but never the punishment down the road." And I assure

you there's a great deal of punishment down the road, and when that thing happens, it's far reaching. Especially when you go to the divorce court, it's just horrendous the things that happen after that. So yes, we always tell the person that's the victim, "It's going to take you a long time to trust." We tell the victimizer who's done this, "Please understand, they're going to have a hard time for a long time. You're ready to get on with life, they're ready to now deal with it because they just found out. So while you're ready to go, they're ready to stop, so you're not on the same plain for the first several months, you're rather combative in fact, going in and out with your emotions."

This pastor implies that the "devil" leads people to extramarital affairs more than people's own desires and, as a result, those who are in extramarital affairs may have no view of the consequences. However, conservative pastors indicate that there should be forgiveness from the spouse and reconciliation, even though it may take a long time to re-establish trust. According to this pastor, this path is much better than dealing with divorce court. Another conservative pastor states that he prefers to

always seek for reconciliation in a marriage. I don't even advocate separation unless there's an element of danger involved to one of the spouses. There are times where I just want to tell someone, "You know what, he is a real bozo, just leave him." But according to what the Bible teaches in regards to divorce, it is something that God hates; it is something that we should try to work out as best as we possibly can. I tell somebody if your houseboat is on fire, and you're standing here on the shore, are you going to have the same motivation to put that fire out as if you are on the boat when the fire is going on? Chances are you're not going to . . . but if you're on the boat and the fire's going on, you have all kind of incentives to put that fire out. I like to encourage people [by saying,] "If you're in a marriage and you understand that it's God's best for you to work that out, it's a whole lot more incentive for you to work that out when you're there sharing everything together than you going home to mom and there's this pseudo peace that now comes over you because there's no fighting going on and you've got freedom to do whatever you want to do." I like to encourage couples to do everything they can to work it out.

According to this pastor, since God hates divorce, a married couple should try to work out problems. Using the Bible as validation, he argues that staying in a marriage is advisable in all cases and invokes God as the reason for this as long as there is no sign of harm or danger to the spouses or the children. In addition to his invoking the Bible and God, he uses a “houseboat” metaphor to argue that a couple will work harder to save a marriage if they stick with it instead of being separated and trying to work on it. What is interesting about this response is the assumed gender of the one who committed adultery. In saying that he wants to tell people that “he is a real bozo,” he is indicating that in his view, generally men are the ones who commit adultery.

One conservative pastor had an interesting take on the argument even though he does push for reconciliation. He states:

I’m pro-marriage, so yes I do go in with the perspective that hopefully there can be [reconciliation]. Jesus said [when] the Pharisees had come to him and asked him a question, “Can a man divorce a woman for any cause?” Jesus’ response was “no, not for any cost.” That was the liberal view of marriage and what they thought about marriage. If she didn’t cook the eggs right, they can divorce. So, Jesus said, “Not for any cause but save the cause of fornication,” which is perpetual immorality on behalf of one of the spouses being unfaithful to another spouse. My argument is: Is there a possibility that the other spouse is not as innocent as he or she might think? They could be guilty for not doing some things that they should have done to ward off that need getting met [by someone else]. So, is it wrong? Yes. Does it take place? Yes. Do I seek for reconciliation? Yes. I seek to show that there’s no innocent party.

While this pastor, like the other conservative pastors, seeks reconciliation and forgiveness for the offended spouse, he also states that he tries to show the offended spouse that they may not be completely innocent. The offended spouse, according to this pastor, may have not been fulfilling the needs of the other spouse. While he argues that this point is not an

excuse for having an extramarital affair, this pastor indicates that it is just as important to clarify this unfulfillment as it is to identify and address the offense that has taken place. This implies that the other spouse is ultimately at fault. He or she did not meet the sexual needs of his or her spouse and caused the person to have an extramarital affair. So even though the first spouse was not the one who was involved in the extramarital sexual act itself, the actions or lack thereof on the first spouse's part precipitated the sexual affair.

When it comes to asking if God would be willing to forgive, these pastors unanimously say yes. One reason why God is willing to forgive is because extramarital sex could be considered a sin like any other. As a result, if one asks for forgiveness from God, they will be forgiven. For example, a liberal pastor in a suburb of Philadelphia states that

God can forgive any sin; in fact, he not only forgives, but the Old Testament says he chooses not to remember. "I will remember your iniquity no more, as far as the east is from the west, so far have I put your transgressions from you." One of the things I believe about Christianity is that it's God's record in pursuing us and the fact that he has provided a way for us to be reconnected to him, and he did that through his son Jesus who died on the cross for us and through his death. So yeah absolutely, you'll be forgiven.

Regardless of whether a pastor identified as liberal or conservative, all of those surveyed agreed that forgiveness is possible. This pastor indicates that because Jesus Christ died on the cross for all sin, if a person asks for forgiveness, Jesus is more than willing to forgive.

This point was echoed by another pastor who states:

Absolutely, I don't think there's anything unforgiveable accept the final rejection of Christ, and that's between somebody and God whenever that happens. In 1 John 1:9, it says, "If we confess our sins, he's faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." That word "all" is pretty significant. The matter of confession means just

agreeing with God that what I've done is wrong if we're willing to admit that we strayed from God's way. But I can't say it more firmly; everything's forgivable and that's one of the things we try to stress to young ladies who've had abortions, people involved in adultery or whatever it is.

This pastor utilizes the Bible, citing a specific verse, as validation to argue that if someone had an extramarital affair, it is counted as sin and a person would just have to "confess" their sins to receive forgiveness from God. However, even though all of the pastors agree that there is forgiveness from God, some pastors believe, as one pastor indicated, that God allows divorce after marital unfaithfulness. He states:

There can be forgiveness from God, but there are grounds for divorce too. Jesus said that divorce is wrong except for the case of fornication. Now, that fornication again defines itself as sex outside of marriage: adultery. But the word fornication also has another meaning to it. The word fornication it comes from the Greek word *pornea*, which is the word we get for pornography. So the idea of sexual fornication is the idea of sexual sin, period. So fornication is the door to all the other sexual sins, and that's why when Jesus said except for the case of fornication. In fact, one translation says except for the case of adultery, unrepentant adultery, or someone that won't repent. Now you could have somebody commit adultery and they'll repent, get forgiven and their spouse will accept them back. We do see that. But if that other person will not give up that practice, they purposely just choose to continue that lifestyle, then the other spouse does have a grounds for divorce, and, therefore, for remarriage.

According to this pastor, God will forgive if someone recognizes their sin and asks for forgiveness. However, if someone does not ask or is unwilling to stop having extramarital affairs, there should be a divorce. What's interesting is the point this pastor brings out about the Greek term *pornea* referring to all sexual sins. So therefore, any "sexual sin," which according to this pastor refers to not only extramarital affairs but incest,

homosexuality, and other sexual prohibitions argued to be listed in the Bible, are sins and should be repented of or can be grounds for divorce.

Overall Findings

This chapter details my research on what Protestant pastors have to say about sexual morality. From this section of the study, after analyzing the differences and similarities of Protestant pastors about sexual morality, four major findings of my research provide answers to my research question in this chapter.

Major Finding One

Liberal and conservative protestants claim that they are “being realistic” about nonmarital sexuality. However, they discuss this issue differently. A number of liberal pastors seem to struggle in answering the question because of the variation in the lifestyles of the people who live in American society and their desire to respond with realism to what goes on sexually within society. These liberal pastors argue that the age of the person has a lot to do with if someone should participate in nonmarital sex: those who are mature and older can, those who are younger (teenagers) should not. As a result, liberal pastors focus on how *sex is done* within our culture to try to make sense of it, while conservative pastors focus more on their view or biblical interpretation of how *sex should be done* and often argued that “God’s design for sex” is more necessary and beneficial than how sex is actually done in the United States.

Major Finding Two

While both liberal and conservative Protestant pastors are against extramarital sex, there were some differences. First, a few liberal pastors either state or imply that extramarital sex is only acceptable if a couple agreed or if there was a serious health issue which caused one spouse to be in a vegetative state. Also, in regards to conservative pastors, gendered beliefs guide their answers. For example, several conservative pastors argue that there is now a “role reversal,” where women are becoming like men and are more likely to stray sexually than in decades before. This position implies that conservative pastors believe that there are set gender roles which allow men to be more likely to stray than women.

Major Finding Three

All of the pastors state that there can be forgiveness from both God and from the aggrieved spouse. What is interesting is that a few conservative pastors argue that the offended spouse may have been at fault as well due to the lack of attention. The focus on “lack of attention” by these conservative pastors makes evident perceived gender differences since it is argued that the attention needed by women and men differ significantly. They argue that women need emotional support and men need physical support, and if either are lacking from the marriage, a spouse is likely to find it from someone else.

Major Finding Four

The question that arises out of this analysis is: Why do both liberal and conservative Protestants cite the Bible at certain times and not at other times? Liberal Protestant pastors often critique conservative interpretations of the Bible with their own interpretations. However, for the most part, they rarely use the Bible as a justification for their arguments. Conservative Protestants, on the other hand, reference or give an interpretation of the Bible as a primary form of validation. It can be assumed, based on their statements and the way they discussed issues of sexual morality, that many conservative Pastors feel that they speak for God or feel that everything they say is based on the Bible, even though they may not directly mention the Bible.

Limitations To Interview Results

There are some limitations to this research. Due to financial constraints, I was only able to interview in the limited area of the East Coast from New Jersey to Maryland. Therefore, I do not know whether these findings would be similar in other areas. I also was unable to talk to popular, well-known pastors who may have had large churches and television ministries. Additionally, I did not study televangelists who are able to reach millions of people with their message, which would have provided additional valuable insights concerning what Protestants are told about family values and sexual morality. Another limitation in this study is that while I was able to speak to women who were coded as liberal pastors, I was unable to obtain interviews with women who were or would have been considered conservative pastors. While I did try to get interviews with this population, it was to no avail. This may be due to the limited number of female

pastors who consider themselves conservative pastors and/or to the nature of the topic itself and the fact that I was a male interviewer. A final limitation to this study was the lack of African-American liberal pastors. During the time of this study, I was unable to find any to interview. I am certain that there are some who can qualify as liberal Protestants; however, the availability and ease in finding African-American conservative pastors could be attributed to what has been indicated in the literature that shows that African-Americans tend to be more religiously conservative than white Americans.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

The main goal of this dissertation was to understand what Protestant authors and pastors say about sexual morality and how they validate their beliefs and ideas. Both liberal and conservative Protestants validate their beliefs in various ways. The findings lend credence to the argument that conservative Protestants use a variety of methods—such as upbringing and experience, organizational dogma, and scientific beliefs—other than a simple interpretation of the Bible to justify their views of sexual morality. Even though conservative Protestants argue that they have a predilection for true biblical interpretation, many do not use solely their interpretation of biblical text to validate their arguments. At the same time, liberal Protestants at times use what one liberal pastor argues is “a more orthodox interpretation of the Bible,” to discuss issues of sexual morality such as homosexuality and same-sex marriage.

In discussing the theme of homosexuality versus other themes of the interviews, there are some major differences between liberals and conservatives. Most liberal spokespeople do not cite the Bible or Christian beliefs as much as conservative Protestants when talking about issues of sexual morality except when discussing homosexuality. They do use the Bible—or at least the historical context of the Biblical accounts—to defend homosexuality. On the other hand, the conservative pastors are more likely to refer to science and environment when discussing homosexuality than when discussing any other theme. It is likely that the differing Protestant spokespeople are

defending or validating their positions on homosexuality by utilizing what they believe their opponents would utilize or have utilized most in defending their positions.

My research presents some general conclusions from the data. First, many Protestant spokespeople's worldviews are formed by more than their personal religious beliefs, but through a variety of experiences which inform their religious ideologies. Their current views of sexual morality were molded internally by their upbringings, their social environments, and even their religious milieus. As a result, even though the adherers believe that they are following what they perceive as "unadulterated" biblical or Protestant "truth," they may be following another's tainted personal religious beliefs. Second, some of the arguments made by Protestants are influenced by cultural changes and constructions and have been presented as religious beliefs for so long that they have been coded and presented as such. For example, conservative spokespersons' beliefs about homosexuality may have been informed by newer translations of the Bible, which use the word "homosexuality." However, the conceptualization of homosexuality is much more recent than the original writings of the Bible.

Even though conservative Protestants argue that their interpretation is informed solely by the Bible, at times the conservative spokespeople refer to statistics or health information to further validate or even supplement their biblical arguments. On the other hand, many liberal Protestants argue that their interpretation is informed by a deeper analysis of the Bible, as they discuss the historical context of the Bible, use other sources, see the Bible as incomplete, and regard some passages about sexual morality to be inadequate in addressing today's culture. For example, in discussing homosexuality,

Myers and Scanzoni argue that “translators have muddied the waters in many cases, because the specific behaviors that were addressed in their cultural context don’t easily lend themselves to a succinct and descriptive rendering in modern English” (2005, 103).

Third, the positions taken by both liberal and conservative Protestant spokespeople are usually the same official position of the denomination or association to which they belong. Both liberal and conservative Protestant spokespeople were drawn to their particular denominations because of the denomination’s or organization’s tenets. This fact implies that their positions may have been formed prior to becoming a part of the particular Protestant designation, or that they might be influenced more by their religious subgroup than by biblical texts.

Fourth, spokespeople on both sides use the Bible to support ideology, not necessarily the other way around. For example, some liberal Protestant spokespersons argued that homosexuality is endorsed or shown in the Bible through an intensely amicable relationship between two men in the Old Testament, David and Jonathan, even though other scholars would argue that there is no clear indication that they had a homosexual relationship.

Finally, while many beliefs vary between liberal and conservative Protestants, what is evident is that the two groups are similar in how they attempt to validate their beliefs, by using whatever means are necessary (e.g., biblical, extrabiblical, and secular) to lend credence to their points of view. Many Protestants hear from people who validate beliefs and worldviews they already have and inform them of how to reconcile those beliefs and views to a society that is changing.

The content analyses and interviews show that when it comes to discussion of sexual morality both liberal and conservative Protestant spokespeople interpret biblical texts to make arguments. Liberal Protestants use the Bible as an authority in much the same way as conservatives; however, their biblical references rely on different interpretations than do those of conservatives. A good example of this tendency toward biblical citation was of liberal Protestant scholar Philo Thelos's book, *Divine Sex*, in which he used scripture to support almost every point that he made. In addition, the liberal Protestant spokespeople indicate that many conservatives are interpreting the Bible incorrectly or just basing their sexual proscriptions on church dogma. Still, however, conservative spokespeople use the Bible more frequently than their liberal counterparts and reference scriptures more often in their statements. The conservative pastors overwhelmingly used biblical texts to support many of their statements. In addition, conservative pastors differ from liberal pastors in their answers because they not only reference God, but implied in their answers was an understanding that they speak on his behalf. On the other hand, the liberal pastors were more likely to look to cultural norms in order to answer questions about sexual morality, rather than look to the Bible or church doctrine. In fact, liberal pastors argue that their interpretations are informed by an understanding of the sociohistorical contexts during biblical and current times. Therefore, they are much more likely to make arguments based on cultural standards rather than biblical proscriptions.

However, debates over sexual morality include more than what people are doing sexually, but also include, as this research has shown, discussions of family values,

gender, and perceptions of sexuality. Debates about sexuality are not just debates about sex but about the larger meanings we attach to social and cultural changes (i.e., the family). For example, focusing on sexuality clarifies how worldviews of sexuality inform beliefs about gender roles. Also, understanding those arguments is necessary to understanding the ongoing “culture wars” in the United States.¹¹⁰ Therefore, this dissertation has intended to help understand these arguments more fully. In addition, this research provides helpful information and key starting points for social scientists who wish to research these issues in the future.

Limitations, Considerations and Future Work

While I am satisfied with the research presented in this dissertation, there are areas of expansion. In future work, more time should be spent focusing in on the intricacies of racial differences in discussions of sexual morality and how race is a key determinant in the ways in which Protestants view sexual morality in the United States. Since studies have indicated numerous differences between white and black Protestants in multifaceted ways within Protestantism, it would be beneficial to see how the views of sexual morality differ. Already well-known differences amongst black and white Protestants would be good topics to explore whether these differences still exist and are significant. Therefore, more interviews with black ministers, especially liberal black ministers who are known to teach a social justice theology, would have provided fruitful

¹¹⁰ “Culture war” refers to the dilemma in contemporary society due to the coexistence of various, irreconcilable worldviews on issues of morality Berger (1967). For greater detail on this concept, refer to the literature review chapter of this dissertation.

information for this research. One could compare not only black and white pastors, in general, but also black liberals and conservatives.

Questions that should be addressed in future studies should focus on whether similarities exist between the stance held by black liberal Protestants and the stance held by black conservative Protestants on racial stigma and sexual morality, especially as many studies on this topic tend to be conservative. Also, future work could expand the discussion of forgiveness beyond extramarital sex and ask questions about forgiveness of a spouse who was homosexual, had multiple sex partners, and other various sexual indiscretions to see if there are differences in the arguments about how and when a spouse should forgive. Still, other research could focus on the specific upbringings of these various spokespeople to see if there are indicators that they are informed by their families or environments, thus causing them to follow their current paths and maintain the beliefs that they hold.

Development of a research project that could study and analyze how people are influenced by these messages would offer more insight, greater depth, and beneficial information in truly understanding how Protestants are influenced by these messages and in turn how they view sexual morality in the U.S. Overall, however, this research provides an understanding of the variety of Protestant voices and views of sexual morality as well as the differences and similarities between them. Knowing what Protestant spokespeople believe about issues of sexual morality and how they support their beliefs provides a greater understanding of social debates of sexual morality as well as the worldviews of multifaceted types of Protestants in the United States. Even more,

this research demonstrated the tenability of Hunter's claim that "the divisions of political consequence . . . are not theological and ecclesiastical in character but the result of differing worldviews . . . our most fundamental and cherished assumptions about how to order our lives . . . and ideas about who we are as Americans" (1991, 42).

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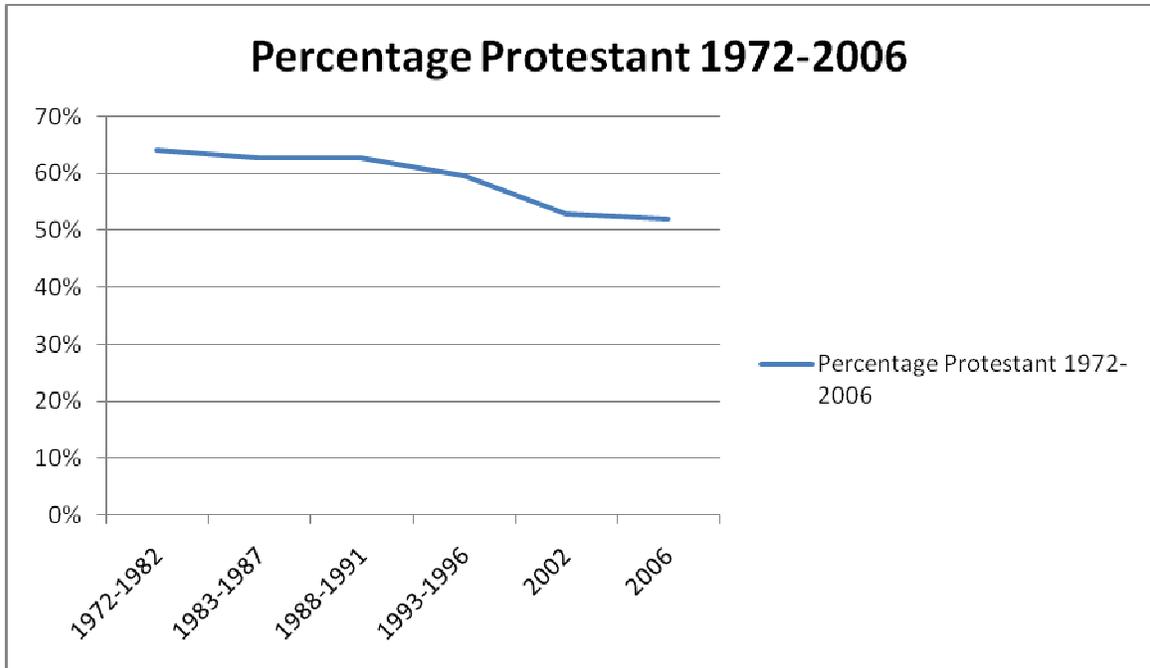
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APPENDIX A

PERCENTAGE OF US PROTESTANTS



General Social Survey, 1972–2006

APPENDIX B

CONTENT ANALYSIS BOOKS

Conservative Protestant Books

- Anderson, Kerby (editor). 2000. *Marriage, Family, and Sexuality: Probing The Headlines That Impact Your Family*. Kregel Publications
- Elliot, Elisabeth. 2002. *Passion and Purity: Learning to Bring Your Life Under Christ's Control*. Revell, Fleming H. Company
- Gagnon, Robert, A. J. 2002. *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*. Abingdon Press
- Gardner, Tim A. 2002. *Sacred Sex: A Spiritual Celebration of Oneness in Marriage*. WaterBrook Press
- LaHaye, Tim and LaHaye, Beverly. 1998. *The Act of Marriage*. Zondervan
- Lochner, Todd. 2004. *How Far is Too Far?: Where To Draw The Line On Premarital Sex and Physical Intimacy*. Brown Books Publishing Group
- McBurney, Louis and McBurney, Melissa. 2005. *Real Answers About Sex: The Complete Guide to Love as God Intended*. Zondervan Publishing
- Mouw, Richard. 1992. *Uncommon Decency: Christian Civility in an Uncivil World*. InterVarsity Press
- Nelson, Tommy. 1998. *The Book Of Romance*. Thomas Nelson Publishers
- Pembroke, Bobbie. 2004. *Sex is For Marriage: Sex is a Gift From God*. Author House
- Sumrall, Lester F. 2002. *60 Things God Said About Sex*. Whitaker House
- Torode, Sam and Torode, Bethany. 2002. *Open Embrace: A Protestant Couple Rethinks Contraception*. Eerdmans, William B. Publishing
- Wilson, P.B. 2002. *God Is In The Bedroom Too: The Pleasures of True Intimacy*. Harvest House Publishers
- Winner, Lauren. 2005. *Real Sex: The Naked Truth About Chastity*. Brazos Press.

Yandian, Bob. 1993. *One flesh: God's Gift to Passion: Love, Sex, and Romance in Marriage*. Creation House

Liberal Protestant Books

Comstock, Gary D. 2001. *A Whosoever Church: Welcoming Lesbians and Gay Men into African-American Congregations*. Westminster John Knox Press

Cutrer, William and Glahn, Sandra. 2002. *Sexual Intimacy in Marriage*. Kregel Publishing

Dillow, Linda and Pintus, Lorraine. 1999. *Intimate Issues: 21 Questions Christian Women Ask about Sex: Conversations Woman to Woman*. Random House, Inc.

Ferrebee, Louise A. (editor). 2001. *The Healthy Marriage Handbook*. Broadman & Holman Publishers

Gruber, Tom. 2001. *What the Bible Really Says about Sex*. Trafford Publishing

Leman, Kevin. 2001. *Sex Begins In The Kitchen: Because Love Is An All-Day Affair*. Fleming H. Revell Publishing

Martin, Dale B. 2006. *Sex and the Single Savior: Gender and Sexuality in Biblical Interpretation*. Westminster John Knox Press

Miner, Jeff and Connoley, John Tyler. 2002. *The Children Are Free: Reexamining the Biblical Evidence on Same-Sex Relationships*. Jesus Metropolitan Community Church Publishing

Myers, David G. and Scanzoni, Letha Dawson. 2005. *What God Has Joined Together? A Christian Case for Gay Marriage*. HarperSanFrancisco

Newman, Susan D. 2002. *Oh God!: A Black Woman's Guide to Sex and Spirituality*. Ballantine Books

Rauch, Jonathan. 2004. *Gay Marriage: Why is it Good for Gays, Good for Straights, and Good for America*. Times Books

Rogers, John. 2006. *Jesus, The Bible, and Homosexuality: Explore the Myths, Heal the Church*. Westminster John Knox Press

Rosenau, Douglas E. 2002. *A Celebration of Sex: A Guide to Enjoying God's Gift of*

- Sexual Intimacy*. Thomas Nelson Publishing
- Smedes, Lewis B. 2001. *Sex for Christians: The Limits and Liberties of Sexual Living*. Eerdmans, William B. Publishing Company
- Thelos, Philo. 2006. *Divine Sex: Liberating Sex From Religious Tradition*. Trafford Publishing
- Wheat, Ed and Wheat, Gaye. 2002. *Intended for Pleasure: Sex Technique and Sexual Fulfillment in Christian Marriages*. Fleming H. Company

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

*Before we begin this interview, I want to remind you, as it was written in my letter that this interview will be recorded and will last approximately 30 minutes to an hour. In addition, answers you give may be written in my dissertation and at a later time, published. Your name will not be used. If you agree to the terms of the interview please sign here.*_____

Self-Identification of Beliefs

1. Tell me about yourself, how did you get to be the pastor of this church?

Liberal or Conservative Christian? (Screening questions 2 thru 4)

2. As you may know, attempting to define Christianity is difficult due to the diverse number of Christian groups, how would you define Christianity?
3. What makes you different from others who may not hold your same beliefs and call themselves Christians?
4. If you had to choose one, would you consider yourself a liberal or a conservative Christian?
 - a. Why? What makes you consider yourself a liberal or conservative?
 - b. What makes you say you are not a liberal or conservative Protestant?

View of the Bible?

5. Tell me, how do you view the Bible and its role in people's lives?
 - a. Some people believe that the Bible is the literal word of God and others would say it is open to interpretation and all the stories are not based on facts. What do you think?

Movement?

6. What is the history of this church?
7. Where does your church fall amongst other Protestant churches?
 - a. What are the main tenets of the church?
8. What distinguishes your church from other churches in your area?

Sexual Morality Themes

As indicated in my letter to you, I am doing a study about the beliefs of Protestant Christians about sexual morality. The questions will cover different themes dealing

with sexuality. Please answer clearly what you believe and teach your congregation based on the belief, what is a sin, and if there is forgiveness as a result.

General Sexual Morality Questions

9. What do you think of when I say the word family?
 - a. What constitutes a family?
 - b. Why do you hold your view?

10. Do you have a variety of families in this church (e.g., single mothers)?
 - a. If so, how are they viewed in the church?

11. What does sexuality mean to you?
 - a. Who is able to experience it?
 - b. What do you believe is the purpose? Explain.

Nonmarital Sex

12. What are your feelings about people having sex outside of marriage?
 - a. Why do you hold your view?

13. Have there been any instances in which it became apparent that members of your congregation had engaged in nonmarital sex? If so, tell me how did you and/or the church deal with that situation? If not, what would you do in this situation?
 - a. Why did you proceed that way?

14. Do you think it is harder for men to restrain themselves sexually or not?
 - a. Do women tempt men? If so, how are men suppose to resist?

Extramarital Sex

15. Tell me about your views on extramarital affairs.
 - a. Why do you hold your view?

16. Have there been any instances in which it became apparent that members of your congregation had engaged in or experienced extramarital affairs? If so how did you and/or the church deal with the situation? If not, what would you do in this situation?
 - a. Why did you proceed that way? Did you consider other alternative courses of action?

17. In your experience, do men or women have a harder time being faithful to their spouse? Why do you think this is the case?

Homosexuality

18. Tell me about your views on homosexuality.
 - a. Same-sex marriages?

- b. Why do you hold your view?
19. Discuss any instances in which it became apparent that members of your church were homosexual. If not, what would you do in this situation?
- a. How were they treated? Or, how would they be treated?
 - b. Did it affect the church in any way? Or, how would it affect the church?

Marital Sexuality

20. There is some debate within Protestantism about what is deemed as sexually pure. Discuss what is a married couple allowed to do sexually in marriage?
21. Are there different roles that women and men should assume when it comes to sexuality?
- a. What are they for women?
 - b. What are they for men?
 - c. How do you come to your beliefs on this?

Specific Gender Questions (only asked if not addressed in more general questions)

22. What do you do in your church if you find that an unmarried girl or woman is having sex before marriage?
- a. What happens if the girl or woman becomes pregnant?
 - b. What is expected of her as a result of her actions?
23. What do you do in your church if you find that an unmarried boy or man is having sex before marriage?
- a. What happens if the boy or man makes a girl or woman pregnant?
 - b. What is expected of him as a result of his actions?
24. What do you do to a man in your church if he has had an extramarital affair?
- a. What actions should he take as a result?
 - b. What actions should his wife take as a result?
25. What do you do to a woman in your church if she has had an extramarital affair?
- a. What actions should she take as a result?
 - b. What actions should her husband take as a result?

Closing Question and Remarks

26. Do you ever teach on any of the themes that were discussed during this interview?
- a. Why or why not?
 - b. If so, can I come to your service the next time you teach on any of these topics?

APPENDIX D

METHODOLOGICAL ESSAY

Asking About Family Values and Sexual Morality as an African-American Christian Man

This essay will explore some of the intricacies that I had to think about and deal with in my role as an interviewer. This essay is informal and intended to demonstrate to the reader what I was thinking and to aptly conduct my own exploration of myself as a researcher. At the outset of my research, I realized that several things may affect the interviews. I was concerned how my race, gender, and own spirituality had to be dealt with and in a way minimized to mitigate the affects that it might have on the results.

My first interview was in a large Presbyterian church that was over 200 years old. As I walked in the side entrance, I noticed that there was what I considered a “wall of fame” where pictures of women and men were neatly hung side by side under wooden letters that spelled out “Church Leadership.” As I quickly glanced over the wall, I soon realized that while some of the people were prepossessing in their photographs, none necessarily had the same skin color as me. Additionally, many of them looked much older than me as well. As I continued down the hall, I had some consternation about what I had just gotten myself into. I thought, “How will the pastor of this church treat me?” Once I finally got to his office and knocked on the door, I had to remind him of who I was and what I was doing even though I had spoken to him not long before. He finally invited me into his office and I felt his aloofness immediately. As I started asking him questions, his answers were short and I sensed some reticence. However, once I started relaxing, I noticed that he relaxed as well. One thing I realized from this experience is

that, as the researcher, I have to be comfortable in various environments, or at least put up the façade, if I am going to be an effective interviewer. Ruminating over this first interview I realized that what I perceived to be the older white male interviewee's uneasiness with a young African-American man asking him about sexual morality may have had more to do with my own insecurities of being in such an environment.

There was only one other place that I felt that my race became a huge hindrance to the interview process. I requested an interview with a pastor of a church in a rural town of Pennsylvania through a formal letter in the mail. The pastor of this church contacted me by phone stating that he was very interested in being interviewed. I explained in detail what I was doing, what would be expected of the pastor in the interview, and when it would all take place. Later the same week, upon arriving at the location, I walked in and there was no reception area and no one greeted me even though several dozen people were around, and regardless of my smiles or attempts to make eye contact. Fortunately there was a sign on the wall that indicated the direction to the pastor's office. I walked to his office and knocked on the door. I received no answer. I waited at the office for approximately 20 minutes when I finally saw a middle-aged white male with a concerned look on his face walking towards me. As he got closer, I positioned myself to greet him warmly. Once I greeted him and he greeted me in a way that seemed a bit disingenuous, he told me to wait outside the office while he went in. After about five minutes, he came out of the office and had me follow him to a room which looked like a room for children owing to the pictures on the walls and the child-sized seats and tables. I was just about to begin with the first question when he interrupted me and said, "I'm no longer interested, I

don't want to do this." I asked him why and he just told me again, he was no longer interested. I didn't understand, but I left. I couldn't help but wonder whether the difference in response was due to actually seeing an African-American man instead of just speaking to a "raceless" man on the phone.

While I can't be certain, the experience made me realize that as an interviewer, regardless of how hard I try to minimize any ways of biasing or altering the data due to myself as the interviewer, my race may at times hinder how comfortable people are with me. As a result, I made an extra effort to try to be relaxed, genial, and extra friendly to the white pastors who I interviewed just in case they had some embedded anxieties or perceptions due to my race. I must mention that most of the respondents were very open, candid, and kind. I felt that they were receptive to me as I asked them questions.

In addition to race, I felt that my gender may have slightly hindered some of the conversations that I had, particularly with the female pastors. While I don't believe that it affected my results in a significant way, I did at times sense some hesitation in answers given by female pastors about sexuality and gender roles. I sometimes felt awkward asking the female pastors about sex; specifically questions about "what is sex" and my follow up questions to encourage them to explain their answers more fully. Regardless of being uncomfortable, I still asked the questions and the female pastors that I interviewed were very open in sharing with me their views and ideas.

The last issue I confronted as an interviewer—and something that immediately became apparent as I spoke to pastors—(primarily conservative pastors)—was the importance of my own spirituality. Quite often the pastors during some part of the

interview would ask me about my own religious beliefs or stated that they sensed that I was a “believer” to try to get me to talk about my own beliefs. I am a Christian, which is one reason why I am interested in studying Christians, but I knew that as an interviewer, I would bias the results if I went in sharing information about myself or details about my personal religious beliefs. There was often a tension between saying as little as possible so as not to bias the results, yet needing to maintain a comfort level with pastors. As a result, I only shared with them that I was a Christian if I was directly asked. I allowed them to make assumptions about my beliefs with out verifying or validating those assumptions. Additionally, I did not divulge any information that I felt would hinder the interview process.

While, some of the pastors wanted me to talk about my own personal convictions, I just reminded them that I was there to learn about their views first because their beliefs and values were most important for my research. Some of the pastors seemed uncomfortable talking to me until I divulged that I was a Christian. I do believe, however, that being able to honestly say that I am a Christian did not encumber the conversation but enlivened it, allowing the pastors to speak freely and comfortably.

In addition to what I’ve learned in graduate school about qualitative research, dealing “hands-on” with these issues as a researcher has taught me that researchers must be strategic in how they approach their subjects. Also, we must be circumspect interviewers, realizing that there are subtleties both internally and externally that can alter an interview if we allow it. Lastly, we must do what we can to make sure that we obtain data that is unbiased, even if it means divulging some information about yourself or being

overly genial to our interviewees. We must do what we can, within reason and ethical standards, to obtain high quality data.

