

Masculinity and Femininity

Supplement Contents

Masculinity and Femininity: Definition.....	2
The Meaning of Masculinity	2
The Meaning of Femininity.....	8
<i>Subversive Virginity</i> By Sarah E. Hinlicky.....	12
<i>Subversive Masculinity</i> By Sarah E. Hinlicky.....	15
Sexual Purity: What Sex Is and Perversions Of.....	18
The Colorado Statement on Biblical Sexual Morality	18
Thoughts on Sexuality & Temptation.....	19
The Five Stages of Pornography Addiction.....	19
The Subtle Dangers of Pornography	20
<i>Women and Sex Addiction</i> By Marnie C. Ferree.....	21
Pornography Statistics	23
- Sex and the Internet Statistics	
- Teens and Sex Statistics	
- Marriage and Family Statistics	
- Portrayals of Sex in the Media Statistics	
Sources and Websites	28

Masculinity and Femininity Definitions

[The Following Definitions are taken from *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood:-A Response to Evangelical Feminism*. Edited by John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Crossway Books, 1991)]

1. At the heart of mature Masculinity is a sense of benevolent responsibility to lead, provide for and protect women in ways appropriate to a man's differing relationships.
2. At the heart of mature Femininity is a freeing disposition to affirm, receive and nurture strength and leadership from worthy men in ways appropriate to a woman's differing relationships.

The Meaning of Masculinity

Here we take the definition of masculinity a phrase at a time and unfold its meaning and implications:

"AT THE HEART OF . . ."

This phrase signals that the definitions are not exhaustive. There is more to masculinity and femininity, but there is not less. We believe this is at the heart of what true manhood means, even if there is a mystery to our complementary existence that we will never exhaust.

"... MATURE MASCULINITY ..."

A man might say, "I am a man and I do not feel this sense of responsibility that you say makes me masculine." He may feel strong and sexually competent and forceful and rational. But we would say to him that if he does not feel this sense of benevolent responsibility toward women to lead, provide and protect, his masculinity is immature. It is incomplete and perhaps distorted.

"Mature" means that a man's sense of responsibility is in the process of growing out of its sinful distortions and limitations, and finding its true nature as a form of love, not a form of self-assertion.

"... A SENSE OF ..."

I use the word "sense" because to be masculine a man must not only be responsible, but sense or feel that he is. If he does not "sense" or "feel" and "affirm" his responsibility, he is not mature in his masculinity.

The word "sense" also implies the fact that a man can be mature in his masculinity when his circumstances do not put him in any relationship where he actually has the possibility to relate to any woman. He may be in combat or out to sea away from women. He may be in prison. He may have a job on an oil rig in the North Atlantic. He may be a monk. Or his style of life may simply make interaction with women very limited.

A man can be properly masculine in those circumstances if he has the sense of benevolent responsibility to lead, provide for and protect women. This sense need not be actualized directly in order to qualify for mature masculinity. For example, his "sense" of responsibility will affect how he talks about women and the way he relates to pornography and the kind of concern he shows for the marriages of the men around him.

The word "sense" also implies that a man may not be physically able to provide for or protect his family and yet be mature in his masculinity. He may be paralyzed. He may have a disabling disease. His wife may be the main breadwinner in such a circumstance. And she may be the one who must get up at night to investigate a frightening noise in the house. This is not easy for the man. But if he still has a sense of his own benevolent responsibility under God he will not lose his masculinity.

His sense of responsibility will find expression in the ways he conquers self-pity, and gives moral and spiritual *leadership* for his family, and takes the initiative to *provide* them with the bread of life, and *protect* them from the greatest enemies of all, Satan and sin.

Someone might ask: So is a woman masculine if she is a single parent and provides these same things for her children? Are these only for men to do? I would answer: A woman is not unduly masculine in performing these things for her children if she has the sense that this would be properly done by her husband if she had one, and if she performs them with a uniquely feminine demeanor.

However, if a woman undertakes to give this kind of leadership toward her husband she would not be acting in a properly feminine way, but would be taking up the masculine calling in that relationship. If the husband is there but neglects his responsibility and does not provide leadership for the children, then the mature, feminine mother will make every effort to do so, yet in a way that says to the husband, "I do not defy you, I love you and long with all my heart that you were with me in this spiritual and moral commitment, leading me and the family to God."

"... BENEVOLENT ..."

This word is intended to show that the responsibility of manhood is for the *good* of woman. Benevolent responsibility is meant to rule out all self-aggrandizing authoritarianism (cf. Luke 22:26). It is meant to rule out all

disdaining condescension and any act that makes a mature woman feel patronized rather than honored and prized (cf. 1 Peter 3:7). The word “benevolent” is meant to signal that mature masculinity gives appropriate expression to the Golden Rule in male-female relationships (Matthew 7:12).

“... RESPONSIBILITY ...”

The burden of this word is to stress that masculinity is a God-given *trust* for the good of all his creatures, not a *right* for men to exercise for their own self-exaltation or ego-satisfaction. It is less a prerogative than a calling. It is a duty and obligation and charge. Like all God’s requirements it is not meant to be onerous or burdensome (1 John 5:3). But it is nevertheless a burden to be borne, and which in Christ can be borne lightly (Matthew 11:30).

The word “responsibility” is chosen to imply that man will be uniquely called to account for his leadership, provision and protection in relation to women. This is illustrated in Genesis 3:9 when God says to Adam first, “Where are you?” Eve had sinned first, but God does not seek her out first. Adam must give the first account to God for the moral life of the family in the Garden of Eden. This does not mean the woman has no responsibility, as we will see. It simply means that man bears a unique and primary one.

“... TO LEAD ...”

One problem with language is that words tend to carry very different connotations for different people. Hence the word “lead” will sound strong and domineering to some, but moderate and servant-like to others.

Another problem is that one word carries many different nuances and implications for different contexts and situations. For example, the word “lead” could refer to what people do when they direct an orchestra, or persuade a friend to go to the zoo, or inspire a group for a cause, or command a military platoon, or make the first suggestion about where to eat, or take the driver’s seat when a group gets in the car, or take the initiative in a group to push the button in an elevator, or choose a door and open it for another to go through, or chair a committee, or sing loud enough to help others, or point a lost motorist to the freeway entrance, or call the plays on a football team, or call people together for prayer.

Therefore, I need to explain in some detail what I have in mind by the mature masculine responsibility to lead. Otherwise false ideas could easily come into people’s minds that I do not intend. Following are nine clarifying statements about the meaning of mature masculine leadership.

1. *Mature masculinity expresses itself not in the demand to be served, but in the strength to serve and to sacrifice for the good of woman.*

Jesus said, “Let the greatest among you become as the youngest and the leader as one who serves” (Luke 22:26). Leadership is not a demanding demeanor. It is moving things forward to a goal. If the goal is holiness and Heaven, the leading will have the holy aroma of Heaven about it – the demeanor of Christ.

Thus after saying that “the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church,” Paul said, “Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and *gave himself up for her*, that he might sanctify her” (Ephesians 5:23, 25). Jesus led his bride to holiness and heaven on the *Calvary* road. He looked weak, but he was infinitely strong in saying NO to the way of the world. So it will be again and again for mature men as they take up the responsibility to lead.

2. *Mature masculinity does not assume the authority of Christ over woman, but advocates it.*

The leadership implied in the statement, “The husband is the head of the wife *as Christ is the head of the church*” (Ephesians 5:23), is not a leadership that gives to the man all the rights and authority that Christ has. The analogy between Christ and the husband breaks down if pressed too far, first because, unlike Christ, all men sin. Christ never has to apologize to his church. But husbands must do this often.

Moreover, unlike Christ, a husband is not preparing a bride merely for himself but for another, namely Christ. He does not merely act as Christ, but also for Christ. At this point he must not be Christ to his wife lest he be a traitor to Christ. Standing in the place of Christ must include a renunciation of the temptation to be Christ. And that means leading his wife forward to depend not on him but on Christ. And practically, that rules out belittling supervision and fastidious oversight. She also stands or falls before her own master, Jesus Christ.

3. *Mature masculinity does not presume superiority, but mobilizes the strengths of others.*

No human leader is infallible. Nor is any man superior to those he leads in every respect. Therefore a good leader will always take into account the ideas of those he leads, and may often adopt those ideas as better than his own. This applies to husbands at home and elders in the church and all the other places where leadership is critical. A man’s leadership is not measured by his obliviousness to the ideas and desires of others. A leader of peers may be surrounded by much brighter people than himself. He will listen and respond. And if he is a good leader, they will appreciate his initiative and guidance through the ups and downs of decision-making. The aim of leadership is not to demonstrate the superiority of the leader, but to bring out all the strengths of people that will move them forward to the desired goal.

In Ephesians 5:28-29 the wife is pictured as part of the man's body as the church is part of Christ's body. So in loving his wife a man is loving himself. This is clearly an application to marriage of Jesus' command, "Love your neighbor as yourself." This rules out a leadership that treats a wife like a child. A husband does not want to be treated that way himself.

Moreover Christ does not lead the church as his daughter but as his wife. He is preparing her to be a "fellow-heir" (Romans 8:17), not a servant girl. Any kind of leadership that in the name of Christ like headship tends to produce in a wife personal immaturity or spiritual weakness or insecurity through excessive control or picky supervision or oppressive domination has missed the point of the analogy in Ephesians 5. Christ does not create that kind of wife.

4. *Mature masculinity does not have to initiate every action, but feels the responsibility to provide a general pattern of initiative.*

In a family the husband does not do all the thinking and planning. His leadership is to take responsibility *in general* to initiate and carry through the spiritual and moral planning for family life. I say "in general" because "in specifics" there will be many times and many areas of daily life where the wife will do all kinds of planning and initiating. But there is a general tone and pattern of initiative that should develop which is sustained by the husband.

For example, the leadership pattern would be less than Biblical if the wife in general was having to take the initiative in prayer at mealtimes, and get the family out of bed for worship on Sunday morning, and gather the family for devotions, and discuss what moral standards will be required of the children, and confer about financial priorities, and talk over some neighborhood ministry possibilities, etc. A wife may initiate the discussion and planning of any one of these, but if she becomes the one who senses the general responsibility for this pattern of initiative while her husband is passive, something contrary to Biblical masculinity and femininity is in the offing.

Psychologist James Dobson is so concerned about the recovery of the leadership of husbands at home that he calls it "America's greatest need."

A Christian man is obligated to lead his family to the best of his ability. . . . If his family has purchased too many items on credit, then the financial crunch is ultimately his fault. If the family never reads the Bible or seldom goes to church on Sunday, God holds the man to blame. If the children are disrespectful and disobedient, the primary responsibility lies with the father . . . not his wife. . . . In my view, America's greatest need is for husbands to begin guiding their families, rather than pouring every physical and emotional resource into the mere acquisition of money.

5. *Mature masculinity accepts the burden of the final say in disagreements between husband and wife, but does not presume to use it in every instance.*

In a good marriage decision-making is focused on the husband, but is not unilateral. He seeks input from his wife and often adopts her ideas. This is implied in the love that governs the relationship (Ephesians 5:25), in the equality of personhood implied in being created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27), and in the status of being fellow-heirs of the grace of life (1 Peter 3:7). Unilateral decision-making is not usually a mark of good leadership. It generally comes from laziness or insecurity or inconsiderate disregard.

On the other hand dependence on team input should not go to the point where the family perceives a weakness of indecision in the husband. And both husband and wife should agree on the principle that the husband's decision should rightly hold sway if it does not involve sin. However, this conviction does not mean that a husband will often use the prerogative of "veto" over the wishes of his wife or family. He may, in fact, very often surrender his own preference for his wife's where no moral issue is at stake. His awareness of his sin and imperfection will guard him from thinking that following Christ gives him the ability of Christ to know what's best in every detail. Nevertheless, in a well-ordered Biblical marriage both husband and wife acknowledge in principle that, if necessary in some disagreement, the husband will accept the burden of making the final choice.

6. *Mature masculinity expresses its leadership in romantic sexual relations by communicating an aura of strong and tender pursuit.*

This is very difficult to put into words. But sexual relations are so basic to human life we would be delinquent not to at least try to say how masculinity expresses itself here. It is the mingling of tenderness with strength that makes the unique masculine quality of leadership in sexual relations. There is an aura of masculine leadership which rises from the mingling of power and tenderness, forcefulness and affection, potency and sensitivity, virility and delicateness. It finds expression in the firmness of his grasp, the strength of taking her in his arms, the sustaining of verbal adoration, etc. And there are a hundred nuances of masculine pursuit that distinguish it from feminine pursuit.

It is important to say that there is, of course, a feminine pursuit in sexual relations. This is why the word "initiate" is not an exact way of describing masculine leadership in sexual relations. The wife may initiate an interest in romance and may keep on initiating different steps along the way. But there is a difference. A feminine initiation is in effect an invitation for the man to do his kind of initiating. In one sense then you could say that in those times the man is *responding*. But in fact the wife is inviting him to lead in a way as only a man can, so that she can respond to him.

It will not do to say that, since the woman can rightly initiate, therefore there is no special leadership that the man should fulfill. When a wife wants sexual relations with her husband she wants him to seek her and take her and bring her into his arms and up to the pleasures that his initiatives give her.

Consider what is lost when women attempt to assume a more masculine role by appearing physically muscular and aggressive. It is true that there is something sexually stimulating about a muscular, scantily clad young woman pumping iron in a health club. But no woman should be encouraged by this fact. For it probably means the sexual encounter that such an image would lead to is something very hasty and volatile, and in the long run unsatisfying. The image of a masculine musculature may beget arousal in a man, but it does not beget several hours of moonlight walking with significant, caring conversation. The more women can arouse men by doing typically masculine things, the less they can count on receiving from men a sensitivity to typically feminine needs. Mature masculinity will not be reduced to raw desire in sexual relations. It remains alert to the deeper personal needs of a woman and mingles strength and tenderness to make her joy complete.

7. Mature masculinity expresses itself in a family by taking the initiative in disciplining the children when both parents are present and a family standard has been broken.

Mothers and fathers are both to be obeyed by their children (Ephesians 6:1). Mothers as well as fathers are esteemed teachers in the home (Proverbs 1:8; 6:20; 31:1). They carry rights of authority and leadership toward their children, as do their husbands. They do not need to wait till Dad gets home from work to spank a disobedient child. But children need to see a dynamic between Mom and Dad that says, Dad takes charge to discipline me when Mom and Dad are both present. Woman should have to take the initiative to set a disobedient child right while her husband sits obliviously by, as though nothing were at stake. Few things will help children understand the meaning of responsible, loving masculinity better than watching who takes the responsibility to set them right when Mom and Dad are both present.

8. Mature masculinity is sensitive to cultural expressions of masculinity and adapts to them (where no sin is involved) in order to communicate to a woman that a man would like to relate not in any aggressive or perverted way, but with maturity and dignity as a man.

This would mean dressing in ways that are neither effeminate nor harsh and aggressive. It would mean learning manners and customs. Who speaks for the couple at the restaurant? Who seats the other? Who drives the car? Who opens the door? Who walks in front down the concert hall aisle? Who stands and who sits, and when? Who extends the hand at a greeting? Who walks on the street side? How do you handle a woman's purse? Etc. Etc. These things change from culture to culture and from era to era. The point is that masculine leadership will not scorn them or ignore them, but seek to use them to cultivate and communicate a healthy pattern of complementarity in the relationships between men and women. Mature masculinity will not try to communicate that such things don't matter. Mature masculinity recognizes the pervasive implications of manhood and womanhood, and seeks to preserve the patterns of interaction that give free and natural expression to that reality. A dance is all the more beautiful when the assigned steps are natural and unself-conscious.

9. Mature masculinity recognizes that the call to leadership is a call to repentance and humility and risk-taking.

We are all sinners. Masculinity and femininity have been distorted by our sin. Taking up the responsibility to lead must therefore be a careful and humble task. We must admit as men that historically there have been grave abuses. In each of our lives we have ample cause for contrition at our passivity or our domination. Some have neglected their wives and squandered their time in front of the television or putzing around in the garage or going away too often with the guys to hunt or fish or bowl. Others have been too possessive, harsh, domineering, and belittling, giving the impression through act and innuendo that wives are irresponsible or foolish.

We should humble ourselves before God for our failures and for the remaining tendency to shirk or overstep our responsibilities. The call to leadership is not a call to exalt ourselves over any woman. It is not a call to domineer, or belittle or put woman in her place. She is, after all, a fellow-heir of God and destined for a glory that will one day blind the natural eyes of every man (Matthew 13:43). The call to leadership is a call to humble oneself and take the responsibility to be a servant-leader in ways that are appropriate to every differing relationship to women.

It is a call to risk getting egg on our faces; to pray as we have never prayed before; to be constantly in the Word; to be more given to planning, more intentional, more thoughtful, less carried along by the mood of the moment; to be disciplined and ordered in our lives; to be tenderhearted and sensitive; to take the initiative to make sure there is a time and a place to talk to her about what needs to be talked about; and to be ready to lay down our lives the way Christ did if that is necessary.

“... PROVIDE FOR ...”

“At the heart of mature masculinity is a sense of benevolent responsibility to lead, *provide for*”

The point of saying that man should feel a responsibility to provide for woman is not that the woman should not assist in maintaining support for the family or for society in general. She always has done this historically because so much of the domestic life required extraordinary labors on her part just to maintain the life of the family. Today in many cultures women carry a tremendous breadwinning role in the field, often while the men do far less strenuous tasks. It is possible to be excessively demanding or excessively restrictive on a woman's role in sustaining the life of the family. Proverbs 31 pictures a wife with great ability in the business affairs of the family.

What I mean when I say that a man should feel a benevolent responsibility to *provide* is this: when there is no bread on the table it is the man who should feel the main pressure to do something to get it there. It does not mean his wife can't help--- side by side in a family enterprise or working in a different job. In fact, it is possible to imagine cases where she may have to do it all---say, if he is sick or injured. But a man will feel his personhood compromised if he, through sloth or folly or lack of discipline, becomes dependent over the long haul (not just during graduate school!) on his wife's income.

This is implied in Genesis 3 where the curse touches man and woman in their natural places of life. It is not a curse that man must work in the field to get bread for the family or that woman bears children. The curse is that these spheres of life are made difficult and frustrating. In appointing the curse for his rebellious creatures God aims at the natural sphere of life peculiar to each. Evidently God had in mind from the beginning that the man would take special responsibility for sustaining the family through bread-winning labor, while the wife would take special responsibility for sustaining the family through childbearing and nurturing labor. Both are life-sustaining and essential.

The point of this Genesis text is not to define limits for what else the man and the woman might do. But it does suggest that any role reversal at these basic levels of childcare and breadwinning labor will be contrary to the original intention of God, and contrary to the way he made us as male and female for our ordained roles. Supporting the family is primarily the responsibility of the husband. Caring for the children is primarily the responsibility of the wife.

Again I stress that the point here is not to dictate the details of any particular pattern of labor in the home. The point is that mature manhood senses a benevolent responsibility before God to be the primary provider for his family. He senses that if God were to come and call someone to account for not meeting the family's needs God would come to the husband first (Genesis 3:9).

The same is true for a social grouping of men and women who are not married. Mature men sense that it is primarily (not solely) their responsibility to see to it that there is provision and protection. The covenant of marriage does not create a man's sense of benevolent responsibility to provide the basic necessities of food and shelter. In marriage the sense of responsibility is more intense and personal. But this dimension of mature manhood is there in a man apart from marriage.

“... PROTECTION ...”

“At the heart of mature masculinity is a sense of benevolent responsibility to lead, provide for and *protect*...” Suppose a man and a woman (it may be his wife or sister or friend or a total stranger) are walking along the street when an assailant threatens the two of them with a lead pipe. Mature masculinity senses a natural, God-given responsibility to step forward and put himself between the assailant and the woman. In doing this he becomes her servant. He is willing to suffer for her safety. He bestows honor on her. His inner sense is one of responsibility to protect her because he is a man and she is a woman.

There is a distorted and sinful masculinity that might claim an authority and leadership that has the right to tell the woman to step in front of him and shield him from the blows and let him escape. But every man knows this is a perversion of what it means to be a man and a leader. And every wife knows that something is amiss in a man's manhood if he suggests that she get out of bed 50% of the time to see what the strange noise is downstairs.

She is not condemned as a coward because she feels a natural fitness in receiving this manly service. And she may well be more courageous than he at the moment. She may be ready to do some fearless deed of her own. A man's first thought is not that the woman at his side is weak, but simply that he is a man and she is a woman. Women and children are put into the lifeboats first, not because the men are necessarily better swimmers, but because of a deep sense of honorable fitness. It belongs to masculinity to accept danger to protect women.

It may be that in any given instance of danger the woman will have the strength to strike the saving blow. It may be too that she will have the presence of mind to think of the best way of escape. It may be that she will fight with tooth and claw to save a crippled man and lay down her life for him if necessary. But this does not at all diminish the unique call of manhood when he and his female companion are confronted by a danger together. The dynamics of mature masculinity and femininity begin the drama with him in front and her at his back protected--- however they may together overcome the foe or suffer courageously together in persecution. A mature man senses instinctively that as a man he is called to take the lead in guarding the woman he is with.

“... WOMEN ...”

At the heart of mature masculinity is a sense of benevolent responsibility to lead, provide for and protect women . . . I do not say wives because there is a sense in which masculinity inclines a man to feel a responsibility for leadership and provision and protection toward women in general, not just toward wives or relatives. Masculinity and femininity are rooted in who we are by nature. They are not simply reflexes of a marriage relationship. Man does not become man by getting married. But it is clear that the form which leadership, provision and protection take will vary with the kind of relationship a man has with a woman – from the most intimate relationship of marriage to the most casual relationship with a stranger on the street. This is why the description of masculinity must conclude with the following phrase.

“... IN WAYS APPROPRIATE TO A MAN’S DIFFERING RELATIONSHIPS”

Ephesians 5:22, Titus 2:5 and 1 Peter 3:1, 5 exhort wives to be subject to “your own” (*idiois*) husbands. This term “your own” shows that the relationship of leadership and submission between a woman and her husband should be different from the relationship of leadership and submission which she may have with men in general. Husbands and wives have responsibilities to each other in marriage that they do not have to other men and women.

But this does not mean that there is no way that maleness and femaleness affect the relationship of men and women in general. That a man has a unique responsibility for leadership in his own home does not mean that his manhood is negligible in other settings. It is not negligible. But it is very diverse. The responsibility of men toward women will vary according to the kind of relationship they have. Husband and wife will have different responsibilities than a pastor and female parishioner will have. And those responsibilities will in turn be different from the differing responsibilities of men and women in business, recreation, government, neighborhood, courtship, engagement, etc. The possibilities of women and men meeting each other and having dealings with each other are extremely diverse and beyond counting. And my persuasion is that mature masculinity will seek appropriate expressions of manhood in each of these relationships.

These expressions of manhood will include acts of defense and protection, a readiness to serve with strength, and a pattern of initiative. I have touched on all three of these. But it may be helpful to focus once more on this idea of a pattern of initiative that is appropriate for differing relationships. The point here is that even though a man will not take initiating steps of leadership with a stranger or with a colleague the same way he will with his wife, his mature manhood will seek a pattern of initiative appropriate for the relationship.

For example, if a man works as a lawyer in a law firm with other lawyers, some of whom are women, he will of course not initiate many of the kinds of discussion that he might with his wife. In fact one of the special initiatives mature masculinity will take is to build protections against the development of any kind of inappropriate intimacy with his female colleagues. It is not *primarily* the responsibility of women to build procedural and relational guidelines to protect themselves from the advances of ill-behaved men. Primarily it is the responsibility of mature manhood to establish a pattern of behaviors and attitudes—a kind of collegial choreography—that enable men and women to move with freedom and ease and moral security among each other.

If, in the course of the day, a woman in the law firm calls a meeting of the attorneys, and thus takes that kind of initiative, there are still ways that a man, coming to that meeting, can express his manhood through culturally appropriate courtesies shown to the women in the firm. He may open the door; he may offer his chair; he may speak in a voice that is gentler.

It is true that this becomes increasingly difficult where a unisex mentality converts such gentlemanly courtesies into offenses and thus attempts to shut out every means of expressing the realities of manhood and womanhood. It will be a strain for mature Christian men and women to work in that atmosphere. But it may be that through intelligent discussion and courteous, caring behaviors they may have a redeeming effect even on what their colleagues think and feel about manhood and womanhood.

We must reckon with the possibility that in the various spheres of life it is possible that role relationships emerge for men and women that so deeply compromise what a man or woman senses is appropriate for their masculine or feminine personhood that they have to seek a different position. This is what J. I. Packer implies when he makes the following perceptive observation:

While I am not keen on *hierarchy* and *patriarchy* as terms describing the man-woman relationship in Scripture, Genesis 2:18-23 . . . and Ephesians 5:21-33 . . . continue to convince me that the man-woman relationship is intrinsically nonreversible. By this I mean that, other things being equal, a situation in which a female boss has a male secretary, or a marriage in which the woman (as we say) wears the trousers, will put more strain on the humanity of both parties than if it were the other way around. This is part of the reality of the creation, a given fact that nothing will change.

This brings us back to the basic insight of Paul Jewett, namely, that our self-knowledge is indissolubly bound up not simply with our *human* being but with our *sexual* being. At the human level there is no 'I and thou' *per se*, but only the 'I' who is male or female confronting the 'thou,' the 'other,' who is also male or female.

I believe this is true and that God has not left us without a witness to the meaning of our masculine and feminine personhood. I have tried to unfold at least some of what that masculine personhood involves. Now we turn to the meaning of mature femininity.

The Meaning of Femininity

A significant aspect of femininity is how a woman responds to the pattern of initiatives established by mature masculinity. This is why I have discussed masculinity first. Much of the meaning of womanhood is clearly implied in what I have said already about manhood—in the same way that the moves of one ballet dancer would be implied if you described the moves of the other. Nevertheless it is important now to focus on the description of womanhood given earlier and unfold its meaning for the sake of a balanced and attractive portrait of manhood and womanhood.

At the heart of mature femininity is a freeing disposition to affirm, receive and nurture strength and leadership from worthy men in ways appropriate to a woman's differing relationships.

“AT THE HEART OF . . .”

Again, this phrase signals that the definition of femininity is not exhaustive. There is more to femininity, but not less. I believe this is at the heart of what true womanhood means, even if there is a mystery to our complementary existence that we will never exhaust.

“. . . MATURE FEMININITY . . .”

The word “mature” implies that there are distortions of femininity. False or immature stereotypes are sometimes identified as the essence of femininity. Ronda Chervin, in her book *Feminine, Free and Faithful*, gives a list of what people commonly consider “positive feminine traits” and “negative feminine traits.” The participants in her workshops say positively that women are responsive, compassionate, empathetic, enduring, gentle, warm, tender, hospitable, receptive, diplomatic, considerate, polite, supportive, intuitive, wise, perceptive, sensitive, spiritual, sincere, vulnerable (in the sense of emotionally open), obedient, trusting, graceful, sweet, expressive, charming, delicate, quiet, sensually receptive (vs. prudish), faithful, pure. Chervin lists the following women who exhibit many of these traits: Ruth, Naomi, Sarah, Mary (Jesus' mother), Cordelia of *King Lear*, Melanie in *Gone with the Wind*, Grace Kelly, and *Mother Teresa of Calcutta*. On the other hand people often stereotype women with negative traits: weak, passive, slavish, weepy, wishy-washy, seductive, flirtatious, vain, chatter-box, silly, sentimental, I, moody, petty, catty, prudish, manipulative, complaining, nagging, pouty, smothering, spiteful. It is plain then that when we talk of femininity we must make careful distinctions between distortions and God's original design. “Mature femininity” refers not to what sin has made of womanhood or what popular opinion makes of it, but what God willed for it to be at its best.

“. . . IS A FREEING DISPOSITION . . .”

I focus on mature femininity as a *disposition* rather than a set of behaviors or roles because mature femininity will express itself in so many different ways depending on the situation. Hundreds of behaviors may be feminine in one situation and not in another. And the specific acts that grow out of the disposition of womanhood vary considerably from relationship to relationship, not to mention from culture to culture.

For example, the Biblical reality of a wife's submission would take different forms depending on the quality of a husband's leadership. This can be seen best if we define submission not in terms of specific behaviors, but as a *disposition* to yield to the husband's authority and an *inclination* to follow his leadership. This is important to do because no submission of one human being to another is absolute. The husband does not replace Christ as the woman's supreme authority. She must never follow her husband's leadership into sin. She will not steal with him or get drunk with him or savor pornography with him or develop deceptive schemes with him.

But even where a Christian wife may have to stand with Christ against the sinful will of her husband, she can still have a spirit of submission—a disposition to yield. She can show by her attitude and behavior that she does not like resisting his will and that she longs for him to forsake sin and lead in righteousness so that her disposition to honor him as head can again produce harmony.

The disposition of mature femininity is experienced as freeing. This is because it accords with the truth of God's purpose in creation. It is the truth that frees (John 8:32). There are sensations of unbounded independence that are not true freedom because they deny truth and are destined for calamity. For example, two women may jump from an airplane and experience the thrilling freedom of free-falling. But there is a difference: one is encumbered by a parachute on her back and the other is free from this burden. Which person is most free? The one without the parachute feels free—even freer, since she does not feel the constraints of the parachute straps. But she is not truly

free. She is in bondage to the force of gravity and to the deception that all is well because she feels unencumbered. This false sense of freedom is in fact bondage to calamity which is sure to happen after a fleeting moment of pleasure.

That is the way many women (and men) today think of freedom. They judge it on the basis of immediate sensations of unrestrained license or independence. But true freedom takes God's reality and God's purpose for creation into account and seeks to fit smoothly into God's good design. Freedom does include doing what we want to do. But the mature and wise woman does not seek this freedom by bending reality to fit her desires. She seeks it by being transformed in the renewal of her desires to fit in with God's perfect will (Romans 12:2). The greatest freedom is found in being so changed by God's Spirit that you can do what you love to do and know that it conforms to the design of God and leads to life and glory.

God does not intend for women to be squelched or cramped or frustrated. But neither does he intend for women to do whatever seems to remove these feelings without regard to the appropriateness of the action. Sometimes freedom comes from outward changes in circumstances. Sometimes it comes from inward changes of the heart and mind. Many today say, for example, that true freedom for a lesbian would be the liberty to act according to her sexual preference. But I would say that true freedom cannot ignore God's judgment on homosexual activity and God's will for men and women to be heterosexual in their sexual relations. Therefore true freedom is not giving in to our every impulse. It is the sometimes painful and exhilarating discovery of God's power to fight free from the bondage of our sinful selves.

I believe that the femininity to which God calls women is the path of freedom for every woman. It will not look the same in every woman. But it will lay responsibilities on all women in the same way that mature masculinity lays responsibilities on all men. Some of these we express very naturally. Others of them we must grow into by prayer and faith and practice. But this process of growth is no more confining than the growth of a young woman toward patterns of mature behavior that enable her to act with natural freedom in the company of adults.

“... TO AFFIRM, RECEIVE AND NURTURE STRENGTH AND LEADERSHIP FROM WORTHY MEN ...”

“At the heart of mature femininity is a freeing disposition *to affirm, receive and nurture strength and leadership from worthy men* in ways appropriate to a woman's differing relationships.”

The “strength and leadership” referred to here is what was described above concerning the responsibility of mature masculinity to lead, provide and protect. The quality of that strength and leadership is captured in the phrase, “from worthy men.” I recognize that there is strength and leadership that is unworthy of a woman's affirmation. I do not mean to define femininity merely as a response to whatever sinful men may happen to offer up. Mature femininity is rooted in a commitment to Christ as Lord and is discerning in what it approves. Mature femininity has a clear, Biblical vision of mature masculinity. Woman delights in it as man delights in mature femininity. Each gives the other the greatest scope for natural, pure, mature expression. But when a man does not possess mature masculinity the response of a mature woman is not to abandon her femininity. Rather, her femininity remains intact as a desire for things to be as God intended them to be. But she also recognizes that the natural expression of her womanhood will be hindered by the immaturity of the man in her presence.

My definition of the heart of femininity includes three words to describe the response of a woman to the strength and leadership of worthy men: affirm, receive and nurture.

“Affirm” means that mature women advocate the kind of masculine-feminine complementarity that we are describing here. This is important to stress because there may be occasions when women have no interaction with men and yet are still mature in their femininity. This is because femininity is a disposition to affirm the strength and leadership of worthy men, not just to *experience* it firsthand. It is also true, as we will see below, because there are unique feminine strengths and insights that women embody even before they can be given to any man.

“Receive” means that mature femininity feels natural and glad to accept the strength and leadership of worthy men. A mature woman is glad when a respectful, caring, upright man offers sensitive strength and provides a pattern of appropriate initiatives in their relationship. She does not want to reverse these roles. She is glad when he is not passive. She feels herself enhanced and honored and freed by his caring strength and servant-leadership.

“Nurture” means that a mature woman senses a responsibility not merely to receive, but to nurture and strengthen the resources of masculinity. She is to be his partner and assistant. She joins in the act of strength and shares in the process of leadership. She is, as Genesis 2:18 says, “a helper suitable for him.”

This may sound paradoxical-that she strengthens the strength she receives, and that she refines and extends the leadership she looks for. But it is not contradictory or unintelligible. There are strengths and insights that women bring to a relationship that are not brought by men. I do not mean to imply by my definition of femininity that women are merely recipients in relation to men. Mature women bring nurturing strengths and insights that make men stronger and wiser and that make the relationship richer.

Note: We need to heed a caution here about the differing strengths of men and women. Whenever anyone asks if we think women are, say, weaker than men, or smarter than men, or more easily frightened than men or something like that, a good answer would go like this: women are weaker in some ways and men are weaker in some ways; women are smarter in some ways and men are smarter in some ways; women are more easily frightened in some kinds of circumstances and men are more easily frightened in other kinds of circumstances.

It is very misleading to put negative values on the so-called weaknesses that each of us has by virtue of our sexuality. God intends for all the “weaknesses” that are characteristically masculine to call forth and highlight woman’s strengths. And God intends for all the “weaknesses” that are characteristically feminine to call forth and highlight man’s strengths.

A person who naively assumes that men are superior because of their kind of strength might consider these statistics from 1983: six times more men than women are arrested for drug abuse. Ten times more men than women are arrested for drunkenness. Eighty-three percent of serious crimes in America are committed by men. Twenty-five times more men than women are in jail. Virtually all rape is committed by men.

I point that out to show that boasting in either sex as superior to the other is a folly. Men and women as God created them are different in hundreds of ways. One helpful way to describe our equality and differences is this: Picture the so-called weaknesses and strengths of man and woman listed in two columns. If you could give a numerical value to each one the sum at the bottom of both columns is going to be the same. Whatever different minuses and pluses are on each side of masculinity and femininity are going to balance out. And when you take those two columns from each side and lay them, as it were, on top of each other, God intends them to be the perfect complement to each other, so that when life together is considered (and I don’t just mean married life) the weaknesses of manhood are not weaknesses and the weaknesses of woman are not weaknesses. They are the complements that call forth different strengths in each other.

If it is true that manhood and womanhood are to complement rather than duplicate each other, and if it is true that the way God made us is good, then we should be very slow to gather a list of typical male weaknesses or a list of typical female weaknesses and draw a conclusion that either is of less value than the other. Men and women are of equal value and dignity in the eyes of God-both created in the image of God and utterly unique in the universe.

“. . . IN WAYS APPROPRIATE TO A WOMAN’S DIFFERING RELATIONSHIPS . . .”

“At the heart of mature femininity is a freeing disposition to affirm, receive and nurture strength and leadership from worthy men *in ways appropriate to a woman’s differing relationships.*”

Mature femininity does not express itself in the same way toward every man. A mature woman who is married, for example, does not welcome the same kind of strength and leadership from other men that she welcomes from her husband. But she will affirm and receive and nurture the strength and leadership of men *in some form* in all her relationships with men. This is true even though she may find herself in roles that put some men in a subordinate role to her. Without passing any judgment on the appropriateness of any of these roles one thinks of the following possible instances:

Prime Minister and her counselors and advisors.

Principal and the teachers in her school.

College teacher and her students.

Bus driver and her passengers.

Bookstore manager and her clerks and stock help.

Staff doctor and her interns.

Lawyer and her aides.

Judge and the court personnel.

Police officer and citizens in her precinct.

Legislator and her assistants.

T.V. newscaster and her editors.

Counselor and her clients.

One or more of these roles might stretch appropriate expressions of femininity beyond the breaking point. But in any case, regardless of the relationships in which a woman finds herself, mature femininity will seek to express itself in appropriate ways. There are ways for a woman to interact even with a male subordinate that signal to him and others her endorsement of his mature manhood in relationship to her as a woman. I do not have in mind anything like sexual suggestiveness or innuendo. Rather, I have in mind culturally appropriate expressions of respect for his kind of strength, and glad acceptance of his gentlemanly courtesies. Her demeanor-the tone and style and disposition and discourse of her ranking position-can signal clearly her affirmation of the unique role that men should play in relationship to women owing to their sense of responsibility to protect and lead.

It is obvious at this point that we are on the brink of contradiction—suggesting that a woman may hold a position of leadership and fulfill it in a way that signals to men her endorsement of their sense of responsibility to lead. But the complexities of life require of us this risk. To illustrate: it is simply impossible that from time to time a woman not be put in a position of influencing or guiding men. For example, a housewife in her backyard may be asked by a man how to get to the freeway. At that point she is giving a kind of leadership. She has superior knowledge that the man needs and he submits himself to her guidance. But we all know that there is a way for that housewife to direct the man that neither of them feels their mature femininity or masculinity compromised. It is not a contradiction to speak of *certain kinds* of influence coming from women to men in ways that affirm the responsibility of men to provide a pattern of strength and initiative.

But as I said earlier, there are roles that strain the personhood of man and woman too far to be appropriate, productive and healthy for the overall structure of home and society. Some roles would involve kinds of leadership and expectations of authority and forms of strength as to make it unfitting for a woman to fill the role. However, instead of trying to list what jobs might be fitting expressions for mature femininity or mature masculinity, it will probably be wiser to provide several guidelines.

It is obvious that we cannot and should not prohibit women from influencing men. For example, *prayer* is certainly a God-appointed means women should use to get men to where God wants them to be. Praying women exert far more power in this world than all political leaders put together. This kind of powerful influence is compounded immensely when one considers the degree to which the world is shaped and guided by the effects of how men and women are formed by their mothers. This influence is perhaps more effective than all the leadership of men put together.

So the question should be put: what kind of influence would be inappropriate for mature women to exercise toward men? It would be hopeless to try to define this on a case-by-case basis. There are thousands of different jobs in the church and in the world with an innumerable variety of relationships between men and women. More appropriate than a black-and-white list of man's work and "woman's work" is a set of criteria to help a woman think through whether the responsibilities of any given job allow her to uphold God's created order of mature masculinity and femininity.

Here is one possible set of criteria. All acts of influence and guidance can be described along these two continuums:

Personal _____ Non-personal

Directive _____ Non-directive

To the degree that a woman's influence over man is personal and directive it will generally offend a man's good, God-given sense of responsibility and leadership, and thus controvert God's created order.

A woman may design the traffic pattern of a city's streets and thus exert a kind of influence over all male drivers. But this influence will be non-personal and therefore not necessarily an offense against God's order. Similarly, the drawings and specifications of a woman architect may guide the behavior of contractors and laborers, but it may be so non-personal that the feminine-masculine dynamic of the relationship is negligible.

On the other hand, the relationship between husband and wife is very personal. All acts of influence lie on the continuum between personal and non-personal. The closer they get to the personal side, the more inappropriate it becomes for women to exert directive influence.

But the second continuum may qualify the first. Some influence is very directive, some is non-directive. For example, a drill sergeant would epitomize directive influence. It would be hard to see how a woman could be a drill sergeant over men without violating their sense of masculinity and her sense of femininity.

Non-directive influence proceeds with petition and persuasion instead of directives. A beautiful example of non-directive leadership is when Abigail talked David out of killing Nabal (1 Samuel 25:23-35). She exerted great influence over David and changed the course of his life; but she did it with amazing restraint and submissiveness and discretion.

When you combine these two continuums, what emerges is this: If a woman's job involves a good deal of directives toward men, they will, in general, need it to be non-personal.

The God-given sense of responsibility for leadership in a mature man will not generally allow him to flourish long under personal, directive leadership of a female superior. J. I. Packer suggested that "a situation in which a female boss has a male secretary" puts strain on the humanity of both (see note 18). I think this would be true in other situations as well. Some of the more obvious ones would be in military combat settings if women were positioned so as to deploy and command men; or in professional baseball if a woman is made the umpire to call balls and strikes and frequently to settle heated disputes among men. And I would stress that this is not necessarily owing to male egotism, but to a natural and good penchant given by God.

Conversely, if a woman's relation to man is very personal, then the way she offers guidance will need to be non-directive. The clearest example here is the marriage relationship. The Apostle Peter speaks of a good wife's meek

and tranquil spirit that can be very winsome to her husband (1 Peter 3:4). A wife who “comes on strong” with her advice will probably drive a husband into passive silence, or into active anger. It is not nonsense to say that a woman who believes she should guide a man into new behavior should do that in a way that signals her support of his leadership. This is precisely what the Apostle Peter commends in 1 Peter 3:1ff. Similarly in the workplace it may not be nonsense in any given circumstance for a woman to provide a certain kind of direction for a man, but to do it in such a way that she signals her endorsement of his unique duty as a man to feel a responsibility of strength and protection and leadership toward her as a woman and toward women in general.

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Subversive Virginit

Sarah E. Hinlicky

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Okay, I'll admit it: I am twenty-two years old and still a virgin. Not for lack of opportunity, my vanity hastens to add. Had I ever felt unduly burdened by my unfashionable innocence, I could have found someone to attend to the problem. But I never did.

Our mainstream culture tells me that some oppressive force must be the cause of my late-in-life virginity, maybe an inordinate fear of men or God or getting caught. Perhaps it's right, since I can pinpoint a number of influences that have persuaded me to remain a virgin. My mother taught me that self-respect requires self-control, and my father taught me to demand the same from men. I'm enough of a country bumpkin to suspect that contraceptives might not be enough to prevent an unwanted pregnancy or disease, and I think that abortion is killing a baby. I buy into all that Christian doctrine of law and promise, which means that the stuffy old commandments are still binding on my conscience. And I'm even I enough to believe in permanent, exclusive, divinely ordained love between a man and a woman, a love so valuable that it motivates me to keep my legs tightly crossed in the most tempting of situations.

Defining Sexuality Down

In spite of all this, I still think of myself as something of a feminist, since virginity has the result of creating respect for and upholding the value of the woman so inclined. But I have discovered that the reigning feminism of today has little use for it. There was a time when I was foolish enough to look for literature among women's publications that might offer support in my very personal decision. (It's all about choice, after all, isn't it?) The dearth of information on virginity might lead one to believe that it's a taboo subject. However, I was fortunate enough to discover a short article on it in that revered tome of feminism, *Our Bodies, Ourselves*.

The most recent edition of the book has a more positive attitude than the edition before it, in that it acknowledges virginity as a legitimate choice and not just a by-product of patriarchy. Still, in less than a page, it presumes to cover the whole range of emotion and experience involved in virginity, which, it seems, consists simply in the notion that a woman should wait until she's really ready to express her sexuality. That's all there is to say about it. Apparently, sexual expression takes place only in and after the act of genital intercourse. Anything subtler — like a feminine love of cooking or tendency to cry at the movies or unsuppressable maternal instinct or cultivation of a wardrobe that will turn heads or even a passionate good-night kiss — is deemed an inadequate demonstration of sexual identity. The unspoken message of *Our Bodies, Ourselves* is clear enough: as long as a woman is a virgin, she remains completely asexual.

Surprisingly, this attitude has infiltrated the thinking of many women my age, who should still be new enough in the web of lies called adulthood to know better. One of my most vivid college memories is of a conversation with a good friend about my (to her) bizarre aberration of virginity. She and another pal had been delving into the gruesome specifics of their past sexual encounters. Finally, after some time, my friend suddenly exclaimed to me, “How do you do it?”

A little taken aback, I said, “Do what?”

“You know,” she answered, a little reluctant, perhaps, to use the big bad V-word. “You still haven’t ... slept with anybody. How do you do it? Don’t you *want* to?”

The question intrigued me, because it was so utterly beside the point. Of course I want to — what a strange question! — but mere wanting is hardly a proper guide for moral conduct. I assured my concerned friend that my libido was still in proper working order, but then I had to come up with a good reason why I had been paying attention to my inhibitions for all these years. I offered the usual reasons — emotional and physical health, religious convictions, “saving myself” till marriage — but nothing convinced her until I said, “I guess I don’t know what I’m missing.” She was satisfied with that and ended the conversation.

In one sense, sure, I don’t know what I’m missing. And it is common enough among those who *do* know what they’re missing to go to great lengths to insure that they don’t miss it for very long. In another sense, though, I could list a lot of things that I do know I’m missing: hurt, betrayal, anxiety, self-deception, fear, suspicion, anger, confusion and the horror of having been used. And those are only emotional aspects; there is also disease, unwanted pregnancy and abortion. As if to prove my case from the other side, my friend suffered a traumatic betrayal within a month or two of our conversation. It turned out that the man involved would gladly sleep with her, but refused to have a “real relationship” — a sad reality she discovered only after the fact.

The Power to Choose

According to received feminist wisdom, sexuality is to be understood through the twin concepts of power and choice. It’s not a matter of anything so banally biological as producing children, or even the more elevated notion of creating intimacy and trust. Sometimes it seems like sex isn’t even supposed to be fun. The purpose of female sexuality is to assert power over hapless men, for control, revenge, self-centered pleasure or forcing a commitment. A woman who declines to express herself in sexual activity, then, has fallen prey to a male-dominated society that wishes to prevent women from becoming powerful. By contrast, it is said, a woman who does become sexually active discovers her power over men and exercises it, supposedly to her personal enhancement.

This is an absurd lie. That kind of gender-war sexuality results only in pyrrhic victories. It’s a set-up for disaster, especially for women. Men aren’t the ones who get pregnant. And who ever heard of a man purchasing a glossy magazine to learn the secret of snagging a wife? Sacrifice and the relinquishing of power are natural to women — ask any mom — and they are also the secret of feminine appeal. The pretense that aggression and power-mongering are the only options for female sexual success has opened the door to predatory men. The imbalance of power becomes greater than ever in a culture of easy access.

Against this system of mutual exploitation stands the more compelling alternative of virginity. It escapes the ruthless cycle of winning and losing because it refuses to play the game. The promiscuous of both sexes will take their cheap shots at one another, disguising infidelity and selfishness as freedom and independence, and blaming the aftermath on one another. But no one can claim control over a virgin. Virginity is not a matter of asserting power in order to manipulate. It is a refusal to exploit or be exploited. That is real, and responsible, power.

But there is more to it than mere escape. There is an undeniable appeal in virginity, something that eludes the resentful feminist’s contemptuous label of “prude.” A virgin woman is an unattainable object of desire, and it is precisely her unattainability that increases her desirability. Feminism has told a lie in defense of its own promiscuity, namely, that there is no sexual power to be found in virginity. On the contrary, virgin sexuality has extraordinary and unusual power. There’s no second-guessing a virgin’s motives: her strength comes from a source beyond her transitory whims. It is sexuality dedicated to hope, to the future, to marital love, to children and to God. Her virginity is, at the same time, a statement of her mature independence from men. It allows a woman to become a whole person in her own right, without needing a man either to revolt against or to complete what she lacks. It is very simple, really: no matter how wonderful, charming, handsome, intelligent, thoughtful, rich or persuasive he is, he simply cannot have her. A virgin is perfectly unpossessable.

Of course, there have been some women who have attempted to claim this independence from men by turning in on themselves and opting for lesbian sexuality instead. But this is just another, perhaps deeper, rejection of their femaleness. The sexes rightly define themselves in their otherness. Lesbianism squelches the design of otherness by drowning womanhood in a sea of sameness, and in the process loses any concept of what makes the female feminine. Virginity upholds simply and honestly that which is valuable in and unique to women.

The corollary of power is choice. Again, the feminist assumes that sexually powerful women will be able to choose their own fates. And again, it is a lie. No one can engage in extramarital sex and then control it. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the moral nightmare of our society’s breakdown since the sexual revolution. Some time ago I saw on TV the introduction of the groundbreaking new “female condom.” A spokeswoman at a press conference celebrating its grand opening declared joyously the new freedom that it gave to women. “Now women have more bargaining power,” she said. “If a man says that he refuses to wear a condom, the woman can counter, fine, I will!” I was dumbstruck by her enthusiasm for the dynamics of the new situation. Why on earth would two people harboring

so much animosity towards each other contemplate a sexual encounter? What an appealing choice they have been given the freedom to make!

The dark reality, of course, is that it is not free choice at all when women must convince men to love them and must convince themselves that they are more than just “used goods.” There are so many young women I have known for whom freely chosen sexual activity means a brief moment of pleasure — if that — followed by the unchosen side effects of paralyzing uncertainty, anger at the man involved, and finally a deep self-hatred that is impenetrable by feminist analysis. So-called sexual freedom is really just proclaiming oneself to be available for free, and therefore without value. To “choose” such freedom is tantamount to saying that one is worth nothing.

Admittedly, there are some who say that sex isn’t anything nearly so serious or important, but just another recreational activity not substantially different from ping-pong. I don’t believe it for a second. I learned most meaningfully from another woman the destructive force of sexuality out of control when I myself was under considerable pressure to cave in to a man’s sexual demands. I discussed the prospect with this friend, and after some time she finally said to me, “Don’t do it. So far in life you’ve made all the right choices and I’ve made all the wrong ones. I care enough about you that I don’t want to see you end up like me.” Naturally, that made up my mind. Sex does matter; it matters a lot; and I can only hope that those who deny it will wake up to their error before they damage themselves even more.

It is appalling that feminism has propagated lies so destructive to women. It has created the illusion that there is no room for self-discovery outside of sexual behavior. Not only is this a grotesque lie, but it is also an utterly *boring* one. Aside from its implied dismissal of all the world’s many riches outside the sexual domain, this false concept has placed stultifying limitations on the range of human relationships. We’re told that friendships between men and women are just a cover until they leap into the sack together. While romance is a natural and a commendable expression of love between women and men, it is simply not the only option. And in our sexually competitive climate, even romantic love barely deserves the title. Virginity among those seeking marital love would go far to improve the latter’s solidity and permanence, creating an atmosphere of honesty and discovery before the equally necessary and longed-for consummation. Where feminism sees freedom from men by placing body parts at their disposal in a bizarre game of self-deception, virginity recognizes the equally vulnerable though often overlooked state of men’s own hearts and seeks a way to love them for real.

It is puzzling and disturbing to me that regnant feminism has never acknowledged the empowering value of virginity. I tend to think that much of the feminist agenda is more invested in the culture of groundless autonomy and sexual Darwinism than it is in genuinely uplifting women. Of course, virginity is a battle against sexual temptation, and popular culture always opts for the easy way out instead of the character-building struggle. The result is superficial women formed by meaningless choices, worthy of stereotype, rather than laudable women of character, worthy of respect.

Preparing for Love

Perhaps virginity seems a bit cold, even haughty and heartless. But virginity hardly has exclusive claim on those defects, if it has any claim at all. Promiscuity offers a significantly worse fate. I have a very dear friend who, sadly, is more worldly-wise than I am. By libertine feminist standards she ought to be proud of her conquests and ready for more, but frequently she isn’t. The most telling insight about the shambles of her heart came to me once in a phone conversation when we were speculating about our futures. Generally they are filled with exotic travel and adventure and Ph.D.s. This time, however, they were not. She admitted to me that what she really wanted was to be living on a farm in rural Connecticut, raising a horde of children and embroidering tea towels. It is a lovely dream, defiantly unambitious and domestic. But her short, failed sexual relationships haven’t taken her any closer to her dream and have left her little hope that she’ll ever attain it. I must be honest here: virginity hasn’t landed me on a farm in rural Connecticut, either. Sexual innocence is not a guarantee against heartbreak. But there is a crucial difference: I haven’t lost a part of myself to someone who has subsequently spurned it, rejected it, and perhaps never cared for it at all.

I sincerely hope that virginity will not be a lifetime project for me. Quite the contrary, my subversive commitment to virginity serves as preparation for another commitment, for loving one man completely and exclusively. Admittedly, there is a minor frustration in my love: I haven’t met the man yet (at least, not to my knowledge). But hope, which does not disappoint, sustains me.

Subversive Masculinity

Sarah E. Hinlicky

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There are some things in life that are better defined by examples than formulas. Masculinity is one of them. Whenever I've attempted a dictionary-precise definition of masculinity, I've always tripped myself up in endless qualifications and asides. So now instead I collect little anecdotes to illustrate the concept to my liking. Here is one of my favorites. One weekend last year I was at a well-known dance club in New York's Village with a girl friend from college. Two guys I knew from the area were escorting us; we'll call them Timothy and Titus. At some point well into the evening, while we were jumping and jiving in the middle of the dance floor, a drunken stranger tried to, well, grope me. I wasted no time scooting over to the other side of the circle, which naturally raised the boys' curiosity. I explained myself. Titus promptly responded, "Do you want us to take him outside and beat him up for you? I've always wanted to be able to defend a woman like that." The punishment hardly fit the crime, so I declined his offer. But my friend and I were wildly impressed. Neither of us in our lives had met a guy willing to do that for us. What was more, Timothy was the one hoping for a romantic entanglement, not Titus, so the latter stood nothing to gain for his trouble. The story passed among my friends in short order and every last one of them hinted, none too subtly, that they would sure like to meet this man.

Maybe it is embarrassingly retrograde to equate masculinity with a proposal of physical aggression to solve a social infelicity. It would be unwise, though, to turn a blind eye to the enthusiastic reception with which this offer met among the women I know. Unwise also to ignore the fact that this man had made it to his single mid-twenties with his sexual virtue still intact. I had always known that female chastity and girl power went hand in hand. After this incident I began to realize that male chastity and a compelling, attractive masculinity weren't antithetical, either.

Of course, try telling that to a typical American teenage male, and your pains will be met with laughter at best, if not outright derision. The statistic is appalling: by the age of 19 years, 85% of American men have had sex. 30% will have done so by the age of 15, half by the age of 17. It is reasonable to assume that these sexually active young men are not terribly fearful about the state of their masculinity. On the whole, they are considerably more fearful of something else. The number one reason for not having sex among 16- to 21-year-olds is fear of disease (shortly followed by the "not ready" reason – a dangerous rationale that can reverse itself in a matter of seconds).

Fear of disease isn't a very good reason, though, and ultimately not very convincing. For instance... I had a conversation this past summer with my little brother, who is actually only little to me in terms of age – otherwise he's about a foot taller than I am. Our conversation was about the two most important topics in the world, religion and sex. My brother was telling me that he insists on practicing the first now, but planned to save the latter for marriage. I agreed it was a good policy. Then he mentioned that he was kind of amazed that his friends didn't feel the same way. After all, he said, there's such a high risk of pregnancy and disease. That's when I started to get uneasy. The thing of it is, I have known an awful lot of guys who have long since traded in the V card (so to speak) and no such horrible fate has descended upon them. Of all the people I have known who haven't waited, only the tiniest fraction of them has had to deal with either pregnancy or disease. Most suffer little apparent harm, some hurt maybe when the relationship ends, but new love does a nice job of covering up old pain. An ethic based on the fear of traumatic physical consequences will not last very long in the face of a few countervailing examples.

My brother and I ended up agreeing that there had to be more to it than that. God's law just couldn't be so arbitrary, based on a few statistical anomalies that at best work by negative reinforcement and at worst send the persons concerned to the drugstore for not-so-reliable supplies. There had to be some positive content to the "thou shalt not." The positive content is bound to be more persuasive than its negative counterpart, but ironically it isn't mentioned nearly as often, to the detriment of struggling young men. Case in point. There was a guy I knew in college whom several of us half-jokingly called the "Ungracious Virgin." He was holding out because he knew it was right according to his so-called "Sunday school morality." All the same, he resented his childish morality and the God who gave it every step of the way, and so he never matured in his understanding of the law. His fear was of the destructive, not instructive, kind, and he deserves better. So for his sake and my brother's I have been trying, a little paradoxically as a woman, to work my way through the "problem" (some might say *oxymoron*) of male virginity.

For starters, it must be said that a healthy ethic of fear has its place. But if the fear tactic is to be employed at all, the emphasis ought to shift to the bad impact that premarital sex, sometimes even with the fiancée, has on marriages. I've been absolutely staggered to hear one man after another express excruciating regret over his fast and loose past once he's met the woman of his dreams – this came through loud and clear in the informal Boundless survey. The simple (and often denied) fact of the matter is that sexual intercourse binds man to woman, and becoming unbound again is no more possible for the man than it is for the woman. Man ends up carrying with him to the binding vows of marriage all the other people he's been bound to before. Worse yet, it is widely agreed that for men especially sexual memories remain vivid for a very, very long time, regardless of one's marital status. This will not appear to be much of a problem to the man who says he expects very little of love and even less of marriage. But that is a shaky and shallow excuse. It's funny how the idea of "the One" captivates everybody, even the skeptics who try most vehemently to deny it. I'm sure we all have seen a hardened cynic reduced to a state of realization, quivering, sentimental infatuation and chuckled to ourselves at the irony of it all. Most of the non-V guys I know (all of them, perhaps) still aspire to some kind of everlasting love, even if they reject the "institution" of marriage on principle, and keep looking, however doubtfully, for the one great love of their lives. Meanwhile, their lifestyles methodically sabotage their hopes and dreams. Marriage promises the love that is so ardently desired by men, but conditionally – conditioned upon faithfulness not just during marriage but before it too.

The logical question is, then, if men want this kind of love, why do they jeopardize it by messing around so much? I, for one, am not at all persuaded by the line of argument that claims guys are more compelled by their hormones to promiscuity than women are. Whoever made that claim obviously did not know any women very well and vastly underestimated the power of sublimation for men and women alike. I think there's a little more credence to the claim that men are not, as a rule, told by their societies that their own virginity is worth preserving. Generally speaking, cultures have always been more interested in female chastity than its male counterpart. It may not be particularly fair, but it does make sense; after all, women are the ones carrying the babies, and until very recently there was no foolproof way to verify the father's identity. For our own culture, where the stigma of promiscuity has nearly disappeared and the attendant problems are treatable if not curable, I'd like to place blame on one specific person. And the winner is none other than Hugh Hefner.

However it actually developed, and whatever latent social impulses it picked up on, in the final analysis little has been so explicitly destructive of male chastity in the past thirty years or so than the *Playboy* philosophy. I would venture to guess that it has been altogether more destructive for men than even the worst kind of feminism has been for women. The message is simple and seductive, quietly pervading the national male consciousness. Its veneer of respectability makes it particularly alluring; the smooth *Playboy* lifestyle isn't crass like *Hustler*, for heaven's sake, and the magazine always manages to have the best celebrity interviews. Very clever. Even if they resist it or resent it, even if they never let their eyes pass across a single issue, American men know that they are being pressured to score as much as possible. The ideal foisted on them is one of suave promiscuity, backed up by a blandly materialistic worldview. The trap is baited with money. It is reinforced by all the things guys are likely to get interested in: sports, vehicles and fraternities. The lure of luxury effortlessly translates into the lure of womanflesh. One kind of lifestyle naturally implies the other. The materialism of it allows men to shut down their hearts without even noticing.

And that is where I see the most serious destruction. For every baby born out of wedlock and every instance of STD, there must be ten times as many men who have abandoned their claims to soul and spirit. A woman may suffer more visibly from promiscuity in the social and physical penalties she pays. But at the same time, if I may make such a sweeping gen(d)eralization, a woman will stay attuned to her soul and hang on to her heart no matter how damaged they get. Whereas a man, it seems to me, can much more easily ignore that part of his being if not lose it altogether.

Since I started thinking hard about this issue, I've been paying close attention to the non-V twentysomething men I know. Once I started looking, I was surprised by what I found. I saw imperfectly concealed sadness, the eyes of little boys who had slept their way out of childhood and family, who never found a way into a new family with children of their own to reclaim the innocence that they'd had to forsake. I saw these men looking at virgin women with envy – not lust! – at what these lucky girls still had: not a sexual status, but a lightness of heart that is the companion of sexual innocence. Some of these men, I think, hoped to recover the lightheartedness from sheer proximity to virgin women, even while they despaired of ever deserving such a woman for themselves. At other times, their own suppressed despair prompted them to turn on their chaste buddies, unconsciously harassing them into submission (misery loves company). In my own personal encounters with these men, I have often had the startling feeling of

being a lot more grown up than they were. Their post-chaste problem refuses to be ignored. Sexuality grips the imagination so because life and death are wrapped up in it. Rightly fulfilled, it creates humanity in both the lovers and their children. Abused, it kills not only physically but spiritually as well.

And now look at the fallout. These poor men (yes, please pity them; we are a people of repentance and forgiveness) who bought into the Heffner philosophy were gypped out of their manhood. No one ever taught them the meaning of masculinity. No one ever challenged their foolish, boyish ways and forced them to prove that they were really men. No one even cared if they grew up to be men at all. At best they sensed a choice between two false models: one in which manhood was defined by aggressive sexual behavior, high income and mood-altering substances, the other in which anything stereotypically male (strength, protectiveness, daring, competitiveness, authority) has been deemed rude, crude and socially unacceptable. Given that the later is more of a non-option than anything else, it's not surprising that most men have gone for the former, even if they have modified it to fit some inkling of morality they may have ("it's okay if she says so," "it's okay if I love her," etc.). I even wonder if the rise of male homosexual activity in our country isn't somehow linked to a search for real manhood and real danger.

It would help to sort out from the usual clichés about "men-and-sex vs. women-and-love" the genuine intuition about what makes male sexuality distinctly male. Everyone has heard the clichés that say, when it comes to sexual relationships, women focus on the intimacy part and men focus on the physical part. But what really makes male sexuality distinctly male? Maybe it can be stated like this. Female sexuality is specific. Women rarely want sex-in-general: their passion is focused on one with whom the sex is desired. Commitment is inherent in female sexuality, no doubt in large part for biological reasons. The question for women is who the lucky winner will be. And the problem is avoiding bad or too early or serial commitments. But male sexuality isn't like that, perhaps again for biological reasons. It is naturally unfocused and amorphous. It is a challenge for men to focus desire onto one person, one woman, one life partner. Herein the culmination of sexual adulthood for men is found. If men engage in too-early-sex or pre-wife promiscuity, not only is true sexual adulthood subverted, but a crucial challenge to the man — an essential test of his masculinity — is lost or failed, all too often in the supposed pursuit of masculinity itself. Promiscuity undermines masculinity. Fatherhood perfects it.

But if this challenge to men is going to stand, we as a culture have to stop being afraid of masculinity. Certainly we must condemn that which is bad or perverted masculinity (machismo, for instance) but we dare not lose the good and true masculinity along with it. My family has a story that illustrates this beautifully. Many many years ago when my great-grandparents were first married (in the 1920s or '30s) they got into an awful fight. My great-grandpa lost his temper and hit my great-grandma for the first time ever. With that the fight ended, because my great-grandma turned away and refused to speak to her husband for the next three days. Finally, on the third day, he got down on his knees before her and begged for her forgiveness, which she granted, and he never hit her again. In some ways it is a shocking story – I certainly was shocked the first time I heard it. But look at what is going on under the surface. This working-class Christian man learned for himself that violence towards his own wife was a sign of weakness and not strength, infidelity and not marital prerogative. As her husband he was called to serve and protect her, not dominate and hurt her. And he learned powerfully the depth of her love and faithfulness towards him because she was willing to forgive an ugly sin when he came to her in repentance. My great-grandfather was a physically powerful man, but through that story we have always understood that his greatest strength was in his humble apology. The time has come to reconnect masculinity and morality. They have been severed from one another far too long. Morality is never persuasive until you can show what it's for. It has to point to something higher and better or else it becomes sheer social utility. If women should be aiming for a "cartel of virtue" (to use Wendy Shalit's words), then men, as a whole and not just in tiny pockets, should aim for an "alliance of valor." Valor is the marriage of masculinity and morality, the cultivation of the highest and best way for men. Giving in to lust and money and cultural pressures is just so easy. Winning the heart of a good woman, raising a child to love and fear the Lord, and contributing to a worthy vocation are not so easy. But they are the signs of a real man.

Sexual Purity

The Colorado Statement on Biblical Sexual Morality

The Bible reveals that God's character defines for us what it means to be sexually pure: God's mandate to His people is to "be holy, because I am holy."

We believe that God intends for people to enjoy sex within His established limits. However, because we live in a fallen world, we also believe the following:

Desire and experience cannot be trusted to set the morality of sex. The morality of sex is set by God's holiness.

God's standard is purity in every thought about sex, as well as in every act of sex. Sexual purity is violated even in thoughts that never proceed to outward acts. Sex must never be used to oppress, wrong or take advantage of anyone. Rape, incest, sexual abuse, pedophilia, voyeurism, prostitution and pornography always exploit and corrupt.

God's standards for sexual moral purity protect human happiness. But sex is not an entitlement, nor is it needed for personal wholeness or emotional maturity.

God calls some to a life of marriage and others to lifelong celibacy, but His calling to either state is a divine gift worthy of honor and respect. No one is morally compromised by following God's call to either state, and no one can justify opposing a divine call to either state by denying the moral goodness of that state.

Sexual behavior is moral only within the institution of heterosexual, monogamous marriage. Marriage is secure only when established by an unconditional, covenantal commitment to *lifelong* fidelity, and we should not separate what God has joined. Christians continue to debate whether there are a limited number of situations in which divorce is justifiable (Deut. 24:1-4; Matt. 19:9; 1 Cor. 7:15), but all agree that divorce is never God's ideal; lifelong commitment should always be the Christian's goal.

Marriage protects the transcendent significance of personal sexual intimacy. Heterosexual union in marriage expresses the same sort of holy, exclusive, permanent, complex, selfless, and complementary intimacy that some day will characterize the union of Christ with the redeemed and glorified Church.

Sex in marriage should be an act of love and grace that transcends the petty sins of human selfishness, and should be set aside only when both partners agree to do so, and then only for a limited time of concentrated prayer.

Sex outside of marriage is never moral. This includes all forms of intimate sexual stimulation that stir up sexual passion between unmarried partners. Such behavior offends God, and often causes physical and emotional pain and loss in this life. Refusal to repent of sexual sin may indicate that a person never has entered into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

The Old and New Testaments uniformly condemn sexual contact between persons of the same sex; and God has decreed that no one can ever excuse homosexual behavior by blaming his or her Creator.

The moral corruption of sexual sin can be fully forgiven through repentance and faith in Christ's atonement, but physical and emotional scars caused by sexual sin cannot always be erased in this life.

Christians must grieve with and help those who suffer hard-ship caused by sexual immorality, even when it is caused by their own acts of sin. But we must give aid in ways that do not deny moral responsibility for sexual behavior.

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Thoughts on Sexuality and Temptation

A recent George Barna poll found that 36 percent of self-proclaimed born-again Christians approve of cohabitation, and 39 percent said indulging in sexual fantasies is morally acceptable—despite biblical principles to the contrary. Gary Phillips, former professor of Bible at Bryan College, points out that, “We are made in God’s image and that is why God judges sexual sin more harshly than other sins. It not only violates the law and character of God, it also violates the *being* of God. Our students must understand that God does not share our society’s casual attitude toward sexual immorality. I tell students, ‘Whatever you do, don’t take God’s being and image and violate it in the back seat of a car or in a motel room.’”

- A. God created sex when He created the first man and woman. Sex was part of His plan to be enjoyed by humans. He placed strong sexual instincts in man so that His creation would continue to multiply. Sex, when in God’s plan and timing, is beautiful and honoring to Him.
- D. Thinking about sex *can* be sin. Jesus said, “You have heard it said that you shall not commit adultery, but I say to you that everyone that looks upon a woman to lust for her has committed adultery with her already in his heart” (Matthew 5:27-28). Self-gratification is clearly a perversion of the sex act and is often accompanied by lustful thoughts of someone else.
- E. Talk of sex *can* be sinful. Ephesians 4:3-4 says, “Let there be no sex-sin impurity once named among you. Let no one be able to accuse you of any such things. Dirty stories, foul talk and course jokes-these are not for you. Let no one be able to accuse you of any such things. Instead remind each other of God’s goodness and be thankful.” Jesus said in Matthew 12:34-36, “Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give an account thereof in the day of judgment.”
- F. The best way to understand the seriousness with which God takes this issue is to imagine what it means symbolically if the marriage relationship between the man and the woman is meant to be a picture of Christ and the church. To be united to a person sexually outside of marriage is to either to suggest that Christ is a predator or that the church can receive salvation without going through God’s plan. Homosexual unions become blasphemous: as if to say that Christ would be united with himself, or that the church would not need Christ, but could find salvation and fulfillment through union with itself. This does *not* mean that men are “little Christs” or that women are the embodiment of Christ’s perfect plan. It does mean, however, that our behavior should honor that which God has designed it to represent.

The Five Stages of Pornography Addiction:

- *Early exposure*
Most guys who get addicted to porn start early. They see the stuff when they are very young, and it gets its foot in the door.
- *Addiction*
Later comes addiction. You keep coming back to porn. It becomes a regular part of your life. You’re hooked. You can’t quit.
- *Escalation*
After a while, escalation begins. You start to look for more and more graphic porn. You start using porn that would have disgusted you when you started. Now it excites you.
- *Desensitization*
Eventually, you start to become numb. Even the most graphic, degrading porn doesn’t excite you anymore. You become desperate to feel the same thrill again, but can’t find it.

- *Acting Out Sexually*

At this point, many men make a dangerous jump and start acting out sexually. They move from the paper and plastic images of porn to the real world.

Excerpted from "In Your Face, In Your Mind: Resisting the Power of Pornography," a booklet of Focus on the Family. Copyright © 2000, Focus on the Family. All rights reserved. International copyright secured. Used by permission.

Subtle Dangers of Pornography

Ted Bundy confessed before he was executed for multiple murders that addiction to pornography fueled his violent behavior. Many viewers of pornography claim that occasional viewing of nudity will not turn them into serial killers. True, only a small percentage of individuals who view pornography develop addictions that lead them to violent behavior. Pornography, however, does pose subtle dangers worth considering

National Coalition for the Protection of Children and Families

In his book, *The Centerfold Syndrome*, psychologist Gary R. Brooks, Ph.D., identifies five principal symptoms of what he describes as a "pervasive disorder" linked to consumption of soft-core pornography like *Playboy* and *Penthouse*.

Voyeurism – An obsession with looking at women rather than interacting with them. Brooks contends that the explosion in glorification and objectification of women's bodies promotes unreal images of women, distorts physical reality, creates an obsession with visual stimulation and trivializes all other mature features of a healthy psychosexual relationship.

Objectification – An attitude in which women are objects rated by size, shape and harmony of body parts. Brooks asserts that if a man spends most of his emotional energy on sexual fantasies about inaccessible people, he frequently will not be available for even the most intimate emotional and sexual moments with his partner.

Validation – The need to validate masculinity through beautiful women. According to Brooks, the women who meet centerfold standards only retain their power as long as they maintain perfect bodies and the leverage of mystery and unavailability. And the great majority of men who never come close to sex with their dream woman are left feeling cheated or unmanly.

Trophyism – The idea that beautiful women are collectibles who show the world who a man is. Brooks asserts that the women's-bodies-as-trophies mentality, damaging enough in adolescence, becomes even more destructive in adulthood. Furthermore, trophies, once they are won, are supposed to become the property of the winner, a permanent physical symbol of accomplishment and worthiness. This cannot be so with women's bodies.

Fear of true intimacy – Inability to relate to women in an honest and intimate way despite deep loneliness. Pornography pays scant attention to men's needs for sensuality and intimacy while exalting their sexual needs. Thus, some men develop a preoccupation with sexuality, which powerfully handicaps their capacity for emotionally intimate relationships with men and for nonsexual relationships with women.

A FEW THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Professors Dolf Zillman of Indiana University and Jennings Bryant of the University of Houston found that repeated exposure to pornography results in a decreased satisfaction with one's sexual partner, with the partner's sexuality, with the partner's sexual curiosity, a decrease in the valuation of faithfulness and a major increase in the importance of sex without attachment.
- A study conducted by Dr. Reo Christensen of Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, found that pornography leaves the impression with its viewers that sex has no relationship to privacy; that it is unrelated to love, commitment or marriage; that bizarre forms of sex are the most gratifying; that sex with animals has an especially desirable flavor; and that irresponsible sex has no adverse consequences.

- According to the book *Media, Children, and the Family: social Scientific, Psychodynamic, and Clinical Perspectives*, research has shown that sexual arousal and accompanying excitedness diminish with repeated exposure to sexual scenes. As exposure to commonly shown sexual activities leaves consumers relatively unexcited, they are likely to seek out pornography that features novel and potentially less common sexual acts.
- In addition, in a series of studies, researchers observed numerous persistent changes in perceptions concerning sexuality and sexual behavior after repeated exposing (i.e., six 1-hours weekly sessions) volunteers to pornography. These include the trivialization of rape as a criminal offense, exaggerated perceptions of the prevalence of most sexual practices, increased callousness toward female sexuality and concerns, dissatisfaction with sexual relationships and diminished caring for and trust in intimate partners.
- In the book *Back From Betrayal*, author Jennifer P. Schneider, M.D., asserts that for some dissatisfied people, fantasizing about affairs is the first step to a real affair. She suggests that the fantasization process occupies such a large part of a person's inner world that little energy is left for the marital relationship.
- According to Francine Klagsbrun, author of *Married People: Staying Together in the Age of Divorce*, the reason marriage provides the greatest possibility for intimacy is because marriage is predicated on the idea of exclusivity. And one of the differences between marriage and other friendships is the importance of exclusivity.
- In the book, *Men Confront Pornography*, Michael S. Kimmel maintains that pornography is one of the major sources of sexual information that young males have about sexuality and is therefore the central mechanism by which their sexuality has been constructed. "Men can no longer hide behind pornography as harmless fun."

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Women and Sex Addiction

Sex addiction is not just a man's problem. Marnie Ferree offers hope for women who have shared her struggle with affairs and pornography.

By Marnie C. Ferree, M.A., LMFT

The Anguish of Sexual Addiction

If you're a woman whose life has been affected by pornography or sexual addiction, you may feel all alone. Perhaps you doubt other homes could be dealing with sexual sin. Other families look so perfect and uncomplicated.

If you're a female who *personally* is struggling with pornography or other secret sexual activity, your feelings are probably even more intense. You're lonely and ashamed. You feel like you're the only one. You're terrified someone may discover your secret life. You wonder what's the matter with you. If you are a Christian, you may wonder how it is possible to call yourself a believer and still indulge in this kind of behavior.

You may desperately want to change your life. To stop acting out. God knows you've tried! But you find you *can't* stop, and you feel like a failure. . . a disappointment to those who care about you, to yourself, and certainly to God.

You know you need help, but you have no idea where to turn. Where do you dare confess this ugly secret?

My Difficult Story

I understand your pain, your fear, your confusion, your loneliness, your dilemma. I, too, am a woman who for years was actively consumed with sexual addiction. I know what it's like to be powerless over out-of-control sexual behavior and to have my life become totally unmanageable. I remember believing I couldn't go on living, but being too afraid to die.

I am the daughter of a pastor, and I was raised to be in church every time the doors were open. We had daily devotionals around the dinner table. I definitely was taught the distinction between right and wrong. As a teenager, a college student, and a young wife and mother I was active in church and sincerely wanted to serve the Lord. At the same time, I was involved addictively in promiscuous and then extra-marital sex, beginning from the age of 14 or 15. I carried on serial and even simultaneous relationships. In significant ways I violated my marriage vows and harmed my children. I knew what I was doing was wrong, and I prayed often for the strength to stop – and stay stopped. But repeatedly I failed.

I was being driven by a powerful pain inside which I could neither identify nor name. My mother died when I was three, and my father was usually absent—tending to his pastoral and teaching responsibilities. I had felt abandoned all my life. I saw my first pornography at an early age and was confused by the images and the way they made me feel. Beginning at age five, I was sexually molested in a very romanticized relationship by a trusted family friend. I thought that sex was equal to love, and I spent the next 20 years in a desperate search for a man to love me. I would flirt, I would pursue, I would manipulate, I would do anything to gain a male's attention and "commitment." I found that giving sex was the surest way to get what felt at the time like love.

Even grave consequences from my behavior weren't enough to make me stop. I lost my first marriage, my health from a sexually transmitted disease, my reputation, and my self-respect. Finally, increasing thoughts of suicide drove me to ask for help.

Getting Help

That desperate request eight years ago started a journey of healing that I would never have imagined. With the help of a graceful God, a Christian counselor, a 12-step program, and supportive friends, I've been given a new life. My husband and I have restored our marriage, and our children have healed from our family's dysfunction. I've even been blessed with the opportunity to help others, especially women, recover from the problem of sexual addiction. God daily provides me chances to redeem the pain of my experiences by reaching out to other hurting addicts through a ministry designed especially for women.

If you can identify with my story, please know that there *is* hope! It *is* possible to be free from lust, sexual sin, and self-loathing. You can start today!

A key point is that *you can't recover alone*. You *must* ask other safe people—such as Christian counselors and friends—to help you learn and practice a new way of life. Your private confessions to God may result in His forgiveness, but they won't bring you permanent sobriety and transformation. Accountability and fellowship are crucial.

I've found in my own journey that God has been faithful to meet my every need. Whether you're an addict or an addict's spouse, He'll do the same for you. Ask Him for the willingness to seek help. Dare to take that first step toward wholeness. Like the woman at the well, God will meet you and provide help and healing.

Marnie C. Ferree is a licensed marriage and family therapist. She is rapidly becoming known as a leader in the field of female sex addiction recovery. As a recovering addict who has been sober for many years, she understands this problem from a personal as well as a professional perspective.

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Pornography Statistics 2003

Internet Pornography statistics become outdated very quickly, especially in the Internet environment where numbers change daily. The following pornography statistics are current as of 2003. These statistics have been derived from a number of different reputable sources including Google, WordTracker, PBS, MSNBC, NRC, and Alexa research.

Pornography Industry Statistics

- Size of the industry - \$57.0 billion world-wide
- \$12.0 billion US
- Porn revenue is larger than all combined revenues of all professional football, baseball and basketball franchises.
- US porn revenue exceeds the combined revenues of ABC, CBS, and NBC (6.2 billion)

Internet Porn Statistics

• Pornographic websites	4.2 million (12% of total websites)
• Pornographic pages	372 million
• Daily pornographic search engine requests	68 million (25% of total search engine requests)
• Daily pornographic emails	2.5 billion (8% of total emails)
• Average daily pornographic emails/user	4.5 per internet user
• Monthly Pornographic downloads (Peer-to-peer)	1.5 billion (35% of all downloads)
• Daily Gnutella “child pornography” requests	116 thousand
• Websites offering illegal child pornography	100 thousand
• Sexual solicitations of youth made in chat rooms	89%
• Youths who received sexual solicitation	20%
• Worldwide visitors to pornographic web sites	72 million annually

Adult Internet Porn Statistics

• Men admitting to accessing pornography at work	20%
• Women admitting to accessing pornography at work	13%
• US adults who regularly visit Internet pornography websites	40 million
• Promise Keeper men who viewed pornography in last week	53%
• Christians who said pornography is a major problem in the home	47%
• Adults admitting to Internet sexual addiction	10%
• Breakdown of male/female visitors to pornography sites	72% male – 28% female

Statistics

From the National Coalition for Protection of Children and Families (<http://www.nationalcoalition.org/stat.html>)

Sex and the Internet

- The generation we are looking at right now has never known a time of innocence.”
How One man Unleashed the porn Plague, Andy Butcher. Charisma Magazine, November 2003

- Approximately 40 million people in the United States are sexually involved with the Internet
Exposing Porn: Science, Religion, and the New Addiction, Paul Strand. Christian Broadcasting Network, 2004.
- One in five children ages 10-17 have received a sexual solicitation over the Internet
The Web's Dark Secret. Newsweek, 19 March, 2001.
- Three million of the visitors to adult web sites in September 2000 were age 17 or younger
NetValue Report on Minors Online. Business Wire, 19 December, 2000.
- One in four children who use the Internet are exposed to unwanted sexual material
Your Children & Pornography: A guide for Parents, Tom Buford. Tommera Press, 2001.
- 2.5 billion emails per day are pornographic
Pornography Statistics 2003, Family Safe Media. www.familysafemedia.com, 2003.
- 25 percent of all search engine requests are pornography related
Internet Pornography Statistics: 2003, David C. Bisette, Psy.D. www.healthy mind.com, 2004.
- 72 million Internet users visit pornography web sites per year
Pornography Statistics 2003. Internet Filter Review. www.internetfilterreview.com, 2003.
- 94 percent of Americans believe a ban on Internet pornography should be legal
Statistics on Internet Pornography. www.levelbest.com
- 79 percent of Americans say the government should do something about the potential for dangerous strangers to make contact with children
Survey Shows Widespread Enthusiasm for High Technology. NPR Online. <http://www.npr.org/programs/specials/poll/technology/>, 1999.
- One in 17 children ages 10-17 were threatened or harassed over the Internet
Report Statistical Highlights. National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, Crimes Against Children, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2000.
- Nearly 1.4 million Americans are stalked online each year (4 out of 5 are women)
Stalkers Online, Andrea Rock. Ladies' Home Journal, March 2000.
- Sex is the number 1 topic searched on the internet
Overdosing on Porn, Rebecca Hagelin. www.worldandi.com, March, 2004.
- The Adult Industry Medical Health Care Foundation, a health-care clinic for porn workers, carries out 600 AIDS and STD tests per month
How One man Unleashed the porn Plague, Andy Butcher. Charisma Magazine, November 2003.
- 34 percent of churchgoing women said they have intentionally visited porn web sites online
Internet porn a guy thing? Not really, online rating service says, Mark O'Keefe. The Charlotte Observer.
- Less than 10% of sexual solicitations and only 3% of unwanted exposure on the Internet were reported to authorities
Online Victimization: A Report on the Nation's Youth. National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, Crimes Against Children, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2000.
- 39 million homes receive the adult channels in scrambled form, while the number of children with potential exposure to such images is about 29 million
Court looks at adult channel 'bleed,' Michael Kirkland. UPF Financial Wire, 30 November, 1999.

- Cable companies brought in revenue of \$177 million from sexually explicit pay-per-view programming
No Big Surge in Sex Programs is Expected From Cable Ruling, Jim Rutenberg. The New York Times, 24 May, 2000.
- 70 percent of sexual advances over the Internet happened while youngsters were on a home computer
One in Five Kids Has Been Propositioned for Cybersex. Legal Facts. Vol. 2, No. 3, 2000.
- 21 percent of teens say they have looked at something on the Internet that they wouldn't want their parents to know
A World of Their Own. Newsweek, 8 May 2000.
- Out of 81 pastors surveyed (74 males 7 female), 98% were exposed to porn; 43% intentionally accessed a sexually explicit web site
National Coalition survey of pastors. Seattle. April 2000.

Teens and Sex

- 45 percent of 1,000 surveyed teens admitted parents are the biggest influence in deciding whether or not to have sex
New York Times, Kate Zernike. 16 December, 2003.
- 42 percent of guys and 33% of girls ages 15-17 have had intercourse
Let's Talk About Sex, Melissa Daly. Seventeen Magazine, July 2003.
- Median age for the first use of pornography: boys: 11-13 girls: 12-14
Your Children & Pornography: A guide for Parents, Tom Buford. Tommera Press, 2001.
- An estimated 18% of girls who are 15 years old will have a baby before age 20
The Percentage of Teens Having Sex Continues to Decline, Amber Moore. www.childtrends.org, 24 November, 2003.
- The United States' birth rate among teens is the highest compared to France, Canada, Japan and Great Britain
What is the Story on Teen Sexuality?, Andrea Pennington, M.D. <http://health.discovery.com>.
- In 2002, it was estimated that 3.2 million teens under the age of 15 were living with HIV
AIDS, Sex & Teens. www.avert.org.
- There are 700 abstinence-only programs covering the United States; President Bush hopes to increase spending for such programs from \$60 million to \$135 million
Sex-Ed Online, Rogene Fisher. www.abcnews.com, 19 March, 2004.
- 85 percent of the 1 million teen pregnancies per year in the United States are unplanned
Statistics on Teen Pregnancies. www.pregnacny-info.net.
- In grades 7-12, 23.4% of first sexual relationships are one-night stands
Study: Teens who hurry love less likely to use birth control, Karen S. Peterson. USA Today.
- 33 percent of guys and 23% of girls feel some or a lot of pressure to have sex
Let's Talk About Sex, Melissa Daly. Seventeen Magazine, July 2003.
- Women ages 20-24 obtain 32% of all abortion
Who Has Abortions? Focus on the Family. <http://www.family.org/pregnancy/articles/a0030225.cfm> - 22.1KB

- 82 percent of teens did not use birth control pills during last sexual intercourse
US Teens' Sexual Behavior Statistics. Focus on the Family.
<http://www.family.org/cforum/fosi/abstinence/facts/a0027048.cfm>, 24 July, 2003.
- Half of all American youth will have contracted an STD by age 25
Half of young people will contract STDs, according to new study. American Family Association Journal, May 2004.
- 9.1 million young people ages 15-24 have contracted a sexually transmitted disease
Half of young people will contract STDs, according to new study. American Family Association Journal, May 2004.
- 45 percent of teens do not use protection regularly
Charlotte Observer, April 2004.
- 68 percent of teens are unconcerned about STDs
Charlotte Observer, April 2004.
- 19 million teens are infected with STDs per year
Charlotte Observer, April 2004.
- One in 12 children are no longer virgins by his/her 13th birthday
The Secret Sex Lives of Kids, Lisa Collier Cool. Ladies' Home Journal, 2001.
- 21 percent of ninth-graders have slept with four or more partners
The Secret Sex Lives of Kids, Lisa Collier Cool. Ladies' Home Journal, 2001.
- 55 percent of teens ages 13-19 admitted to engaging in oral sex
Seventeen Magazine, 2001.
- 88 percent of teens ages 12-19 say it would be easier to postpone sexual activity if able to have more open, honest conversations with parents
National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, September 2003.
- Two-thirds of U.S. teenagers who have had sexual relations wish they had waited longer
Teens want to wait for sex, Joyce Howard Price. The Washington Times, December 2003.
- 28 percent of teens say they have become more opposed to early sex
Teens want to wait for sex, Joyce Howard Price. The Washington Times, December 2003.
- 84 percent of teens say pregnancy-prevention programs should teach young people to be married before they have a child
Teens want to wait for sex, Joyce Howard Price. The Washington Times, December 2003.
- 26 percent of teens think it is embarrassing to admit they are virgins
Teens want to wait for sex, Joyce Howard Price. The Washington Times, December 2003.
- Every day, 8,000 teenagers become infected by a STD
Sexually Active Teenagers Are More Likely to Be Depressed and to Attempt Suicide, Robert Rector, Kirk Johnson and Lauren Noyes. The Heritage Foundation, 3 June, 2003.
- Sexually active girls are more than three times more likely to be depressed than are girls who are not sexually active; sexually active boys are more than twice as likely to be depressed as are those who are not sexually active
Sexually Active Teenagers Are More Likely to Be Depressed and to Attempt Suicide, Robert Rector, Kirk Johnson and Lauren Noyes. The Heritage Foundation, 3 June, 2003.

- Sexually active girls are nearly three times more likely to attempt suicide than are girls who are not sexually active; sexually boys are eight times more likely to attempt suicide than are boys who are not sexually active
Sexually Active Teenagers Are More Likely to Be Depressed and to Attempt Suicide, Robert Rector, Kirk Johnson and Lauren Noyes. The Heritage Foundation, 3 June, 2003.

Marriage and Family

- 47.78 percent of families said pornography is a problem in their home
Focus on the Family Poll, 1 October, 2003.
- 75.5 percent of surveyed adults said it was okay to visit an adult web site, while 79.7% said it was okay for a significant other to reply to an unsolicited instant message or chat with a stranger of the opposite sex
My Wife doesn't care' if I fool around online, Leslie Miller. USA Today, 10 July, 2000.
- 65 to 85 percent of men and 80% of women said they were monogamous in marriage
What We Know About Sex, Jennifer Mendelsohn. USA Weekend, The Cincinnati Enquirer, 7 November, 2003.
- Half of unmarried men ages 20-29 said they would have sex without any interest in marriage
Why Men Won't Commit: Exploring Young Men's Attitudes About Sex, Dating and Marriage, Barbara Dafoe Whitehead and David Popenoe. The National Marriage Project, 2002.
- In the 1990's, more than half of the brides had already lived together with a boyfriend
National Marriage Project: Cohabitation Report, Barbara Dafoe Whitehead and David Popenoe. 1999.
- 957,200 divorces and 2,355,005 marriages took place in 2000, making the divorce rate 40%
The Divorce Rate, The National Center for Health Statistics. www.divorcereform.org, 2000.
- There were 11.72 million single parents in 2002
U.S. Divorce Statistics. www.divorcemag.com, 2002.
- 74 percent of men try to postpone sex if the relationship has long-term potential
Why Men Won't Commit: Exploring Young Men's Attitudes About Sex, Dating and Marriage, Barbara Dafoe Whitehead and David Popenoe. The National Marriage Project, 2002

Portrayals of Sex in the Media

- 75 percent of prime time television in the 1999-2000 season included sexual content
Sex on TV: Content and Context. The Kaiser Family Foundation, 5 February, 2001.
- 23 percent of couples in scenes with intercourse appeared to be ages 18-24
Your Children & Pornography: A guide for Parents, Tom Buford. Tommera Press, 2001.
- Movies have an 87% likelihood of presenting sexual material
Sex on TV: Content and Context. The Kaiser Family Foundation, 5 February, 2001.
- The average American adolescent will view nearly 14,000 sexual references per year
Sexuality, Contraception, and the Media. American Academy of Pediatrics Committee on Public Education, January, 2001.
- Premarital sex is referred to two or three times every hour in soap operas
Teens and Sex, Paul A. Gore, Ph.D. University of Missouri-Kansas City. www.umkc.edu, 22 April, 1998.
- More than 3 out of 4 Americans say the way television programs show sex encourages irresponsible sexual behavior
Teens, Sex, & the Media. www.mediascope.org, 15 March, 2000.

- 12-17 year old young men are most susceptible and vulnerable to mass media sexual portrayals
Pornography: A review of scientific literature, Stan E. Weed, Ph.D. 17 October, 1997.
- 66 percent of children (ages 10-16) surveyed say their peers are influenced by television shows
It's Just Harmless Entertainment... Oh Really? Parents Television Council. www.parentstv.org.
- 64 percent of all shows include sexual content, and only 15% mention waiting, protection, and consequences
TV Sex Getting "Safer." Kaiser Family Foundation. www.kff.org, 2003.
- Playboy's largest cable channel, Playboy TV, is available in 24 million of the nation's 81 million homes that receive either satellite, cable or digital television
Court Overrides Law restricting Cable Sex Shows, Linda Greenhouse. The New York Times On the Web. <http://www.nytimes.com/library/politics/scotus/articles/052300scotus.html>
- "The Center for Media and Public Affairs' new study found that sexual content is featured once every four minutes on network TV, with 98% of all sexual content having no subsequent physical consequences, 85% of sexual behavior having no lasting emotional impact, and that nearly 75% of the participants in sexual activity were unmarried."
New look at TV sex and violence. National Catholic Register, 16-22 April 2000.
- Sexual content on prime-time TV more than tripled in the past ten years
More TV Sex, USA Today. 30 March, 2000.

Entertainment/Technology/Advertising

- Sexual content (pornography) over cell phones will generate over \$1.5 billion in Western Europe, as the Vodafone Group introduces and provides "risqué" content to customers phones
In Europe, Cell Phone Profits Go Up as Clothes Come Off, Jennifer L. Schenker. The New York Times, 4 May, 2004.
- Marketers are abstaining from sex as sales tool due to the after-shock of the Super Bowl half-time show; Anheuser-Busch, Victoria's Secret and Abercrombie & Fitch are among the companies who are dropping risqué advertising
Risqué may be too risky for ads, Bruce Horovitz. USA Today, 16 April, 2004.
- Carl's, Jr. adopts Hugh Hefner as a representative for the hamburger chain, claiming, "as a pop-icon, Hefner appeals to our target audience and credibly communicates our message of variety."
Christian Broadcaster Blasts Carl's, Jr. for Ad's Sexual Innuendo, James L. Lambert. American Family Association, November 2003.
- Young people are sexualized at an earlier and earlier age...Stars like Britney Spears and Christina Aguilera have long been criticized for exploiting their sexuality for profit. The next generation can already be seen emulating its older sisters – literally.
Mini-Britneys. The Washington Times, 3-9 may, 2004.

Resources

Books:

Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood-A Response to Evangelical Feminism Edited by John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Crossway Books, 1991) This book is a compilation of essays from prominent figures in Christianity on the Complementarian View of Roles, with an introduction by Wayne Grudem and John Piper on

mature masculinity and femininity. This book is a great resource that thoroughly researches the role of women from a Biblical perspective and how that influences roles in the home and the church.

Of Knights and Fair Maidens by Jeff and Danielle Myers (Heartland Educational Consultants, 1996). Jeff and Danielle met and married through a “courtship” relationship that was based on the biblical principles of accountability, character and preparation. They tell the story of their relationship and give lots of ideas for how to have integrity in your own relationships.

When God Writes Your Love Story by Eric and Leslie Ludy (Multnomah Publishers, Inc. 2004). Singles, here's a challenging and refreshing approach to relationships in a culture where love has been replaced by pleasure. Discover God's way to true love, which brings fulfillment and romance in its purest, richest, and most satisfying form. This updated edition features an extra chapter from Leslie about the surprises of life after marriage! 256 pages, softcover from Multnomah. Website: www.ericandleslie.com

Websites:

www.fotf.org. Focus on the Family's web site features everything you need about families: marriage, relationships, public policy information, and more. Dr. Dobson's past newsletters are featured, as are dozens of reports on issues ranging from homosexuality to gambling to the social benefits of marriage.

www.frc.org. Family Research Council's website is the most useful site for studying marriage and family issues from a public policy standpoint. Articles on homosexual marriage, political issues affecting marriage, abortion, etc. are all featured.

www.nationalcoalition.org The National Coalition for Protection of Children and Families is a organization that seeks to move the people of God to embrace, live out and defend the biblical truth of sexuality. They provide resources on current issues like pornography, homosexuality, and teen sexual activity.

www.pureintimacy.org This is a website by Focus on the Family that provides articles and resources on intimacy and addictions, the theology of sexuality, and homosexuality with specific sections for ministry leaders, parents and couples. This site is devoted to providing the best available resources on sexual addiction, pornography use, and other areas involving sexual brokenness.

www.bethesdaworkshops.org Bethesda Workshops encourages sexual wholeness by ministering to those damaged by sexual sin and addiction. Through our intensive program, which uses the best clinical strategies coupled with Christian principles, people can experience a huge jumpstart for recovery. Separate five-day workshops are offered for male sexual addicts, female addicts, spouses of addicts, and couples.

www.fiveaspects.org (The International Council for Gender Studies is formed of evangelical Christians in America and Europe who are committed to speaking the historic Christian faith to this generation. We think that non-biblical egalitarian tenets about the nature and relationship of men and women are not only corrosive to society at large, but also pose a threat to the spiritual vitality and integrity of the Church.)

www.cbmw.org (The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood. This is an excellent website!)