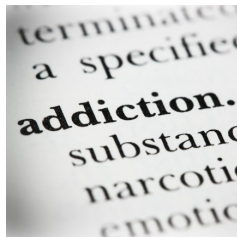




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# A Measure of Grace

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## Female Sex Addiction *by Roger Jones*

Male sexual addiction is the focus of more and more studies and articles, yet there is often little in the way of information available to women who are dealing with addictive behaviors. As with many other issues, women are often left to read a resource primarily written for men and then try to adapt it to their own situations. Everyone (both male and female) must do a bit of translating when seeking to apply self-help materials, as everyone is different. But the forces driving sex addiction for women can be very different than those driving men. Women need their own resources. I will at least refer to a couple.

While there is great shame associated with sexual struggles and addiction in general, it can especially be so for women. Marnie Ferree describes this in her book *No Stones: Women Redeemed from Sexual Addiction*, "As if the  
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shame of being addicted to sex isn't bad enough, the stigma of being a woman who struggles with this problem is particularly intense .... Our culture has the attitude that 'boys will be boys' or that illicit sexual behavior is 'just a male thing.' A female who has a sexual addiction is considered especially perverted. After all, women aren't even supposed to like sex. We're the ones with the proverbial headaches." <sup>1</sup>

Lest we vilify sex and those women who participate in it and (gasp) enjoy it, it is helpful to have a common definition of addiction. Patrick Carnes has provided a simple and helpful one, "being addicted is to have a pathological relationship with a mood altering substance or behavior."<sup>2</sup> While sex is intended to be good, the way people use it can lead them astray. When someone begins to use sex to ease their loneliness or to express their anger or to avoid feeling sadness *and* this is repeated (pathological), one is in danger of becoming addicted to sex. It becomes an outlet and coping strategy for emotions that are not about sex or healthy connection with another.

Later in her book, Ferree talks about the "double bind" that Christian

women face in our culture. There are multiple messages that women take on, some of which are completely contradictory. "I must be good to be worthy of love."<sup>3</sup> Many girls are taught from an early age that they must be good, obedient, polite, submissive to men, and humble. While these are virtues that deserve varying degrees of discussion, these are often taught in such ways that are to the detriment of the woman's personality and personhood.

"If I'm sexual, I'm bad."<sup>3</sup> This message is very confusing. A woman who is sexual outside of marriage is considered a slut or a whore. Men are often praised for the same behavior. That is hardly fair treatment, particularly when "it takes two to tango." This is not just a religious message, but one that the secular parts of culture adhere to as well. If having sex outside of marriage is in

conflict with a person's values, then acting outside of this value system can trigger deep feelings of shame. It is, however, important to make a distinction between guilt and shame. Guilt says, "I did something bad." Shame says, "I am bad." If I did something bad, then I can do something different next time. If I believe I am inherently bad and that only bad people do the things I've done, then

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***While there is great shame associated with sexual struggles and addiction in general, it can especially be so for women.***

## Gods Provision: Abraham, Sarah and I

by Mary Heathman

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**S**o in my last article, I introduced the topic of the sufficiency of God's provision. I let my bias be known, but also said, *"I am not always [at] a point of faith and commitment to wait for God's provision, so I am especially grateful for biblical stories that both (1) help me understand that I am not alone in my confusion and impatience with God, and (2) teach me principles to live by as I follow Christ."*

As we face the end of the year with uncertainties about when and where we will move our offices and a new structure to our programs, I am particularly in need of the insight and encouragement that can be gleaned from *"biblical examples of waiting (or not) on the Lord, and how that played out in the lives of biblical characters like Abraham and Sara, Joseph, Saul/Paul, and others."* As I read these stories, I am wrestling with the realities of my personal life as well as that of WGA's future. *"Chafing a bit under the discipline of waiting in some areas of my own life,"* it helps to remember that *"there is nothing new under the sun"* and *"there is no temptation that has overtaken us that is not common to man."* It is good to remember that, *"We're all in the same boat, you know!"* As I think about being in the same

boat with heroes of the faith, I find myself considering Abraham's own inconsistency in his trust of and commitment to waiting on the Lord. If you are familiar with the story of Abraham's life, you will remember that at God's call, he left his homeland, took all his family and possessions and set out for an unknown destination (see Gen.12:1; Heb.11:8; Acts 7:2-6). What great faith! What an inspiration—his obedience, his willingness to sacrifice all that he knew, in submission to God! This story always gets to the heart of things for me—I am always impressed, challenged, inspired, and encouraged in my faith.

However, later on in Abraham's story, we find that when it was to his advantage—to gain good favor and gifts from Pharaoh, and when he thought his life might be in danger—he told a half-truth, that his wife, Sarah, was his sister. (Read about this in Genesis 12:10-20, 20:1-18, 26:6-12.) Abraham did what I am so tempted to do, even catch myself actually doing—just a *little* truth withheld, just a *little* twist, maybe, and I can protect myself or gain some perceived good for me or my family. And in the process, Abraham and I don't wait on the Lord; we seek provision through a shortcut, what looks reasonable and good in

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## #slice-of-identity~pie(chart)

### What is Our Sexual Identity?

By Scott Kingry



**Sexual Identity**—a socio-cultural label that helps people communicate to others something about their sexual preferences (e.g., “gay,” “straight,” “bi”). It may be based upon a person’s sense of his or her biological sex (as male or female), gender identity (as masculine or feminine), direction and persistence of sexual attractions (sexual orientation), intentions and behaviors (what one intends and chooses to do with the attractions one experiences), and beliefs and values about sexual behavior. **Mark Yarhouse, *Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling*, Vol.59 (no. 3), 201-212.**

In my last article, we discussed various themes related to the topic of “sexual identity” which is a big buzzword in our culture these days. There is a growing number of ways that people “self-identify” when it comes to sexuality, orientation and gender: pansexual, genderqueer, aromantic, polyamorous, trans-identified, etc. It’s getting more diverse and complicated, so it’s OK not to fully understand all the complexities. Yet, it seems that people, especially teenagers, are under considerable pressure to take on one of these sexual identity “labels”. These labels communicate to others something about our sexual preferences and who we believe ourselves to be.

But despite all this diversity of identities, two core questions still remain. What exactly is our sexual identity and what are its various God-ordained components? Mark Yarhouse’s definition above gives us some of the answers. Let’s unpack them a bit.

#### **Our Biological Identity-(Male/Female):**

Our postmodern culture’s view is that gender is exclusively a *social construct*. It is merely influenced by society’s stereotypes of men and women and either conforms to or defies gender “roles”. While I live in a culture (and church culture) with a multitude of beliefs about how men and women should behave, dress, etc., I also know that for Christians gender is something that isn’t as random. Genesis 1:27 states that male and female are created in the image of God. Our biological identity would describe the designated anatomical sex we were born with as male or female (in most cases). So our physical bodies are a picture of the Trinity in some mysterious way—His design, intent and character.

#### **Our Gender Identity-(Masculine/Feminine):**

I would also argue that Genesis 1:27 and being created in the image of God affects how we experience ourselves as male or female—not physically, but how masculine or feminine we *feel*—

*(Continued on page 5)*

(Sexual Identity continued from page 4)

this is our gender identity. Do I generally fit in the world of men or the world of women? Or do I feel different; if so, what does that mean for me in the big picture? Just as our biology, our gender identity isn't merely a social construct or simply random, but is rooted inexplicably in the character of God.

### **Our Faith, Values and Core Beliefs:**

How do our faith and values inform the way we live out our sexuality? We have a Creator who has very particular intents for our existence and how we behave. These purposes extend to our relationships, especially our sexual relationships, because unboundaried sexual behaviors have a wide range of negative consequences to ourselves, families and the community.

### **Our Sexual Attractions**

We are attracted to and move towards people for a variety of reasons. Think about the friends you have or perhaps a mentor, someone you admire and look up to. We are in relationships with people because of qualities we're attracted to in them. We are also attracted to people romantically, physically and sexually and now have certain identity labels for these feelings: straight, gay, bisexual or asexual. Labels of identity based solely on attractions are relatively new and have only been around for about 50 years. This is a good thing to remember.

### **Our Behavior/Sexual Expression**

This aspect of our sexuality includes how we handle our thought life, emotions and volition, as well as how we

experience intimacy and maintain boundaries with ourselves and others. This would be where, when, how and with whom we express our physical and sexual selves. As we know, scripture teaches that the genital expression of our sexuality is reserved for a covenanted marriage relationship. Don't forget that Jesus upped the ante teaching that the real issue of sin lies beyond our behavior and in what is flowing out of our hearts.

### **Other things that influence our sexual identity**

Other factors could influence our Sexual Identity. Experiences of sexual abuse or trauma can give us a skewed vision of ourselves and our sexuality. Struggling with a sexual addiction can do the same. And what about the effects of American Culture or the church in which we grew up? Maybe we should consider our families and their attitudes towards sex.

In a perfect world these aspects of our sexuality would be congruent and whole. But sadly, that is not the world we are living in. In a broken world we experience many conflicts and inconsistencies with these components of our sexual identity; sometimes they battle each other. My next article will discuss more of the possible conflicts we could experience.

***Note:*** We'll be exploring this topic in more depth over 4 weeks in our new ReSOULutions Series "Navigating Sexual Identity and Same Sex Attraction" on Thursday Nights in October. If you'd like to participate, call the office for more information.

(Female Sex Addiction continued from page 2)

why bother to try and change something that can't be altered? With this belief system in operation, one can never stop being "damaged goods."

"I must be sexual to be lovable."<sup>3</sup> And here is the double bind! I'm bad for being sexual, but I must be sexual to be loved. This is a recipe for isolation and loneliness (and addiction). If I believe I have to be sexual in order to be loved, then there is a good chance that I will be sexual. People need love and if they believe that the only way to get it is through sex, then they will have sex. See how addiction can be rooted so deeply in this conundrum? A woman who believes these mutually exclusive messages can find herself turning more and more to sex, when what she really needs is love. And the shame she feels about being sexual at all either leads to silence and more shame, or to a complete rejection of the perceived source of the shame (religion, faith, values, etc.).

The bind becomes intolerable with the final belief. "I'm not really a woman unless someone desires me sexually or romantically."<sup>4</sup> When being a woman only matters in relation to how men feel about her, women never have a chance to accept themselves as the image bearers that God created them to be. I'm reminded of WGA's Founding Director Mary Heathman and her testimony. She says, "My identity and self-worth were wrapped up in my ability to attract men sexually." Hollywood seems to endorse this

belief system. How many movies are there where the women are just extras for the men? Or if the story is from the woman's perspective, her life doesn't begin until the man of her dreams arrives on the scene. These stories are popular because of the widespread belief that a woman is not really a woman unless she is desired by a man. When this belief holds sway, a woman might find herself sacrificing more and more to be the object of desire. Addiction is just a stepping stone away.

If you are a woman and find that some of the points I've made about addiction stir you, I encourage you to pick up Marnie Ferree's book. I also encourage you to talk to someone, whether a friend, pastor or counselor. The greatest contributor to shame is secrecy. Talking to a person you can trust is the antidote to shame.

<sup>1</sup> Marnie C. Ferree, *No Stones: Women Redeemed from Sexual Addiction* (Downer's Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2010), p. 30.

<sup>2</sup> Patrick Carnes, *Out of the Shadows* (Minneapolis: CompCare Publishers, 1983), p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> Ferree, p. 40.

<sup>4</sup> Ferree, p. 41.

(God's Provision *continued from page 3*)  
our own eyes.

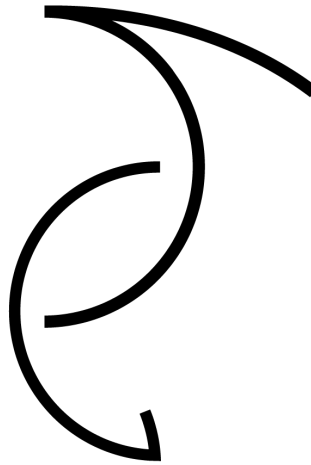
This article isn't about consequences, but there are plenty—read the story, it's fascinating (like a horror story fascinates) how life gets complicated when we have left the best path—waiting for God's provision—and forged our own plan.

We could draw other examples from Abraham's life to illustrate the complications that come into play when we go our own way and make our own provision outside of or even alongside of God's: we could talk about the golden calf fashioned to “worship YHWH” in a new way—turns out God wasn't pleased with this idol placed alongside him in his people's worship. Or what about when Abraham and Sarah decided to help God fulfill his promise of a son to them—their plan was that Abraham would have a son, Ishmael, by Sarah's hand-maiden, Hagar. Of course, when the real promised son, Isaac, arrived on the scene, the story gets really messy. It still is, if you think about the likelihood that the Arab/Israeli conflicts can be traced back to sibling rivalry between the descendants of Ishmael and the descendants of Isaac.

My fascination isn't a morbid delight in Abraham's failings. I am sad for him and for his family as well as for their descendants in the Lord, as I consider how much trouble we could have avoided if we had only waited on God's provision in the first place. But I am also encouraged—not as an excuse for my own lapses in obedi-

ence or commitment—but by the fact of God's grace and unfailing love throughout the whole story. Abraham is a hero of the faith; he was called the friend of God (Isa 41:8).

It is a constant wonder to me to see that God's provision is not only sufficient in the first place—of course we should have waited on it—but God's provision is sufficient **again, and again, and again** as he works all things for good . . .” (Romans 8:28). There is his grace in action; his provision forever pouring out toward us for our good. **I am again impressed, challenged, inspired, and encouraged in my faith; this time impressed with God, not Abraham.**





## August In Review

**August 11-13<sup>th</sup> – Mary was at the Rocky Mountain yearly Meeting of Friends**



## September And Beyond

**September 24th: WGA Open House. This will be one of the last events WGA hosts in our historic office building. Come by to tour the space, pray, and reminisce with us.**

**September 29th: WGA Thursday Night Seminar—Family and Friends Theme**

**October 1st: Intercessory Prayer meeting, 8:00 am at the WGA offices. Come join us as we pray for the needs of the ministry**

**October 16th: WGA participating in the Cherry Creek Presbyterian missions event**

**October 16th: WGA participating in the Denver Friends Church missions event**

**October 21st: Training for pastors about addressing sexual issues in the Church**

**October 22nd: WGA Leadership retreat**

**November 4-5th: WGA Seminar at Denver Friends Church**

**November 12th: Family and Friends Gathering**

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*A Measure of Grace*  
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to guide and support men and  
women who seek to  
understand sexuality and  
relationship, and to inspire all  
people to know and personally  
appropriate God's plan for  
their sexuality and  
relationships.*

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