

# INTIMACY JUSTICE: EXPLORING NARRATIVES OF PATRIARCHAL POWER, FEMALE SEXUALITY, AND MESSAGES IN THE CHURCH

---

EMILY STONE, PHD, LMFT-S

SUSAN PERKINS, PHD, LMFT-S

DANIEL STILLWELL, PHD, LMFT-S

SARAH CAUSEY, MAMFT

JOANN MULLINIX, MFT STUDENT



# SESSION DESCRIPTION

- There is a hidden and not so hidden curriculum throughout spiritual formation in the church, particularly the Evangelical church, that teaches both males and females about power, gender, and expectations for sex.
  - What are some of these messages?
  - How are they the same and different from societal messages?
  - How do these lessons in power, gender, and sex influence males, females, and relationships over time?
- A panel of women (and one man!) who have grown up in the Evangelical church and who are now moms, wives, ministers, and marriage and family therapists will discuss their own experiences as well as the lessons they have both learned and are trying to unlearn in adulthood.
  - Audience participation will be encouraged at various points.

# PARTICIPANTS WILL BE ABLE TO...

- ...identify key themes of power, gender, and sexual expectations that are perpetuated through Evangelical spirituality.
- ...describe ways these themes influence relationships within family systems, particularly the couple relationship.
- ...name ways these messages around power, gender, and sexual expectations potentially influence the spiritual, sexual, and relational development of both males and females.
- ...specify interventions to use with clients presenting with issues related to gender, power, sexuality and relationships who have grown up with these messages ingrained into their spiritual schema.



# INTRODUCTIONS

Emily Stone, PhD, LMFT-S

Susan Perkins, PhD, LMFT-S

Daniel Stillwell, PhD, LMFT-S

Sarah Causey, MAMFT

JoAnn Mullinix, MFT student



# TERMS – MCCLELLAND, 2010; ORENSTEIN, 2016; MARTIN, 1983

## Intimate Justice

- An “intimate justice framework... can highlight issues of entitlement and deservedness in sexual satisfaction”
- “Consent alone is a low bar for sex.”
- Intimacy Justice?
- Examples of intimate injustices?

## Hidden Curriculum

- The set of “rules or guidelines” not taught directly, but assumed.
- Examples of where things about sex and gender are “caught” more than explicitly “taught”?

**WHAT DOES RESEARCH SAY?**





## MESSAGES FROM EVANGELICAL SETTINGS – BURKE, P. 6

- “Instructions on sexual morality have typified the American evangelical movement since the 19th century”
- “Most contemporary American evangelicals agree that God created sex to be enjoyed within heterosexual marriages... God created sex for men and women’s pleasure in addition to procreation”
- “...all evangelicals in this study, believe that the Bible clearly condemns homosexual and extramarital sex.”

## PEGGY ORENSTEIN – *GIRLS & SEX*

- Focused on young women for 25 years
- Interviewed > 70 women ages 15-20

“Can there be true equality in the classroom and the boardroom if there isn’t in the bedroom?” – p. 5





## PLEASING VS. PLEASURE

- One in three girls aged 15-17 report they have performed oral sex on a partner to avoid having intercourse.
- “In their research on high school girls and oral sex, April Burns, a professor of psychology at City University of New York, and her colleagues found that girls thought of fellatio kind of like homework: a chore to get done, a skill to master, one on which they expected to be evaluated, possibly publicly.” (Orenstein, p. 55)

## PLEASING VS. PLEASURE, EVANGELICAL – BURKE, P. 14

- “As for what the woman gets out of it [pegging] I REALLY enjoying seeing the look on DH’s [dear husband’s] face and knowing I am able to give him that much pleasure.”
- “I am finally at the stage where I can willingly do this [anal sex] for him because I know how much he enjoys it, although I still struggle from time to time with the moral correctness of it.”



# I'M HAPPY IF YOU ARE HAPPY

- When Peggy Orenstein interviewed adolescent and college age girls they measured their satisfaction by their partner's satisfaction. "If he's satisfied, I'm satisfied."
- Men evaluated their satisfaction based on orgasm.

## I'M HAPPY IF YOU ARE HAPPY, EVANGELICAL – BURKE, P. 14, 12

- “... emphasize consent equally for both men and women, evangelicals tend to value submissive qualities of wives and promote the belief that it is the responsibility of a spouse to sexually fulfill her partner. As popular authors, Ed and Gaye Wheat (1977: 39) write: ‘the husband delights in a loving wife who is submissive and responsive.’”
- “Tim and Beverly LaHaye’s *The Act of Marriage* (1976: 242), does not discuss non-normative sex, but firmly supports a traditional understanding of gender, listing ‘feminine dominance’ as a possible cause of men’s erectile dysfunction and instructs women to strive for ‘submissive grace.’”

## IT DIDN'T HURT

- Girls are four times more willing than boys to engage in sexual activity they don't like or want.
- Female pain in sex is normalized and satisfying sex for a female can be simply that “it didn't hurt.”



# THE ROLE OF OUR NARRATIVES






“The first act of the feminist critic must be to become a resisting than an assenting reader.”

– Adrienne Rich







if you cannot be positive, maybe try being quiet.

TOBYNAC #SPEAKLIFE

# CO-CREATING THE NEW NARRATIVE

Think about the messages you received from your faith communities on sexuality.

- How have these messages affected your relationships in general? Partners? Friends? Children?
- Which messages do you strongly agree with? Which have you adapted? Rejected?
- Is there is a direct correlation between purity culture and rape culture? How? How not?
- How are these messages different for white women and WOC? White men and MOC?

# THEORY AND PRACTICE

- Dr. Carmen Knudson-Martin's work and her theory seeks to address gendered power in the couple relationship.
  - Socio-Emotional Relational Therapy (SERT)
  - Relational Justice Approach (RJA)
- Therapy itself challenges the patriarchy.
- How does power influence our discussion of common couple dynamics bringing them into counseling (infidelity, work, parenting, etc.)?



## WE CAN:

- ...be aware of power in the relationships with whom we are working, including in their sexual relationship.
- ...be aware of how a person and couple's context influences power structures in the relationship.
- ...become more comfortable with talking about sex and power with individuals and couples.





# FINAL THOUGHTS

Be brave.

Have conversations.

Ask hard questions.

Be a good listener.

Have hope.



# REFERENCES

- Burke, K. (2014). What makes a man: Gender and sexual boundaries on evangelical Christian sexuality websites. *Sexualities*, 17(1-2), 3-22.
- Knudson-Martin, C. (2013). Why power matters: Creating a foundation of mutual support in couple relationships. *Family Process*, 52(1), 5-18.
- Martin, J. (1983). What should we do with a hidden curriculum when we find one? In H. Giroux & D. Purpel (Eds.) *The hidden curriculum and moral education*. Berkeley, CA: McCutchan Publishing Co., pp.122–139.
- McClelland, S. I. (2010). Intimate justice: A critical analysis of sexual satisfaction. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 4(9), 663-680.
- Orenstein, P. (2016). *Girls & sex: Navigating the complicated new landscape*. New York, NY: Harper Collins.
- Williams, K. (2011). A socio-emotional relational framework for infidelity: The relational justice approach. *Family Process*, 50(4), 516-528.
- Williams, K. & Knudson-Martin, C. (2012). Do therapists address gender and power in infidelity? A feminist analysis of the treatment of literature. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 39(3), 271-284.