

**The Legacy of Patriarchy in the Modern Church:
Sociological Perspectives on Gender, Sexuality, and
Christianity**

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Undergraduate Honors Thesis, Bachelor of Arts

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Spring, 2016

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this paper is the ways in which patriarchy has historically bred gender inequality that infiltrates every level of society, from the macro systems to individual interactions. It creates a dominance system that rigidly defines masculinity as something distinct from femininity. Today, women are bombarded with conflicting messages originating from the sexual revolution and the Christian right: women are objectified and hypersexualized, but simultaneously supposed to maintain purity and modesty. This reality becomes the context in which young girls grow to understand their social roles and expectations, as well as the place from which they begin to form opinions and make decisions about their bodies. Many modern perceptions of virginity and purity are derived from historical conceptualizations of women, rooted in a patriarchal context; thus, a socio-historical analysis will be implemented as a reference point through which modern trends will come into focus. This is undertaken in order to illustrate that while American society has made noteworthy strides in women's equality, modern purity culture's rhetoric on virginity reveals that both the church and greater society still have great lengths to go.

INTRODUCTION

In 2004, an English University student, Rosie Reid, sold her virginity in an online auction in order to pay for the cost of her studies. While there are many other stories like hers, Reid's is particular because she is a lesbian who had been sexually intimate with her partner prior to the incident; however, because she had never undergone penetrative sex, she was still able to pass as a virgin. This reveals one of the common definitions of sex: that it only "counts" if it is heterosexual and penetrative (BBC News, 2004). There was also a couple from Topeka who had remained abstinent during their year of courtship and two years of marriage, explaining that "if it was holy before, it must be double-holy afterward" (Lark News, 2011). While this is a satire piece, it is effective because of the way that it illustrates the extent of social preoccupation with virginity.

The focus of this paper is the ways in which patriarchy has historically bred gender inequality that infiltrates every level of society, from the macro systems to individual interactions. It creates a dominance system that rigidly defines masculinity as something distinct from femininity. Today, women are bombarded with conflicting messages originating from the sexual revolution and the Christian right: women are objectified and hypersexualized, but simultaneously supposed to maintain purity and modesty. This reality becomes the context in which young girls grow to understand their social roles and expectations, as well as the place from which they begin to form opinions and make decisions about their bodies. Many modern perceptions of virginity and purity are derived from historical conceptualizations of women, rooted in a patriarchal context; thus, a socio-historical analysis will be implemented as a reference point through which modern trends will come into focus. This is undertaken in order to illustrate that while American society has made noteworthy strides in women's equality, modern

purity culture's rhetoric on virginity reveals that both the church and greater society still have great lengths to go.

With origins in ancient societies which provided ideal conditions for growth (i.e. social/legal legitimization of male superiority and domination) patriarchy is the foundation on which many religious beliefs and practices regarding sexual norms have been established. In application, the history of patriarchy and the history of the church have become inseparable. The power of the patriarchy to persist means that it has become an integral part of our society, and also that we have internalized its values on an individual level. The consequence is an institution of patriarchy that acts as a socialization agent to perpetuate the policing of women's sexuality, both within the church and outside. This work will examine the resulting implications for modern dialogue on purity culture, sexuality, and virginity, as well as consider possibilities for addressing this situation moving forward by addressing the following questions: 1. How has patriarchy—particularly within the church—shaped individual and societal attitudes about sexual purity and virginity? 2. How do societal attitudes about virginity and sexual purity affect individuals' sexual agency and their identification as sexual objects or sexual subjects?

Purity culture rhetoric evidences the notion that American culture has a dichotomy in regard to women and sexuality. Contemporary American trends in sexuality norms result from a variety of complex and intersecting issues that draw together circumstances not only on the micro-sociological level, but the macro levels as well. It is, therefore, important to examine the socio-historical circumstances that act as the roots from which stem the discrepancies in sexual equality between men and women. This work will be framed as a depiction of the patriarchal church teachings and feminist pushback to expose the conflicting ideals and standards that exist to police women's bodies. We will begin with a brief review of the literature, followed by an

examination of the theoretical perspective from which this work is constructed. From there, we will delve into a specifically framed discussion of history including patriarchal foundations, and events that progress against those foundations; culminating in the current social situation regarding sexuality and views of virginity, with a specific example of how this back-and-forth manifests itself in daily life, and a discussion of how that negatively impacts individuals.

BRIEF/RELEVANT LITERATURE

On Body Image

Women's and girls' body esteem is shaped by cultural beliefs about female sexuality. This becomes increasingly evident as girls begin to go through puberty. As girls begin to show signs of puberty, they begin to be perceived as more sexual, and culturally, female sexuality is associated with dirt and shame, rather than with "the pleasure we get from our bodies and the experience of living in a body" (Martin, 1996, p. 10). The collision of these factors results in girls becoming objectified as their bodies change. Girls' body image, self-esteem, and understanding of body image taboos are shaped by the influence of factors such as ethnicity, class, and religion. For women of oppressed groups, this is increasingly difficult, as they must navigate the expectations and standards of the dominant group, as well as that of their own culture (Martin, 1996).

On Violence Against Women

Patriarchal structures teach men and women specific gender roles, which have the capacity to influence the incidence of abuse and violence toward women. Kelland (2011) asserts that sexual objectification of the female body under patriarchy acts as a threat of bodily degradation and harm which, essentially, looms over women on a daily basis. This perpetuates

the mentality that women are passive, potentially violable, inert, and incapable of acting as their own agents; they must rely on men for protection, while simultaneously live in fear of their attack (Kelland, 2011). Such violence is maintained through stereotypes about women that create an unequal power distribution, and makes them more susceptible to victimization (Montesanti, 2015). While women are the victims of these circumstances, they must also bear the consequences for them, as they are viewed as being stripped of their virginity. This is, perhaps, more relevant when considering virgin women, as they are viewed as lacking any sexual agency. In keeping with these conceptions, virgin women who are victims of sexual abuse and assault are perceived—whether by themselves or others—as dirtied, ruined, and less than (Kelland, 2011; Montesanti, 2015).

On Complementarianism in the Church

In the church, the need for a strong distinction between men and women manifests itself in complementarianism. Many of our more recent religious and social practices are predicated upon the traditions of the past, archaic though they may be. Fundamentalist ideas among members of the Christian right continue to promote the headship and leading authority of men over their wives and children, which is still in contrast with feminism (Bendroth, 2001), and may take the form of benevolent sexism¹. Many congregations, like that of Grace Community Church in California, directly promote the submission of women to men as a way to honor God, and may even portray it as a strength of women (Reid, 2013). At the center of these ideas is gender essentialism—the understanding that differences between males and females are due to

¹ Benevolent sexism emerges as one such response. Ambivalent Sexism theory arose in 1996 by Glick and Fiske and divides sexism into two mirror images: hostile and benevolent. Hostile sexism is the aggressive, adversarial approach to interacting with women, while benevolent sexism is a more kindly view of women. Benevolent sexism is founded in the notion that women are morally superior to and in need of the protection of men (Mikolajczak & Pietrzak, 2014).

biological factors that are fixed at birth. Individuals respond to this core belief in several ways that promote society-wide sexism (Smiler & Gelman, 2008).

Responsibility for moral conduct in the sexual sphere is weighted more heavily toward women (Mikolajczak & Pietrzak, 2014). One of the ways in which this manifests itself in religious circles is through preoccupation with female modesty. Modern religious arguments for female modesty are rooted in a desire to protect women, and perpetuate the idea that women are “weak, defective moral agents who need male patronage” (Anthony, 2009, p. 268). Virginity becomes an important element to this conversation, as being a virgin is a crucial aspect to one’s perceived modesty, and an integral part of maintaining this status as needing male supervision and care. These arguments appeal to the cultural norms of the 19th century in the United States that respected women’s virtue and regarded them with delicacy and limited power, as well as overlooked the intensified inequality for women of lower class status and women of color. Assertions of the importance of female modesty result in women constructing their lives around the opinions of men, with much of the power they are able to exert being directly correlated with the extent to which men approve of their physical appearance (Anthony, 2009).

On American Attitudes Today

Today, America tops the charts in regard to both teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease amongst other developed nations. Compared to other progressive Western nations, the rate of U.S. teen pregnancy and birth rates are four to eleven times higher; teen abortion rates are three to eight times higher; and gonorrhea rates are 38 to 74 times higher (Darflinger, 2008). The U.S. is also the only Western nation with federal funding policies for abstinence education (Darflinger, 2008). Moreover, national survey data on Americans of the current era reports that approximately 95% of Americans engaged in sexual intercourse prior to

marriage; 80% of 18-23 year olds report a history of sexual activity, and 51% of the surveyed individuals reported using contraception with each sexual encounter (Arnett, 2015).

Putnam and Campbell (2010) discuss the cocktail of factors that arose in the 1960s to transform American institutions and perceptions of sexual morality, most notably “the Pill,” the women’s liberation movement, and the gay rights movement. Francis (2013) adds that the use of penicillin to cure syphilis contributed to the onset of risky and nontraditional sexual behavior as early as the mid to late 1950s. The result that the percentage of Americans believing that it is not wrong to engage in premarital sex doubled from 24 percent in 1969 to 47 percent in ‘73, and continued to grow to 62 percent in ‘82. However, the conservative trends in the 1980s, and a contrast of liberal trends in the 90s and 00s created a lasting divergence between the evangelical tradition and mainstream America on matters regarding sexual morality (Putnam & Campbell, 2010). American culture continues to put forth conflicting messages about how to define the line between who is a virgin and who is not; however, virginity continues to be a very desirable commodity in our society².

Differing sentiments about virginity expose the sexual double standard to which men and women are subjected: men have more sexual freedom and are praised for their sexual prowess, which they are praised for, whereas women are degraded for exhibiting similar forms of sexual agency. Furthermore, a study on abstinence word association among high school freshmen found that more boys than girls had negative associations with being abstinent; girls were more likely

² The emphasis on the hymen as proof of virginity has led to an increasing number of women in the U.S., Canada, and Western European nations visiting their gynecologists requesting certifications of virginity and hymen reconstruction surgeries (hymenoplasty). This procedure is meant to ensure vaginal bleeding during intercourse, associated with a tearing hymen, which is part of what makes it such a controversial procedure among gynecologists. According to a qualitative study by *The European Journal of Contraception and Reproductive Health Care* on women requesting hymenoplasty, over half of the women were ignorant to their own sexual anatomy. Furthermore, older, familial women were typically the primary source of sexual health information. These women also expressed a fear that their husbands will not be pleased without undergoing this procedure (van Moorst, et. al., 2012).

than boys to have taken an abstinence pledge and to have a friend who has taken one (Wilson, et. al., 2013). For college students who remain virgins, there are several other factors that they claim as the reason for their virginity. Reflective of the sexual double standard in American society, college women were more likely to be happy and proud of their virginity, reported more social pressures to remain a virgin, and reported a higher frequency of interpersonal reasons for their continued virginity than college men. Some of the highest ranked reasons for maintained sexual abstinence are factors such as attempting to honor their personal beliefs (religious or simply moral); fear of unwanted consequences such as contracting STIs or unplanned pregnancy; or lacking a relationship with the “right” person, which would make sexual intercourse appropriate (Sprecher & Regan, 1996).

While gender is a very reliable indicator of reasons for virginity, ethnic differences also play a role in sexual activity outcomes. Blacks, more so than Whites, reported greater degrees of Fear and Personal Beliefs as their major reasons for virginity, and had a greater degree of pressure both to remain a virgin and to become a non-virgin (Sprecher & Regan, 2009). According to a study conducted by the Guttmacher Institute, Black males have a median age of first sex around 15 years-old, which is younger than Asian Americans, Hispanics, and white males or females. However, the differences reported between females of different ethnic groups were contributed to by the socioeconomic statuses of the respective groups in American society. (Upchurch, D. M. et. al., 1998).

In contrast with dominant American culture, religion continues to be an important influence in the sexual behaviors of adolescents and young adults. For women, attending religious services weekly as adolescents is related to delayed instance of sexual activity

compared to women who attended less frequently³ (Jones, Darroch, & Singh, 2005; Burdette & Hill, 2009). Although patriarchal structures in the church have bolstered the policing of women's bodies and promoted the sexual double standard, there is a lack of literature which completely articulates the connections between patriarchal attitudes and women's sexual agency. In response, this thesis contributes to the literature by addressing the ways patriarchy within the church has promoted the sexual double standard and the policing of women's sexuality; this is an angle that has not been explored before in this way. To that end, this paper examines the ways in which conservative church culture and sexual liberation feminist culture have, historically, shaped attitudes toward n virginity, sexuality, and purity—attitudes that have both historic and contemporary consequences for women.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

This work will be constructed from a feminist theoretical perspective because this perspective is frequently overlooked in church discourse, and because it approaches my research questions in ways that are critical of major institutions while simultaneously striving for full equality for women. Feminism argues that without accounting for gender inequality, assessments and critiques of social life are incomplete (Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009). Feminist theory is a broad term, as a variety of feminist thinkers have provided a diverse assembly of subcategories underneath the “feminist umbrella;” liberal feminism, socialist feminism, radical feminism, ecofeminism, and intersectional feminism, for example (Ryle, 2015). Because of the numerous

³ One of the contributing factors to these rates is some of the virginity rituals that are more common in conservative evangelical churches; purity balls, for example. Purity balls are dances wherein daughters pledge virginity until marriage to their fathers, who are the keepers of their chastity until marriage. Later on, integrity balls for young men and their mothers came on the scene, wherein the young men pledged to their mothers that they will not tarnish the virginity of a woman—who is someone's daughter and future wife (Valenti, 2010).

perspectives represented, constructing a mutually agreed upon definition of feminism is a difficult task. In fact, the literature continues to support that not having a clear definition of the term, which assists with the negative stereotypes surrounding feminism and the perception that feminism is obsolete or culturally irrelevant, impedes identification with feminism for many (Swirsky & Angelone, 2014). hooks (2000, p. 28), defines feminism as “the struggle to end sexist oppression.” Under her definition, hooks points out that feminism is not an attempt to privilege a specific group above any other, which gives it powerful potential (hooks, 2000). Likewise, Wade and Ferree (2015, p. 157) define feminism as “the belief that all men and women should have equal rights and opportunities.” Regardless of differences, feminist theory, by and large, has the following goals: to articulate the oppressive nature of sexism in our society, and to enter into discussion about its eradication (Chafetz, 1997).

Subscription to the feminist label is fraught with social difficulty, as sexism towards feminism has negative consequences for feminists such as thoughts of incompetence, anger, anxiety, and feelings of decreased control⁴. This is a pressing matter because of the ways that feminism stands in opposition to the broader, dominant, patriarchal structures, which implement incompetence and lack of control as mechanisms for dealing with this type of social deviance. These mechanisms also work to counter women’s sexual agency, as they feel less empowered to make appropriate independent choices, and are still subjected to sexual objectification experiences (Gervais, & Hoffman, 2013; Szymanski & Feltman, 2014).

⁴ There are multitudes of psychological benefits to self-identification as a feminist. These include, but are not limited to: increased incidence of self-esteem and self-efficacy, higher levels of overall well-being, increased empowerment, greater educational attainment, and higher income—as compared to women who do not self-identify as feminists. Despite these advantages, the literature continues to support that women fail to identify with feminism for numerous reasons, such as not having a clear definition of the term, the negative stereotypes surrounding feminism, and the perception that feminism is obsolete or culturally irrelevant (Swirsky & Angelone, 2014).

The feminist movement is continuing to grow and diversify, incorporating women from increasingly diverse backgrounds and foci. Part of the diversification of the label is Christian-feminism, which seeks to address some of the oppressive elements of the Christian tradition. Christian-feminism recognizes Jesus as the lens through which the rest of scripture is interpreted, and affirms that Jesus was sent to heal and free the poor by liberating them from oppressive social systems. This perspective additionally supports that men and women are equally made and regarded in the image of God, and uses gender-inclusive language to address God as both Father and Mother. Christian-feminism acts as a bridgepoint for conversation on patriarchy in the church, without discrediting Christianity altogether. Because the goal of Christian feminism is to give voice to the experiences of women within patriarchal systems—and particularly within the church—it was helpful as a framework for this paper because of its ability to give respect to both the Christian and feminist arguments, while confronting the true root of the problem: patriarchy (Ruether, 2014; Walker, 1989).

On the Patriarchy

Much of our society's proceedings and functioning center on men: their authoritative leadership, their social activities, and their usefulness as examples of ideal norms. These are key indicators that a society has roots in patriarchy, and are the reasons why Christian-feminists credit patriarchy with the societal oppression and objectification of women; patriarchy is about men at the expense of women. According to Johnson (2014), a "society is patriarchal to the degree that it promotes male privilege by being male dominated, male identified, and male centered" (Johnson, 2014, p. 5). Goodman (2011) identifies leading characteristics of the privileged group in a society as being the group that sets the standards for what is considered normal, and by extension, right and good. Also, privileged groups are characterized by disproportionate access and control of resources and influence. Further, this leads to a sense of

superiority for the privileged group—not only are they normal, but better, and they have the cultural influence to perpetuate these standards (Goodman, 2011).

A misconception about patriarchy is that it is synonymous with “men;” however, it is more accurately a series of intertwined social systems and networks in which both men and women participate that is much greater than ourselves. Johnson (2014) describes it as a metaphorical tree, whose roots are ideologies of control, privilege, and normativity for men. The trunk of this tree is portrayed as the overarching institutions that shape social life, such as education, politics, economy, and family. The branches represent the communities and organizations such as individual churches, families, and cities. Finally, the leaves represent the individuals who simultaneously assist in making life possible for the rest of the tree and draw life from it. And because the entirety of this tree is rooted in ideas that create patriarchy, every aspect of its growth exhibits aspects of the core principles, whether overtly or covertly. Therefore, individuals cannot avoid participating in patriarchy, but are able to control how they participate (Johnson, 2014, p.17-19).

Because patriarchy is a system in which both men and women participate, but men are the group that remains privileged, a great deal of importance is placed on drawing clear distinctions between men and women—and between White, cisgendered, heterosexual, able-bodied men and minority men (Goodman, 2011). These distinctions are made in childhood and are passed on intergenerationally. Young males learn that their displays of emotion need to be heavily regulated; as such expression poses a threat to manhood. Also, there is a trend particularly evident among heterosexual fathers of rebuking preschool sons who choose to wear pink, or play with Barbie dolls. These lessons teach boys to distance themselves from, and

disdain, symbols that are culturally associated with women and female identity (Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009).

These separations in feminine and masculine symbols would include a separation of sexual action by young boys, who are socialized to express a heterosexual prowess that is aggressive, forward, and in contrast to the passive energy that is meant to be expressed by girls (p. 283). In their conversations on sexuality, Schrock and Schwalbe (2009) and Martin (1996) comment on the ways that boys learn it is culturally appropriate and acceptable to express sexual desire for girls—even before puberty. One of the consequences of these behaviors is the sexual objectification of women/girls from an early age. For men and boys, these actions serve to affirm heterosexual prowess and creates a greater boundary between the genders. Media heavily contributes to these lessons, as it praises men for their actions expressing their heterosexual desire. For women, society and the education system underplay the role of female desire and pleasure. This combination of sexual objectification and undermining of desire, centers around female sexual action; around adolescence, girls become cognisant of negative conversations surrounding the female body and sexuality. Adolescent girls express ideas of a sexual double standard, wherein they are expected to remain sexually available and desirable, but abstinent. Thus, differentiation between what it is to be men/males from what it is to be women/females is the root of gender inequality⁵ (Schrock, Schwalbe, 2009; Martin, 1996).

⁵ While the differentiations between men and women have been framed to privilege men over women, they also create a very narrow, loosely constructed definition of masculinity. A great deal of fear results from this lack of structure—men fear being labeled by other men as unmanly, as this label results in a direct challenge to their sense of identity and comes with the label “outsider.” This creates a problem for men who deviate from the cultural norms surrounding manhood. Because “real” men are defined, in part, by their heterosexuality and cisgendered status, men inside these categories go to great lengths to distinguish themselves from those outside these categories. One way this is accomplished is by sexualizing women; another is exemplified by gay men and transmen, who are outside of heteronormative and cisgender experience and are often met with hostility and phobic behavior. It is not uncommon for these “outsider” men to create subcultures that promote the ideals of “hegemonic” masculinity in order to prove that they are deserving of the masculine label (Johnson, 2014 & Schrock, Schwalbe, 2009).

This is the perspective and context from which I will launch my discussion on the patriarchal legacy within the church. A conceptual understanding patriarchy and feminism will act as a lens for evaluating the different trends and social norms discussed. It will also become the means by which the patriarchal ideologies and their implications are made more visible.

FOUNDATIONAL HISTORY

Pre-Christian History—9000 BCE-1700 BCE

The following will be a selective reading of history that is meant to shed light on the historical juxtaposition in sexual policing. In beginning the conversation on patriarchy and the privileging of a particular group of men, it is essential to trace its influences back to the roots of the problem because of the historical pervasiveness of patriarchy and the ways in which its pervasiveness has allowed it to—in many ways—go unnoticed. In the shift from Bedouin tribal groups to initial agrarian societies in the Neolithic Revolution, the status of women began to decline (Mark, 2009; Swidler, 2007, p. 7-13).

Virginity became a relevant topic in the conversation of marriage because of the structure and development of society in the ancient world. The concept of virginity started in the neolithic era, a time without birth control, and a societal structure featuring powerful patriarchy. Men controlled supplies, necessities, and institutions. Not only that, but the marriage was not considered legally complete until it was consummated. Virginity, therefore, provided women with ways to prove the paternity of their children, which granted them access to the assets that men controlled (Blank, 2007, p. 27).

Grooms began seeking out virgin wives, which meant that fathers could ask a higher bride price for their virgin daughters. Due to these increased stakes placed on virginity, grooms

needed to be absolutely sure that their brides-to-be were not “damaged goods,” but were, in fact, virgins. If the groom doubted the virginity of his bride-to-be, he could challenge the woman’s family for proof. In the most extreme cases, if there was no blood on the marital sheets the first time a couple had sex, that was considered evidence of her infidelity, and he was permitted to stone her. With the amount of preoccupation with virginity, combined with the idea of women as property, virginity became deeply tied to the value of a woman. This understanding still persists today. It is important to note that now - as then - the conversation around the value of virginity is entirely focused on women (Blank, 2007; Harris, 2014).

Biblical Times—1 AD-450 AD

As time progressed, Jewish and Christian traditions alike arose in the midst of what Ruether (2012) refers to as “patriarchal slaveocracies⁶”, which served as the source of the system of male domination prevalent in the times of the New Testament writings. The New Testament, therefore, becomes an interesting lesson in dichotomies—it is situated in the context of patriarchal domination, yet suggests radically liberating ideals (Ruether, 2014, p. 83). According to Love (1994, p. 252), the advanced agrarian societies that set the scene for the New Testament are characteristically the most “hierarchically ordered, male-dominated social order marked by social inequality.” These societies established a clearly delineated separation between the public and private sectors; women’s roles were starkly contrasted with male roles, and were also defined for every context in which women might find themselves (Love, 1994, p. 251-257).

⁶ Ruether (2012) defines patriarchal slaveocracy as the social patterns that developed, which inferiorized women as a gender group; she also notes that this domination, “was rooted in a larger patriarchal hierarchical system of priestly and warrior-king control over land, animals and slaves as property, to monopolize wealth, power and knowledge” (p. 23).

These social practices became internalized on an individual level, and were also established in laws, many of which are illustrated through conversations on virginity and marriage. In understanding why virginity was so important in ancient Israel, an understanding of marriage practices and beliefs about marriage are good places to begin. Laws and language surrounding marriage in the Bible—between one Jewish man, and one Jewish woman—reflect the central belief that women are property to be transferred from one man to another (Deuteronomy 22:13-21; Blank, 2007, p. 29). The worth of a woman was tied to her marriageability and her ability to produce offspring (Blank, 2007, p. 28-30). Again and again throughout the Hebrew Bible, marriage is referred to as “taking a wife” (Deut. 22:13; Hosea 1:1-3, Deut. 21:11-13, Ruth 4:5-10 et. al.); language that presents the image of a man finding a suitable woman to marry, without emphasis on the opinion of the woman in that transaction. Women were married off by their fathers, who were paid a hefty bride price to accommodate them for the lost labor when the woman moved in with the husband. Toward the second and third centuries BCE, the bride price became more of a modest demonstration of sincerity, and women even got to give consent to be married (Blank, 2007). However, because women were married off right after starting puberty or even before, at age 12 or 13, their ability to consent comes into question because of the Western conception that people of this age group are incapable of consent. Even the discussion of using the term “women” rather than “girls” comes into question (Bailey, 2011; Blank, 2007).

Furthermore, it was so important that women marry and have children that many laws and social practices were adopted to ensure this came to fruition. For example, infertility was the leading factor in a man’s decision to divorce his wife; divorce was simply not an option for the woman, because she was regarded as an object of the marriage, not a subject. Moreover, adultery

was a capital crime for both men and women, because it was seen as property infringement; the adulterous man was having sex with another man's property (Matthews, 2003). Additionally, if a woman was raped, she was considered unsuitable for marriage because the commodity of her virginity was tarnished, and thus, her marriage value was diminished. The solution was that the rapist paid 50 shekels of silver, the equivalence of five year's wages, to the woman's father, and the rapist married his victim; it was considered better for a woman to be married to her rapist than not to be married at all. These practices view women as objects and effectively limit their sexual agency, as their desires and needs are subsumed by the desires and needs of men (Blank, 2007).

While the teachings of Christ, in several ways, pushed to reverse this systemic patriarchy, it by no means fell away after the resurrection. On the contrary, several cultural events made the pervasive power of patriarchy more prevalent in the early Church. Aiming to differentiate themselves from the surrounding pagan influences, the Church fell back on the more restrictive and oppressive passages of scripture. Greco-Roman pagan culture featured labor norms that had slave women as prostitutes, and more elite women who would perform sexual rituals on certain occasions in conjunction with their occupations (Glazebrook, 2015, p. 1-5). As pagan practices engaged in what were considered by early Christians to be vastly immoral Goddess worship rituals, women in the Church were relegated to a lower social standing of submission as a protectionary measure (Swidler, 2007, p. 196-197).⁷

⁷ As time went on, proving virginity remained an integral part of the marriage process. The medieval era produced an understanding of proof represented by a veil in the womb, a seal that preserved the virginity of a woman. Texts from the Middle Ages indicate that a desire to be able to test for chastity in ways which would allow certainty over what was perceived to be a biological matter (Kelly, 2002). A number of tests arose during this period, and the ones focusing on physical characteristics proved unreliable (Kelly, 2002). One such test involved giving women a diuretic. If the woman did not urinate after consumption, she was considered a virgin. Another test, for when the woman was believed to be a virgin, but urinated after the diuretic test, was to examine the clarity of her urine—women with clear urine were still pure (Harris et. al., 2014). Another test reveals the ways in which the neck was perceived to be related to the vaginal canal. The test was to measure the circumference of the neck before and after

The Jewish tradition was not explicit in whether or not women were made equally in the image of God. This impacted the way Apostles such as Paul navigated the conversation on women in the Church. Paul is described as having an ambivalent stance on women. For example, passages such as 1 Corinthians 11:3—“But I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God”—are contrasted with those such as Galatians 3:28, which reads, “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Ruether, 2014, p. 84). Additionally, since the early Church affirmed the brevity between the resurrection and second coming of Christ, they felt little need to establish structures of living consistent with the teachings they received from Christ in regard to gender. Therefore, as the gap between the resurrection and the anticipated second coming continued to widen, second and third generation Christians again fell back on their culturally defined understandings of social structure established in traditional advanced agrarian societies, which included the traditional sexual norms and practices that treated women as objects (Swidler, 2007, p. 196-197).

THE PATRIARCHAL CHURCH: LATER CHURCH THINKERS AND THEIR TRADITION

This section will address some of the general sentiments expressed by prominent church thinkers in the era after the early church was well established. It will examine how these sentiments about women have impacted church tradition. Regardless of whether this was the intention of the church fathers mentioned here, their views have been interpreted in ways that

intercourse. The neck should elongate and become wider after intercourse, and the voice should also deepen, according to the correspondence between the neck and the stretched vaginal canal (Blank, 2007). During the Enlightenment, the proof process integrated “scientific” evidence. In 1546, catholic anatomist, Andreas Vesalius, published his findings on his dissection of two deceased virgin women. In his findings, he documented the discovery of the hymen for the first time. While his findings were incredibly limited, the hymen became the scientific way to prove that a woman was a virgin; it was understood as a layer of tissue that completely covers the cervix, and must be penetrated during a woman’s first experience with intercourse (O’Malley, 1964; Blank, 2007).

negatively impact the treatment and discourse on women throughout history. Further, because the church—as part of society at large—privileged men’s voices, women’s voices are often overlooked, and at times even discredited. This relative silencing of women in the church has allowed a particular group of privileged men to be the ones with authority to shape attitudes about women’s sexual agency and virginity. These have, historically, been negative and limiting.

Later, ways of conceptualizing and interpreting scripture perpetuated views that continued to oppress and deny the full humanity of women. Based on the Aristotelian model of Greek philosophy, women, as well as slaves and Asian “barbarians”, were viewed as inferior to men, since they lacked the autonomous capacity to reason; thus, these groups of people were depicted as needing the elite class of Greek men, who were considered the only rational beings, to help them navigate and organize life (Ruether, 2014, p. 84; Aristotle, 1999). Not only did this create a classist, sexist, and racist society, but it also fueled the same mentalities within the early Church. For instance, early Christians understood the interpretation of Genesis 1:27, which discusses humanity being made in the image of God, to refer to the mind and the capacity to reason. This interpretation mirrored the divine logos, or divinity of Christ; however, due to the aforementioned influence of cultural philosophy, men were the only ones considered to be capable of reflecting the image of God (Ruether, 2014, p. 83-84). Additionally, St. Augustine suggested that women could be redeemed through baptism because the soul is non-gendered and equally made in God’s image, but in physicality, women are not made in God’s image and are designed to be subject to men. He also argued that, while divine wisdom is female in both grammar and ideation, it is more accurately male (Augustine, 1955; Brown, 1988; Ruether, 2014). The result was a shift patriarchal language in the fourth century for both Eastern and Western church practice (Ruether, 2014, p. 85-88).

In attempting to further understand the complexities of divine interactions with humanity, prominent church thinkers continued to interpret scripture in ways that perpetuated the patriarchal social norms in which they were immersed. It is worth mentioning that the vast majority of these prominent church thinkers were Greek and Latin men. History of the Church in the first few centuries C.E. has largely excluded and forgotten women; in fact, the term “Church Mothers” is never adopted as common church vernacular, despite the droves of women who joined the monastic life and contributed to such works as the *Patrologia Latina*, which is a compilation of Church Father works dating from 200 AD to 1216 (Swidler, 2007, p. 257-259; *Patrologia Latina*).

For example, one prominent Church Father, Thomas Aquinas, asserted that males are the only ones that are endowed with the power of procreation. Additionally, Aquinas believed that women are inherently inferior in both mind and body, being the culmination of an incomplete gestation. He applied this line of reasoning to Christology and concluded that Christ was male as males represented human completeness (Ruether, 2014).

Moreover, in the 16th Century, Luther and Calvin perpetuated the Augustinian view that woman is subordinate to man and the principle actor in sin. Worsening that platform, they denied women could serve as prophetesses (Ruether, 2014, p. 86). However, not all women were content to allow this form of exclusion from the church. Women such as Argula von Grumbach, Katharina Schütz Zell, and Marie Dentière continued to prophesy—which they defined plainly as the interpretation of scripture—during the time of Luther and Calvin’s powerful statements and actions toward women. Each of them published several letters and pamphlets arguing for women’s right to prophesy in the name of Christ, and encouraging Christian women to speak out against the corrupt practices of the church (Pak, 2015, p. 90-123). Regardless, these women were

repeatedly told, quite firmly, that they were to remain silent in public and obey their husbands—even if their husbands beat them (Ruether, 2000, p. 69). Luther also contributed to the conversation by arguing that before the fall, the subordination of women to men would have been a consensual arrangement (Ruether, 2014, p. 86).

These changing church views were simultaneously shifting public opinion of gender roles and relations. Broadly speaking, the reformation era saw an increasingly solidified differentiation in the household between the work, roles, and responsibilities of women and the work of men. For women, this constituted cleaning, child rearing, and activities that confined them to the home; whereas, for men, this constituted manual labor and interactions with the world outside of the home. Families perpetuated the ideals that males were the heads of the household, and women were subservient, which continued to shape the formation of church and social order. The differentiation between men and women supported the dichotomy between the acceptable sexual agency of males and the passive, subservient sexual roles of women; this also perpetuated the notion that women needed protection by men from men, which continued their objectification. Additionally, the aforementioned revival of Augustinian views of women excluded women from participation in the political realm, which continued to shape political organizations for the coming centuries; thus, gender differences have real and severe social consequences (Ruether, 2000, p. 60-82).

PROGRESSIVE HISTORY (HERSTORY)

Victorian Era & Antebellum Period 1780-1890

Emerging religious ideology among the upper classes in this era reconceptualized women as asexual, innocent, perpetually pure domestics who were hyper-nurturing and charged with

catering to the damaged egos of men who returned home from a hard day in the harsh public sphere—a sphere far too hostile for women. Thus, women were conceptualized to be more susceptible to illness; popularly, upper-class women in the 19th Century were diagnosed with hysteria because of the lack of control, independence, and social mobility which was related to increased instance of depression, anxiety, and stress. The result was a bifurcation of masculinity and femininity, wherein women and men were raised into an understanding of their respective identities as opposite, but complementary (Ruether, 2000, p. 83-106; UWO, 2008).

In the midst of this environment largely unsympathetic to social progress, women thinkers and activists begin to appear on the scene as part of the abolitionist movement. This movement provided women a platform from which to begin speaking on issues regarding equality and suffrage. Leading Suffragettes such Sarah Grimke her sister, Angelina, worked under the notion that both the racism of slavery and the power of men over women were counter to God's intended social order. These movements were the first wave of feminism, seeking social change; however, Christian virtue had become synonymous with the aforementioned feminine virtue, wherein subjects like anger, conflict, and an "excess" of critical thinking deemed one unfeminine and also un-Christian. Thus, the tension between society at large and the movement for social change continued to grow (Ruether, 2000, p. 104).

War Era—1910-1949

While first wave feminism was starting to take off, the entirety of the World War era drew attention to many of its challenges and flaws. The Progressive Era yielded several activism movements on the local and national levels, which helped maintain the progression of the women's movement; however, progress halted with the onset of World War One. The Great War triggered an American culture war between modernists and fundamentalists, becoming a time

where religion and politics were fused, and religion was the driving force of patriotism (Preston, 2014). During this time, a group of more radical women, such as Emma Goldman, Margaret Sanger, and Crystal Eastman, emerged to bring focus to sexual liberation and to make commentary on women's roles in the family. Especially prominent was their advocacy of the legalization of birth control, during a time when poorer areas were experiencing high birth and infant mortality rates and when birth control was a highly controversial taboo (LeCouteur & Bureson, 2004; Eig, 2014). They rejected Christianity on the grounds of its oppressive attitudes and practices toward women (Ruether, 2000, p. 107-120).

These women eased society's transition into the "new woman" of the 1920s. While women of the Progressive Era were concerned with remaining unmarried and forming bonds with other women, particularly in academic institutions, these women were the classic '20s flappers, exercising economic and sexual liberation. However, it is important to bear in mind that this "new woman" lifestyle was neither condoned nor adopted by all women. In fact, "new woman" feminists received heavy backlash from older social feminists in organizations. The women representing those organizations were discontent with the ways sexual liberation threatened the "moral purity" aspect of their movement. This occurrence of women being at the forefront of policing other women differs from the backlash of earlier history, which came primarily from men of the church (Ruether, 2000, p. 118-124). -

Additionally, works by prominent female writers—such as Simone De Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*—began to circulate internationally, and spoke to the issues of the feminist cause (Ishay, 2008, p. 174-243). It raised a lot of important conversations during the second wave feminist movement about the sexual rights of women in society. More specifically, De Beauvoir's book gave voice to ideas like women as sexual subjects, and the implications that

women's liberation has in other areas of their lives, including areas like the family and the workplace (de Beauvoir et. al., 2009).

Close to Present—1950s-1990s

With more married, white, middle-class women in the 1960s joining the labor force, but making only approximately 63 percent of what men were making, discontent deepened. In 1963, Betty Friedan published *The Feminine Mystique*. This progressive critique of social patterns of the middle-class gave public voice to the discontent felt by many women of the time, and encouraged women to seek new roles and social identities apart from those assigned by male-dominated society. A particularly powerful example was The National Organization for Women (NOW), which was established in 1966. Starting with just 28 women, membership grew to 1,000 after the first year (Decades of Change).

The Second Wave feminist movement that arose during the 1960s and '70s was inspired by the civil rights movement, largely featured middle-class women, and was spurred on by the sexual revolution in the '60s that came about in part resulting from the advances surrounding the birth-control pill (Decades of Change). Margaret Sanger and Katherine McCormick were the visionaries behind the oral contraceptive because of the pregnancy mortality and high infant mortality rates associated with large families in poorer areas just decades prior. Not only was that, but the dissemination of information on proper methods of contraception illegal for decades. "The Pill," which gained FDA approval in 1960, gave women contraceptive control. Just two years after its availability, an estimated half a million women were taking it regularly, despite the high cost of ten dollars per month (LeCouteur & Burreson, 2004; Eig, 2014). Coupled with the sexual revolution, women were able to explore their sexuality in new ways. In fact, during this time, the literature on marital advice began to give equal attention to both men and women, as well as addressed an audience whose relational status is irrelevant. Many pieces of literature

addressed single women and “encouraged them to pursue robust sexual lives outside the confines of marriage” (Ward, 2015, p. 123). This is a contrast to previous decades, which addressed couples strictly within a marriage context (Ward, 2015).

These particular examples made the sexual revolution and Second Wave feminist movement remarkable; they served as a countermovement that focuses on voicing the experiences and desires of women. Additionally, women gained more subjectivity and agency as they had more control over their sexuality and became better able to consider a wider variety of choices regarding their sexuality.

By the 1970s, the feminist movement had become diverse, expanding to incorporate a wider range of women, and found much solidarity as a result. These feminists saw many victories, and the 1970s was a benchmark decade for the feminist movement. Included in these victories were the passing in Congress of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) and legalizing of abortion in the *Roe vs. Wade* decision (Ruether, 2000, p. 139-155). Other pivotal legislation being passed included the Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1978, which “prohibit[s] sex discrimination on the basis of pregnancy” (Act of 1978), and the Equal Credit Opportunity Act of 1974, which prohibited creditors from considering one’s sex or marital status as a basis for granting or denying credit, and allowed women to obtain credit cards without consent of their husbands (Your ECO Rights, 2013). Publications such as *Ms. Magazine*, and *Our Bodies, Ourselves* continued the conversation about the Feminist movement by focusing on awareness, empowerment, and experience of women. Specifically, *Our Bodies, Ourselves* emphasizes subjectivity and recognizes the diversity in the female sexual experience, without assuming women will (or should) adhere to abstinence-until-marriage purity standards (Decades of Change). The questions raised about feminism in the church came at an opportune time, as many

denominations were deciding to ordain women; furthermore, the church was beginning to use inclusive language in hymnals and Bibles. However, what were considered victories for feminism were fuel for the conservative backlash against feminism headed up by male and female religious and political conservatives. This backlash worsened divisions between church members of the Right and Left (Ruether, 2000, p. 145-155).

The Christian Right powerfully emerged as a counter to the progressive ideology of the feminist movement. Jimmy Carter hosted the White House Conference on Families in 1976; the aim of which was to talk about American families in their various capacities and difficulties, as well as draw attention to the ways in which they are affected by public policy. While Christian right groups, such as the Moral Majority, were originally invested in the concept of such a conference, their loyalties quickly shifted. Carter's organizers defined the family more broadly—beyond the heterosexual, two-parent household that was the preference of the Christian right. Because the Christian right asserted that the family was the core unit of American society, they fashioned all of their political activism in the 80s and 90s in defense of the “traditional” family—a heterosexual, married couple, with the husband as the head and primary breadwinner. They identified abortion, homosexuality, and feminism as the aspects of society most threatening to their nuclear family ideals. Politically, these ideals took the form of continuing efforts to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, a fierce opposition to the ERA, and ongoing attempts to thwart advances in the gay rights movement. Furthermore, the politicized group supported things like abstinence programs in schools to promote the idea that abstinence until marriage is the acceptable and valid option (Dowland, 2009; Ruether, 2000).

CURRENT SOCIAL NORMS

In modern day trends, the feminist movement has entered its third wave. According to Snyder (2008), third wave feminism is focused on inclusion and intersectionality, because of the recognition of the variety of different experiences across gender, class, ethnic, and sexuality lines. The third wave also, “in response to the divisiveness of the sex wars...emphasizes an inclusive and nonjudgmental approach that refuses to police the boundaries of the feminist political” (Snyder, 2008, p. 175-176). In essence, it recognizes that there is diversity in what it means to be a woman, and notes that those experiences are valid. The third wave arguments create a space in which to criticize and evaluate sexual norms, as “third-wavers feel entitled to interact with men as equals, claim sexual pleasure as they desire it (heterosexual or otherwise), and actively play with femininity” (Snyder, 2008, p. 179). This is significant because of the stark contrast to the conservative arguments that are continuing to be put forth by the moral majority and other right-wing political groups; the premise of which have been discussed. These conflicting messages are a representation of the dualistic standards that women must navigate in searching for a sense of identity and sexual agency; they are also uniquely manifested in major social institutions, like that of education. Christian-feminist scholars, such as Rosemary Radford Ruether and Virginia Mollenkott (among others), arise in the midst of this back-and-forth to attempt to bring balance to both sides. Christian-feminism seeks to address some of the oppressive elements of the Christian tradition, acting as a bridgepoint for conversation on patriarchy in the church, without discrediting Christianity altogether ((Ruether, 2014; Walker, 1989).

Specific Manifestation: Contemporary Abstinence Education

One particularly relevant example of the effect of patriarchy on contemporary women’s sexuality is that of the discourse and policy surrounding abstinence education in schools.

Abstinence-only until marriage advocates convey women's increased appeal to men if they remain pure; they contrast this with the sexually active young women who are labeled immoral, dirty, used, and ultimately, not desired by good men., These extremes of the spectrum accomplish the same goal: restricting the agency of women, and directing the focus toward men (Kelly & Hoerl, 2015).

Despite the abundance of up-to-date information on sexuality, the sphere of sexual education in schools is still fraught with controversy over the best approaches. However, the language surrounding sex education is overwhelmingly tied to the dichotomy between purity and pollution. After the HIV/AIDS public health threat of the 1980s this type of language became more prevalent, and the motion toward association of virginity with purity strengthened. Additionally, any non-marital sexual acts or non-heterosexual acts were stigmatized as inherently dirty. The impact of these mentalities influences certain fear-/risk-based educational tactics (Tupper, 2014). This fear plays nicely into the goals of abstinence-only education in schools. In 1996, the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Act, TANF, was signed into law. Title V, Section 510b of the TANF allows the federal government to allocate funds to the public schools that offer abstinence-only-until-marriage programs. These schools would only receive funding if they met the following eight criteria:

1. has as its exclusive purpose teaching the social, psychological, and health gains to be realized by abstaining from sexual activity
2. teaches abstinence from sexual activity outside marriage as the expected standard for all school-age children

3. teaches that abstinence from sexual activity is the only certain way to avoid out-of-wedlock pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, and other associated health problems
4. teaches that a mutually faithful monogamous relationship in the context of marriage is the expected standard of sexual activity
5. teaches that sexual activity outside of the context of marriage is likely to have harmful psychological and physical effects
6. teaches that bearing children out-of-wedlock is likely to have harmful consequences for the child, the child's parents, and society
7. teaches young people how to reject sexual advances and how alcohol and drug use increase vulnerability to sexual advances
8. teaches the importance of attaining self-sufficiency before engaging in sexual activity (Trenholm, et. al, 2007)

Abstinence education, also referred to as Sexual Risk Avoidance (SRA), differs from comprehensive, or Sexual Risk Reduction (SRR), education in that SRA education assumes that adolescents can and should exercise self-control in regard to their sexuality. Adolescents are prepared to remain abstinent, despite any previous sexual activity. SRR education operates under the assumption that no amount of education can completely stop individuals from having sex, if that is the choice they want to make; the program focuses on providing information that will make sexual activity less risky (NAEA, 2013).

There are a wide variety of approaches abstinence-only educators use to facilitate a conversation on sexual health to school students. Sethna (2010) discusses the ways in which animal metaphors are used to reinforce heteronormative, purity until marriage relational

behaviors, while underplaying a more scientific conversation about sexual interactions.

Examples of these conversations range from the classic “birds and the bees” conversation, to more contemporary examples such as showing the documentary *March of the Penguins*, in order to focus on animals that mate for life and raise their young together. However, as Sethna points out, these monogamous, heterosexual relationships are not the only types of relationships present in the animal kingdom. A result is a sexual education curriculum that is heteronormative, and reflects the mentality that sexuality is an animal, instinctual desire (Sethna, 2010).

In contrast to typical, conservative, abstinence-focused approaches to sexual education, there is a relatively new program emerging in certain church circles. The Unitarian Universalist Church has begun implementing the Our Whole Lives: Lifetime Sexuality Education curriculum. This particular curriculum is secular, but can be adapted to fit religious values with supplementary materials. It also provides age-appropriate programming for grades Kindergarten through 12 and for adults. It “recognizes and respects the diversity of participants with respect to biological sex, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, and disability status” making it a progressive and comprehensive education program (UUA, 2015).

The political and social dialogue on Sex Education in institutions is heavily influenced by the prevalence of benevolent sexism and patriarchy in American society. Complementarianism in the church, when politically promoted by groups such as the Moral Majority, can also hold a strong influence in the legislation and discourse on Sex Education. These ideologies, when promoted by leading social institutions, are interwoven with consequences for women in regard to issues of female body image and sexual violence against women; such consequences involve an increase of sexual objectification, decreased self-esteem, and an increased risk of sexual violence. Women face challenging social norms that simultaneously expect them to be modest

and pure, while hypersexualizing their bodies. This is problematic because these consequences contribute to the power of the patriarchy to shape attitudes about women as objects for the attention and appreciation of men, rather than fostering empowerment and self-worth (Anthony, 2009; Mikolajczak & Pietrzak, 2014; Kelland, 2011).

CONCLUSION

This particular work has contributed to the literature by describing the ways in which patriarchal church structures have shaped and are shaped by the broader societal culture in America. In so doing, the paper has woven together the major historical trends in society as they relate to the treatment and perception of women. Furthermore, special emphasis has been placed on how society has approached the ideas of virginity, sexuality, and purity.

Patriarchy has been an integral part of society, arguably, since the inception of society itself. Its characteristic features of male-centrism and domination have created oppression in the ways that institutions operate (Johnson, 2014). While American society has made noteworthy strides in women's equality, modern purity culture's rhetoric on virginity reveals that both society and the church still have great lengths to go. Throughout history, women have been objectified by men and have, in various capacities, been treated as prizes and property. These attitudes have relegated women to lower statuses in the church and in greater society; additionally, they have informed and contributed to current dialogue on virginity. Women are taught through pop culture, the church, and schools that their sexual viability—whether they can have sex, when they should have sex, and with whom—is an integral part of their respective developing identities. However, this same conversation often serves to alienate women from being empowered subjects in the decisions regarding their bodies.

Historically, this conversation has taken several progressions before culminating in the trends and norms we experience today. Women have—to varying degree—been regarded as property, and passed from one man to another throughout their lifetime. Virginity came to play an important role in this exchange, as it made the woman's body more valuable, and served as a means of proving paternity for any resulting offspring. Thus, the status differentials between virgin and nonvirgin women became a major part of women's lives and identities. Furthermore, as Christian church culture arose in the midst of such practices, early church founders and later church thinkers oftentimes perpetuated these practices and understandings while using the authority of God to legitimate their claims about women.

Feminist voices appearing during the Victorian era stood in stark contrast with the surrounding society. Women during that time were seen as too delicate and pure to concern themselves with matters outside the home. These early feminists made gains in women's suffrage. However, these strides toward suffrage were not fully realized until women began breaking out of sexual mores and behaving in ways that were considered very progressive for the time with the flapper movement, and also taking to the workplace during the wartime. Because of the massive reconstruction of family norms after World War Two, women's roles were once again conceptualized to be in the home; these norms remained prevalent until the sexual revolution and women's movement, which brought into question the role of women in society, and women's agency as sexual beings. In the wake of these cultural shifts, politically active Christians formed a conservative movement to attempt to counter these new social norms.

While there were many results of that Christian right movement, one of the most prominent and enduring is their emphasis on abstinence-education in schools, and an abstinence-until-marriage orientation to social sexuality. Today, women are bombarded with messages that

parallel the conflicting messages between the sexual revolution and the Christian right: women are objectified and hypersexualized, but simultaneously expected to maintain purity and modesty. This reality becomes the context in which young girls grow to understand their social roles and expectations, as well as the place from which they begin to form opinions and make decisions about their bodies.

Moving forward, there are several opportunities to expand research on the issues presented. For example, policies on abstinence and comprehensive education have shifted, and in the communities they impact (e.g. comprehensive education being more popular in liberal areas). Since these rival policies have only been at play for a few decades, more research could be done to measure their effectiveness in lowering the rates of teen pregnancy and STI contraction. Additionally, more research could be conducted to measure the relationship between benevolent sexism, rape, and virginity, as patterns can be drawn between some of the core ideologies of each. Research in this area would greatly expand our understanding of the covert sexism women experience in American society. Finally, more research regarding lessons about sex and virginity that adolescents learn from the church specifically would greatly add to the conversation on the role the church plays in perpetuating patriarchal ideas about women.

Furthermore, institutional and policy recommendations are that authoritative institutions (such as the Church, the government, and the educational system) seek out a middle-ground amidst the competitive agenda-pushing of both extremes of the sexuality-policing spectrum. This middle-ground would be a place where in women as well as men are engaged with the range of different perspectives on issues regarding their sexuality and properly empowered to make decisions in a way that is both free from social judgement as well as consistent with safe health standards. It is also recommended that educational institutions become a place where students

can academically engaged in seeking out knowledge regarding the sexuality and sexual reproductive health in order to assist in making informed choices. Additionally the church should strive to become an institution where in people feel comfortable discussing their God-given sexuality so that we create a space where Christians are not afraid of their sexuality, but are in control of their sexuality and are willing to ask the question about what it means to be a Godly, as well as a sexual, being.

In summation: what emerges from the research is a duality between religious and social culture; however, they both conclude with the policing of women's bodies for the gratification of men. Sexual liberation proponents combine with contemporary beauty culture and promote female empowerment and health in ways that, ultimately, take a physical toll on women's bodies to make them more desirable to men (Kelly & Hoerl, 2015). It is, therefore, crucial that we as a society address the problematic elements of these two extremes whose conflict deeply impacts women's sense of identity and subjectivity. By addressing these problems, we will begin to shape a society that emphasizes social equity for both men and women not only in the conversation of sexuality, virginity, and purity, but in all social sectors.

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