

# ISSUES IN PERSPECTIVE

Dr. James P. Eckman, President Emeritus  
Grace University, Omaha, Nebraska  
April 30, 2016

## ***Girls, the Social Media and Human Sexuality***

Two recent books explore the impact social media and sexuality issues are having on American, adolescent girls: *American Girls: Social Media and the Secret Lives of Teenagers* by Nancy Jo Sales and *Girls and Sex: Navigating the Complicated New Landscape*, by Peggy Orenstein. Several important insights are gained from these books:

- The “selfie” phenomenon permits teenage girls to shape and mold the image they wish to present to the world of social media. There is a “selfie surgery app” that permits girls to edit out blemishes, whiten their teeth and shrink their noses. This certainly maximizes the efforts to present themselves in a way they deem best to their peers.
- Over three-fourths of American teens have access to smartphones. Such technology through Facebook, Instagram, texting, etc. permits teens to broadcast their thoughts, photos of themselves and their judgments and ideas on everything for instant evaluation by their peers—or as they are called in the social media, their “friends.” Such is the new route to “popularity.”
- Nancy Jo Sales writes that the constant seeking of “likes” and attention on social media can “feel like being a contestant in a never-ending beauty pageant.” It is indeed an image-saturated culture and social media comments focus on a girl’s looks in almost every category. Accompanying these media comments is evidence of bullying, anxiety and rivalries between other girls. *The Economist* summarizes Sales’s findings: “In interviews, girls complain of how hard it is to appear ‘hot’ but not ‘slutty,’ sexually confident but not ‘thirsty’ (i.e., desperate) . . . ‘Everybody wants to take a selfie as good as the Kardashians,’ says Maggie, a 13-year old.”
- Peggy Orenstein writes: “the pressure on young women to reduce their worth to their bodies as a collection of parts that exist for others’ pleasure,” is a symptom of a larger more devastating problem in our culture. Indeed, “sexual objectification” is a new cultural development. Where past feminists eschewed sexual displays, today’s young female finds sexuality empowering: “There are few times that I feel more confident about my body than when I wear a crop top and my boobs are showing and my legs are showing,” says Holly, a college student. “I never feel more liberated.” American culture prioritizes the value of women being “hot.”

- Both authors are convinced that porn plays a major role in this shift in how teenage girls and boys view these things. Pornography fosters the conviction that a woman's sexuality is primarily for the benefit of men. Orenstein writes that girls she interviewed (as young as 14) were willing to do anything to "cater to the fickle, porn-bred tastes of young men."
- Both of these books are filled with stories of "binge drinking, random hookups, oral sex and misjudged sexting."

So, what is our culture to do with all this information about teenage girls and their sexuality? Clearly, embracing the pursuit of autonomy as the chief goal of life has also produced dysfunction, disorientation and confusion. Many of these teenage girls are experiencing an identity crisis. They struggle with who they are as autonomous individuals. For the millennial generation, work or vocation, which was the primary identity of the boomer generation, no longer applies. For many millennials, the sexual revolution has caused sexuality to emerge as a defining aspect in solving the identity crisis. The Bible offers a two-part solution to this crisis:

- First, the solution to this identity crisis is found in Jesus Christ. There are two aspects of our identity in Christ: (1) As humans, we are created in the image of God, which establishes our infinite worth and value as humans. It is the baseline for the value of humanity at every stage in development. That weighty truth establishes one aspect of our identity: We both resemble God (in His communicable attributes—intellect, emotion and will) and we represent Him as dominion stewards of His world. (2) The Bible also makes clear that when we place our faith in Christ's finished work on Calvary's cross, we are a "new creation, the old has gone, the new has come" (2 Corinthians 5:17). Our new identity is that we are "in Christ," a powerful and profound phrase used 240 times in the New Testament. The power of sin and the power of death have been broken (see Romans 6). When we place our faith in Christ, we are declared righteous by Almighty God (justification): Christ's righteousness has been imputed to our account. Further, we are adopted into God's family, with all the rights and privileges of being a joint heir with Christ (see Galatians 4 and Romans 8). God is now our heavenly Father and we are His children. We await the wondrous family gathering of all the brothers and sisters of God's family in His coming kingdom. Finally, we are being transformed into the image of Christ (Galatians 4:19, Romans 8:29). We now belong to Jesus, who bought us with the price of His shed blood and we are indwelt by His Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19). Galatians 2:20 perhaps best summarizes our new identity in Christ: "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." The struggles, tensions and confusion about personal identity are resolved in Jesus Christ. To be "in Christ" is the vital center of the new identity offered by God.
- The second corrective is a review of our Creator's view of marriage and sexuality. The Creation Ordinance of God clearly connects the "image of God" concept with gender and human sexuality ("male and female He created them", Gen. 1:26-27) and the institution of marriage and the family (Genesis 2:18-25): Marriage, as a "one-flesh" union, is

monogamous, heterosexual and establishes a covenantal relationship (see Malachi 2:14). It is also an archetype of Christ's relationship with His church (Ephesian 5:32). But what does this "one-flesh" union look like? In 1 Corinthians 7:1-10, the Apostle Paul provides the answer. Paul is addressing a church centered in a pagan, sex-saturated culture, not at all unlike our own. Some in the Corinthian church had swung to the other side of the spectrum and were now arguing that Christians should all be celibate. While recognizing the spiritual gift of celibacy for those not married, Paul emphatically says that, in Christ, sexual intercourse is central to the one-flesh union of marriage; celibacy is not an option in marriage. He articulates three guiding principles: (1) The principle of mutual reciprocity, vv.1-2. Paul intentionally mentions both the husband and the wife, indicating that intimacy is not only for the husband; it is also for the wife. (2) The principle of mutual rights, v. 3. There is an obligation, a duty for both the husband and the wife in the marriage bed. This principle clearly argues against using sex as a weapon, or as a tool for manipulation and control in a marriage. The moment we say "I do," as equal partners in this complementary relationship, we realize it is no longer just about me; it is about us! We have conjugal rights and obligations that transcend a self-centered approach to intimacy. (3) The principle of mutual authority, v. 4. As complementary partners, we no longer have authority over our own bodies; our bodies are an extension of our spouse. We belong to each other. There is now a shared, mutual concern for the well-being, health and ownership of our respective bodies. We are truly a one-flesh union. Finally, marriage serves a protective function, keeping and shielding us as partners from the immorality and sexual temptation of a self-indulgent, extra-marital ethic of sex so pervasive in culture (see vv. 5-10). Sexual intimacy within the marriage bond is intended by God to manifest the joy and fulfillment of other-centered sexual expression and love between a husband and wife. It is the ultimate expression of femininity and masculinity within the marriage bond. Sexual intimacy also enhances and strengthens the marriage roles so clearly pronounced in Ephesians 5:22-32 and Colossians 3:18-19. The Song of Solomon and Proverbs 5:15-19 represent poetic expressions of sexual intimacy in the one-flesh union God creates in marriage. They are to be read, enjoyed and celebrated by both sexual partners in a God-centered, Ephesians 5:32 marriage.

See *The Economist* (2 April 2016), pp. 80-81.