An Identity in Crisis:

A foundational Christian framework for understanding the formation and conception of the postmodern self, within contemporary culture, with particular emphasis on the issues surrounding gender identity.

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Abstract

This dissertation outlines a framework from which the concept of identity can be understood within contemporary culture through the examination of modern, postmodern and Christian expressions of identity through an initial understanding of the self, developed in dialogue with Charles Taylor's Sources of the Self. This understanding of postmodern and Christian identity is then used to analyse the current contemporary issues surrounding gender identity and gender dysphoria and identifying the underlying issues that are then expressed through the current gender identity crisis. This is done through the understanding of identity as a culmination of what an individual values, and those who an individual allows to validate them. For gender, this includes analysing the purpose of the body, and the impact of objective truth on science, medicine, and morality; and crucially examining the postmodern and Christian validator through the roles of the church, God and the trans community.

Declaration
The work is original and has not been submitted previously in support of any qualification or course.

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Dedication
For the Church, in this time.

As J. I. Packer once said, it is *"our business is to present the Christian faith clothed in [post]modern terms, not to propagate [post]modern thought clothed in Christian terms... Confusion here is fatal"*.[1]

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[1] J.I. Packer, *"Fundamentalism" and the Word of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1958), 136.

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1 Introduction

According to Times Magazine, 2015 was "The Year We Obsessed Over Identity".[2] Identity politics is on the rise, and the transgender movement has dramatically influenced contemporary cultures' understanding of sexuality and gender. Identity has become a polarising issue. To object to an individual's expression of a particular identity, or sense of self, is considered an attack on the individual themselves. With such a culturally sensitive topic, it becomes even more important to step back from the surface issues and to examine the driving forces behind them. Philosophical thought impacts every aspect of an individual's life. Even seemingly simple responses can become deeply complex. Take Jesus' command to "love your neighbour" (Matt. 22:39, ESV); this command cannot be separated from who an individual perceives to be their neighbour. Their understanding of a neighbour is then connected to their view of what it means to be human. That meaning is derived from an understanding of anthropology that determines not only how they treat other human beings, but how they treat themselves.

1.1 Objectives

The purpose of this paper is to develop a robust understanding of the formation of the postmodern self within contemporary culture, and to determine the challenges this may present to the Christian worldview. The contemporary issues surrounding gender will be the dominant standpoint from which the postmodern and Christian views are compared, as a means of achieving this goal.

Rather than debating the surface issues and attempting to develop a pastoral response to the issues that have become deeply intertwined with an individual's sense of self; this paper will identify and critique the driving force behind these surface issues. This will be achieved first forming an understanding of what 'identity' or 'the self' is. This will then allow an understanding of postmodern identity to be established, from which the roots of the contemporary debate around gender can start to be understood. An individual's understanding of identity, and the philosophical framework it rests upon, is something that principally influences them unconsciously. Hence, establishing an idea of what an individual constitutes their identity to be is the first step to opening up a dialogue on this, or any other, contemporary issues interwoven with identity.[3] Once this foundation has been established, then the postmodern approach to identity can be defined and evaluated against a Christian approach, through the lens of gender.

1.2 Methodology

These objectives will be achieved through a critical thematic literature review crossing various disciplines and perspectives. As the focus of this paper is to develop a Christian foundation from which issues of contemporary culture can be responded too, that, therefore, will be the main perspective through which this subject will be addressed.

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[2] Wesley Morris, "The Year We Obsessed Over Identity," *The New York Times*, January 19, 2018, sec. Magazine, accessed March 23, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/11/magazine/the-year-we-obsessed-over-identity.html.

[3] C. Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), ix.

This paper is divided into three main sections. The first establishes what identity is through a dialogue with Charles Taylor's Sources of the Self.[4] The second unpacks the modern and postmodern approaches to identity by examining the significant thinkers within each of these periods. The section then ends with an outline of a Christian approach to identity, based on the work of Jack O. Balswick, Pamela E. King and Kevin S. Reimer, to allow for a critical examination of the two approaches.[5] The final section then examines the postmodern and Christian approaches to identity within the area of gender identity or transgenderism. This is done through the framework identified in section one and arranged topically to cover the different areas relevant to gender expression and the Christian and postmodern approaches identified in the preceding section.

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[4] Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*.

[5] J.O. Balswick, P.E. King, and K.S. Reimer, *The Reciprocating Self: Human Development in Theological Perspective*, Christian Association for Psychological Studies Books (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2016).

2 Understanding Identity

2.1 Introduction

Identity became a central theme within cultural studies as a result of the political, philosophical and linguistic concerns of the 1990s.[6] Identity as a concept would have been foreign to pre-modern cultures; nevertheless, in the modern sense of the term, identity was previously considered to be a culmination of a number of static factors predominantly outside of an individual's control: genes, sex, culture, social class, nationality, career or family. In the modern and postmodern era, identity changes to be viewed as a project, with Chris Barker and Jane A. Emma describing identity "not as a fixed entity but as an emotionally charged discursive description of ourselves that is subject to change".[7] Identity has become something of a set of "discursive constructions that are both unstable and temporarily stabilised by social practice and regular, predictable behaviour."[8] There is, essentially, no identity to be discovered, only one to be created.[9]

The question of identity is essentially a question of importance. Catholic Philosopher Charles Taylor defines identity as the culmination of an individual's "commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon" from which a person can determine what is good or of value to them.[10] Commitments are based on what a person values and their identifications stem from what validates that sense of value for the individual. For a Catholic, the teachings of the church provide a framework from which a follower can ascertain what is of value to them and, at the same time validate that chosen pursuit. Equally, an understanding of what it means to be British can influence what a British person considers to be of value. That sense of value is then in turn validated by the framework that defined it. For Taylor, identity can, therefore, be broken down into two elements: what is of value and what or who validates that sense of value.

2.2 Value and Validators

According to Taylor, identity revolves around the amoral space, helping individuals' answers the questions of right and wrong, and of worth and importance.[11] Areas where conflicts of identity are reconciled, are the areas that have the greatest significance for an individual. By reconciling these conflicts through "the language of interpretation", individuals are able to reach a point where they accept as valid the issues of identity that have been worked out. The identity of an individual is therefore always articulated through a number of self-interpretations, without which the question of identity could not be answered.[12]

Those self-interpretations are therefore very important but can only arise within a dialogue. It is only through cultured language that these conflicts are resolved, and these conflicts only arise within a community or relationship. Taylor, therefore, concludes that the "self can never be

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[6] Chris Barker and Jane A. Emma, *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*, 5th edition. (London: SAGE Publications, 2000), 259.

[7] Ibid., 260.

[8] Ibid., 269.

[9] Ibid., 273.

[10] Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, 27.

[11] Ibid., 28.

[12] Ibid., 34.

described without reference to those who surround it".[13] Thus, the 'full definition' of anyone's sense of self, does not just revolve around what they value, but also must be understood in references to their defining culture or community.[14]

2.3   Frameworks

The concept of identity only comes into being on the acceptance that the human agent exists within an environment of questions. The answers to these questions form the framework of understanding for an individual, giving them a sense of meaning. This sense of meaning drives how an individual understands themselves. Identity is therefore aspirational, something an individual wants to be true to, but also something they can fail to live up to. It defines what is important and what is not.[15] Within this understanding, it is therefore essential to recognise that an identity, abstract from any sense of framework, or orientating set of answers, would be, by definition, in crisis. As Taylor concludes that a person in crisis cannot know where they stand on "issues of fundamental importance", they instead have no positioning on issues whatsoever.[16] Taylor states that frameworks "provide the background, explicit or implicit, for [a person's] moral judgements, intuitions, or reactions". Frameworks consist of three axes, 'respect', 'meaning' and 'dignity'. These axes determine how an individual makes, and retrospectively make sense of, their decisions and reactions. Frameworks define what is to be aspired to or what constitutes a life worth living.[17] Consequently, the journey for identity is ultimately a quest for sense in what otherwise appears senseless.[18]

A framework is how lives are made sense of spiritually (or metaphysically). This may include the use of multiple frameworks, that are relied upon in response to different questions or circumstances. These frameworks provide a "set of qualitative distinctions" that enable people to think, feel, judge and ultimately perform one course of action that is perceived as better than another.[19] As Taylor explains:

> "One form of life may be seen as fuller, another way of feeling and acting as purer, a mode of feeling or living as deeper, a style of life as more admirable, a given demand as making an absolute claim against other merely relative ones… in each of these cases, the sense is that there are ends or goods which are worthy or desirable in a way that cannot be measured on the same scale as our ordinary ends, goods, [or desires]. They are not just more desirable, in the same sense though to a greater degree, than some of these ordinary goods are. Because of their special status they command our awe, respect, or admiration."[20]

The standards that an individual maintains emerges from their concept of an 'ultimate good'.[21] Whatever they define as this standard of good will dictate how they live out their lives in order to meet that standard. What must be recognised, in order to have a fruitful dialogue, is that there is

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[13] Ibid., 35.
[14] Ibid., 36.
[15] Ibid., 30.
[16] Ibid., 31.
[17] Ibid., 26.
[18] Ibid., 17–18.
[19] Ibid., 19.
[20] Ibid., 20.
[21] Ibid.

no common framework held by everyone. A sense of what is good, and the approach used to comprehend identity, differs depending on the framework of reference employed by an individual. The challenge then emerges when frameworks are not always clearly articulated. Instead, in the example of the honour ethic, there was a definitive cultural understanding of what should or should not be done; what is considered admirable or dishonouring. The culture defined the framework and the expectations that developed from it, without the need for explicit rules.[22]

2.4 Essentialism and Anti-Essentialism

There are a number of approaches to how identity is viewed within contemporary thought which broadly fit into the categories of essentialism and anti-essentialism.

2.4.1 The Universal or Articulated Self

Essentialism refers to the belief that something is fixed. Essentialists view the self as something that is universal, fixed and does not change. The culmination of the modern identity project took this one step further viewing the self not as *the* self but as a series of multiple interchangeable identities.[23] Anti-essentialism views identity as mouldable, something that is formed and shaped, rather than discovered. Anthony Giddens describes it not by a single or collective set of traits that make up an individual, but that the self is "reflexively understood by the person in terms of her or his biography".[24] Identity is something of a person's own creation, formed by their understanding of themselves within their past and present circumstances and their future desires.[25] This results in two very different approaches to identity. One where an individual is trying to discover who they really are, and a second where they are attempting to construct who they want to become.

2.4.2 Gender and Sex

An essentialist approach to gender or sex would consider these attributes fixed, rooted in biology. Prominent feminists like Andrée Collard and Joyce Contrucci who rooted their arguments in biological essentialism advocating for a link between women through childbearing bodies;[26] or Adrienne Rich who celebrated the differences between men and women and attributed that difference to motherhood.[27]

The anti-essentialist approach considers gender to be one part of the modern or postmodern identity project. In essentialism is rooted in biological sex, anti-essentialism opens up the possibility that instead of biology, gender holds a direct link to a person's constructed identity, forming an integral part of who the person considers themselves to be. Identity then replaces biology as the foundation of gender and becomes just one of many factors, if it is recognised at all.

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[22] Ibid., 20–21.

[23] Barker and Emma, *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*, 271.

[24] A. Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Hoboken: Wiley, 2013), 58.

[25] Barker and Emma, *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*, 262.

[26] See: A. Collard and J. Contrucci, *Rape of the Wild: Man's Violence Against Animals and the Earth* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989).

[27] Barker and Emma, *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*, 357.

2.5 Taylors Three Axes and Haidt's Six Foundations

To understand the contemporary sense of identity, and, by extension, the role gender plays within that, it must first be recognised that the contemporary understanding of the self is deeply intertwined with an individual's understanding of what is 'good'.[28] Taylor describes identity as a question of where an individual is 'placed' or 'situated' in relation to their notion of good.[29] Determining that good then becomes paramount to understanding a person's sense of self.

2.5.1 Morals and Identity

Any discussions in the area of what is good inevitably lead to the question of morals and the framework from which those morals derive action and decisions. Moral beliefs centre around the sense that human life is something to be valued and respected. This is why actions that go against this sense of good weigh most heavily on individuals.[30] How individuals react to a moral dilemma in this area is broken down into two areas: instinctive reactions, and implicit or explicit claims regarding the natural world and the status of human beings within it. As Taylor explains, "moral reaction[s are] an assent to, an affirmation of, a given ontology of the human".[31]

These instinctive reactions and implicit claims are rooted in a framework of understanding which can be understood through three axes: 'respect', the sense of responsibility to others; 'meaning' (of or in life); and 'dignity', how an individual gains the respect of others (or not).[32] Taylor argues that the same axes can be identified across cultures, differing only in each culture's emphasis on one or more of the axis.[33] This is clear when comparing these three axes to Jonathan Haidt's six foundations for morally reasoning,[34] defined in his Moral Matrix. From Haidt's research, he identified three foundations that are driven by individual needs: the foundation of care above harm, fairness over cheating, and liberty over oppression. These are reflected in Taylor's third axis of dignity. The second set of three is driven by communal considerations: loyalty over betrayal, authority over subversion and sanctity over degradation. These are mirrored in Taylor's first axis of respect.

2.5.2 Axis One: Respect

Respect focuses in on an individual's responsibility towards, and value of others. These are the values that focus on the belief that human life is something to be respected in and of itself; these drive some of the most specific restrictions and expectations in an individual's life.[35] Respect is what drives the notion of human rights, and the existence of human rights relies on the recognition of the autonomy of individuals.[36]

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[28] Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, 3.

[29] Ibid., 42.

[30] Ibid., 14.

[31] Ibid., 5.

[32] Ibid., 15.

[33] Ibid., 16.

[34] J. Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion* (New York: Penguin Books Limited, 2012), 131ff. and Jesse Graham et al., "Mapping the Moral Domain," *Journal of personality and social psychology* 101, no. 2 (August 2011): 366–385.

[35] Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, 14.

[36] Ibid., 12.

In the context of the honour ethic of ancient Greece, this first axis would have been defined solely on religious grounds.[37] Communal respect was established through a shared common religion that defined loyalty, authority and sanctity, and served to bring individuals together.

2.5.3 Axis Two: Meaning of/in Life

How an individual determines their life to be of meaning, or of value, is through their sense of 'good'. This sense of good comes from their moral framework which aids them in determining what is considered meaningful. If an emphasis is placed on the third axis of dignity, then what constitutes a meaningful life is driven primarily by individual needs. If an emphasis is placed on the first axis of respect, then the community tends to drive what is considered a meaningful life. In both religious and warrior ethics, one "framework stands unquestioned which helps define the demands by which they judge their lives and measure, as it were, their fullness or emptiness."[38] For the honour ethic, this is centred around "fame and infamy".[39] The pursuit of glory and the avoidance of dishonour provide meaning to those that espouse the honour ethic, with dishonour considered insufferable.

2.5.4 Axis Three: Dignity

Taylor describes the dignity axis in a number of ways. The dignity axis can be considered a person's sense of power, their ability to dominate in a public space. Alternatively, it could be viewed as the ability to be self-sufficient or through external admiration.[40] Often dignity is rooted in the moral space, with adherence to the sense of good determining the value of an individual. Dignity can also be performative; this includes the roles an individual performs and their sense of the right or wrong way to perform those roles. An example of this would be a father or mother fulfilling their role as a provider. When a person's sense of dignity is wrapped up in a role that will change in function, like when a child leaves home, this event can breakdown any sense of self-worth that was rooted in their role as a provider for the child.[41] Dignity is centred around an individual's personal sense of being respected by others.

For the honour ethic, the third axis of dignity is dominant. An individual's worth is attributed based on their social standing, with soldiers being placed above citizens (as an example). The foundations for care, fairness and liberty were driven by the fame and glory attached to success on the battlefield. Harm was seen as a necessary cost in exchange for meaning, with a need for honour on the battlefield defining the fairness foundation and the battles purpose being consumed in the concept of liberation from oppressors. A willingness to place one's life at risk for glory in battle was the "mark of a real man" with those unwilling to do so considered "womanish".[42] Respect was gained by an individual in the honour ethic through that framework.

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[37] Ibid., 16.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid., 44.
[40] Ibid., 15.
[41] Ibid., 15–16.
[42] This view was inherently sexist. Ibid., 20.

2.5.5 Summary

For Taylor identity at the highest level is a culmination of what is valued and what validates that sense of value. These two areas cannot be separated from the communities of reference that have shaped the individual's perception of these two areas, alongside the frameworks the individual has adopted or developed in order to understand what they value. This understanding of identity enables values to be traced back to an underlying emphasis of either the dignity or respect axis. The values can then be evaluated against the other axis and the foundations that are part of it to fully understand the impact to both the individual and society as a whole.

Taylor	(2) Meaning in Life					
	(3) Dignity of the individual			(1) Respect for the community		
Haidt[43]	1	2	6	3	4	5
	Care/ Harm	Fairness/ Cheating	Liberty/ Oppression	Loyalty/ Betrayal	Authority/ Subversion	Sanctity/ Degradation

Table 1: Charles Taylor's three-axes mapped against Jonathan Haidt's six foundations of moral theory

With this foundation established, the specifics of postmodernism and the expression of identity and the underlying framework can now start to be comprehended.

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[43] Numbering follows that of: "Home | Moralfoundations.Org," accessed March 29, 2019, https://moralfoundations.org/.

3   Modern, Postmodern and Christian Identity

3.1   Introduction

Taylor identifies three major aspects of the modern identity that have emerged.[44] First, the inwardness sense of an individual's true self being found internally. Second, the "expressivist notion of nature as an inner moral source" that was developed between the 18th and 20th centuries.[45] Finally, the "affirmation of ordinary life" which has developed from the Reformation through the Enlightenment and into contemporary culture.[46]

3.2   Modern Identity

Modernists root reality primarily in science and facts. Modernism is associated with the Enlightenment period, and the pursuit of universal truths that applied regardless of time, space or culture.[47] This search for universal truths drove both the scientific and moral projects of the Enlightenment.[48] This section will outline how the influence of some of the critical enlightenment thinkers impacts the pre-modern understanding of identity to form the modern identity.

3.2.1   The Search Inside

The birth of the modern identity, and what Taylor refers to as the "the first-person standpoint," begins with Saint Augustine of Hippo and his positioning of the search for self internally.[49] For Augustine, the focus on the internal was at least partly motivated by the fragmentation he experienced in his own life and the culture he was living within.[50] Deprived of God, Augustine believed that the self would remain scattered. Consequently, his search within was birthed in response to God's call to find unity in himself through God.[51] His shift to look inwards started the journey towards an understanding of the self as the "stable, abiding reality that constitutes the individual human being".[52] Colin Futon claims this inward pursuit has had "disastrous effects on modern Western thought".[53]

3.2.2   Evolution and Naturalism

Arguably one of the most critical shifts came as a result of Charles Darwin's theory of evolution. Foundational to the rise of modernity, the theory has profoundly shaped modern cultures view of the natural world, to firmly root it in materialism. Jacques Barzun argues that Darwin's motivation was to deny any aspect of plan or purpose in nature: "this denial of purpose is

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[44] Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, x.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Barker and Emma, *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*, 214.
[48] Ibid., 222.
[49] Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, 130.
[50] S.L. Dixon, *Augustine: The Scattered and Gathered Self*, Preaching and Its Partners Series (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1999), 37.
[51] Ibid., 199.
[52] Stanley J. Grenz, "The Social God and the Relational Self," in *Personal Identity in Theological Perspective*, by R. Lints, M.S. Horton, and M.R. Talbot (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2006), 72.
[53] C.E. Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 95.

Darwin's distinctive contention."[54] For God to be removed from the picture, there had to be no purpose in His creation.

Darwin's theory was one of many factors that led to the replacement of God with reason. Taylor refers to this as the disenchantment of the modern world, where the "dissipation of our sense of the cosmos as a meaningful order, has allegedly destroy the horizons in which people previously lived their spiritual lives."[55]

Taylor identified two facets of moral drivers, instinctive and ontological. The evolutionary drive that has placed instinctive reactions into a higher position of value and placed a "great epistemological cloud" over other accounts which do not follow "empiricist or rationalist theories of knowledge".[56] As a result, the ontological moral drivers have been diminished.[57] Taylor links this to the use of various ontological accounts in justifying horrific acts that devalue one human being in comparison to another. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno affirm this in their criticism of Enlightenment philosophy as a logic of dominance and oppression that was rooted in a desire to control nature, and by extension humanity, through science and rationality.[58] The drive that gave birth to the industrial revolution and transformed society as a whole was in itself an attack on human rights,[59] and also resulted in some of the most horrific acts of human history, like the concentration camps of Auschwitz. The frameworks that had previously provided identity with a stable foundation in God, and his meaningful creation, now became problematic.

3.2.3   The Division of Moral Truth

The preference of instinctive reaction placed the role of the mind, and the view of its inherently rational capacities, into the centre of western philosophy.[60] The Cartesian subject, 'I think, therefore I am',[61] equated reason with method. The philosophers of the Enlightenment period used reason to objectify and gain mastery over the world around them, and over the 'self' inside of them.[62]

The transition was then made from conceiving the self as the soul to viewing the human person as a "restless discontent transformer of the world".[63] A transformer which was a "fully centred,

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[54] J. Barzun, *Darwin, Marx, Wagner: Critique of a Heritage*, Intellectual History (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 11.

[55] Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, 17.

[56] Ibid., 5.

[57] Ibid.

[58] T.W. Adorno and M. Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 2nd, reprint ed., Verso classics (New York: Verso, 1979), 225–226.

[59] The Industrial revolution was "regarded as a catastrophe which desecrated the English landscape and brought social oppression and appalling physical hardship to the workers". T. S. Ashton, *The Industrial Revolution 1760-1830*, OUP Catalogue 9780192892898 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), sec. abstract.

[60] Barker and Emma, *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*, 263.

[61] A common transition of the Latin phrase, "Cogito, ergo sum", from René Descartes, *A Discourse on Method*, trans. John Veitch (New York: J. M. Dent, 1912), pt. IV.

[62] R. Lints, M.S. Horton, and M.R. Talbot, *Personal Identity in Theological Perspective* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2006), 72–73.

[63] G. De Santillana, *The Age of Adventure: The Renaissance Philosophers*, Age of Philosophy Series/the Meridian Philosophers (New York: New American Library, 1956), 46.

unified individual, endowed with the capacities of reason, consciousness and action, whose 'centre' consisted of an inner core."[64] This centre developed into the modernist's understanding of identity, and the elevated role of the self, ignited the pursuit of self-mastery. What was first initiated by Augustine as a religious pursuit, quickly became the pillar of modern identity.[65]

The pursuit of self-mastery led to an understanding of the self as social, the origin of which can be found in American Psychologist George Herbert Mead. Mead hypothesised that an individual's experience of the self is only understood in relation to how the self is reflected in the context of a social group.[66] This built upon the ideas of William James who distinguished between the ideas of 'I' and 'me'. 'I' being the subjective consciousness of the self that develops through time, and 'me' the empirical or objective sense of self.[67]

Mead's approach was adopted in Enlightenment thinking, where identity becomes a project, something that is built or progressed towards rather than something that is fixed or static.[68] As moral truth is considered objective, the understanding of an individual's sense of self is constructed, based on the morals adopted through feelings and preferences that develop. The very concept of self-existence prior to social formation is called into question.

3.2.4   Subjective Moral Truth

The modern self exists in a world where facts have become "public, objective [and] valid for everyone", and values have been subjugated to the realm of "private, subjective and relativistic".[69] If there is no purpose in nature, and no meaning beyond this life, there is nothing to root any objective moral values in. This could explain why some of the great deniers of human rights have been the atheist, such as philosophers David Hume, Jeremy Bentham, Friedrich Nietzsche, Karl Marx and Vladimir Lenin; postmodernists Michel Foucault and Richard Rorty.[70]

Francis Schaeffer illustrates the division in truth brought on by modernity through the metaphor of two floors in a building.[71] On the first floor rests science and reason, which are objective and universal.[72] Prior to modernism, theology and morality would have occupied the same floor, but

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[64] S. Hall, "The Question of Cultural Identity," in *Modernity and Its Futures*, ed. Stuart Hall et al., vol. Understanding modern societies: an introduction (Cambridge: Polity Press in association with the Open University, 1992), 275.

[65] L.K. Dupré, *Transcendent Selfhood: The Loss and Rediscovery of the Inner Life*, A Crossroad book (New York: Seabury Press, 1976), 4.

[66] G.H. Mead and C.W. Morris, *Mind, Self & Society from the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist* (Chicago: The University of Chicago press, 1950), xi–xii.

[67] W. James, *The Principles of Psychology*, reprint, illustrated., vol. 1, The Principles of Psychology (New York: Dover Publications, 1950), 293–296.

[68] Barker and Emma, *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*, 218.

[69] N.R. Pearcey, *Love Thy Body: Answering Hard Questions about Life and Sexuality* (Ada: Baker Publishing Group, 2018), 12–13.

[70] Daniel Philpott, "No Human Rights without God," *OpenGlobalRights*, last modified May 28, 2014, accessed March 29, 2019, https://www.openglobalrights.org/no-human-rights-without-god/.

[71] Made popular in his books: F.A. Schaeffer, "Escape from Reason," in *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer: A Christian Worldview*, vol. 1, The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer: A Christian Worldview (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1985). F.A. Schaeffer, "The God Who Is There," in *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer: A Christian Worldview*, vol. 1, The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer: A Christian Worldview (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1985).

[72] Pearcey, *Love Thy Body: Answering Hard Questions about Life and Sexuality*, 12.

modernism introduced a distinctive line between fact and values, subjective and objective truth. This moved theology and morality into the second floor, of personal, individual subjective truth.[73] Truth now becomes something that must be scientifically verifiable. Hence, moral truth becomes subjective, as moral (and theological) truths cannot be validated through rigorous scientific analysis.

The shift of values into the personal realm and the loss of any "specifically theological definition of the nature of a transformed will", resulted in the emergence of a crucial distinction in terms of altruism and selfishness. This distinction impacted the second axis of meaning leading to a precise cultural understanding of what is a 'high' or 'low' life. In Modernism, there is no longer a 'higher' task that life contributes towards. Now meaning has to be found, if at all, in the different expressions of everyday life and the cycle of production and reproduction.[74]

3.2.5 The Fall and Rise of Fame

Where the prevalence of fame was once a central drive, and motivating factor for cultures that embodied the honour ethic, within the modern picture of identity, fame has become a mere predilection.[75] From Platonic roots, there has evolved a willingness to place the opinion of artists, painters and creatives, operating outside of their area of expertise, above those of experts in their field. Taylor Swift's Instagram post that resulted in a significant increase in 18-24 year old registering to vote would be one example of this.[76] The 'cult of celebrity' emerges from the modern sense that "what meaning there is for us depends [in] part on our powers of expression, that discovering a framework is interwoven with inventing it."[77] As Taylor stresses, the importance placed on expression in modern culture means that what it means to respect an individual's integrity, their dignity, includes their expressive freedom to discover, hold, and enact their personal views and opinions.[78]

3.2.6 Summary

In the first axis of respect, with the demotion of morals to personal preference, the sense of responsibility through the objective values placed on every individual is removed. No longer is there an objective standard that every individual is required to uphold, but multiple standards, defined through a multitude of frameworks, that individuals can pick and choose from. Although societies form a framework of what this should be, an individual has the choice over how much of this cultural framework is adopted and what sense of good emerges from it. This, in turn, shifts emphasis onto the dignity axis, as self-defined morals increase an individual's sense of power and control.

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[73] Ibid.

[74] Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, 23.

[75] Ibid., 16–17.

[76] An example would be the increase in those registering to vote after Taylor Swift's Instagram post in October 2008. Although the rise in votes cannot be definitively attributed to or traced back to Swift, the 212,871 registrations received in the two days following was above the average of 13,000 a day the prior year and mainly in the demographic of Swift's followers (18-24). Taylor-Dior Rumble and Ian Youngs Gompertz Will, "Do Celebrities Really Influence Voters?," November 7, 2018, sec. Entertainment & Arts, accessed March 24, 2019, https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-46123964.

[77] Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, 22.

[78] Ibid., 25.

Where meaning was previously driven through the attainment of wisdom (Platonic) or fame (honour ethic), meaning for the modern self is found through self-construction, and only through self-construction can self-mastery be achieved. Modernism claims there is no higher life beyond that of existence in this life. Inevitably without no distinct meaning beyond the self, it comes as no surprise that questions of meaning and value for individuals have arisen in contemporary culture; questions that would have been inconceivable to pre-modern societies.[79]

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[79] Ibid., 16.

3.3 Postmodern Identity

Where Modernism rooted reality primarily in science and facts and relegated morals to the realm of opinion; postmodernism progresses further, to relegate science and facts to the realm of opinion. Scientific fact becomes a scientific opinion. Postmodernism, or the Romantic period, look for the "socio-historical and linguistic specificity of 'truth'."[80] In Modernism, the pursuit of universal truth became paramount, the introduction of postmodernism brought into question the very notion of universal truth, or truth itself.

3.3.1 The Demise of Objective Truth

Fredrich Nietzsche, famous for declaring God to be dead was instrumental in the postmodern understanding of truth. Nietzsche argued that there were no universal truths or 'big facts' only the human interpretation of those truths. The facts accepted into mainstream culture represent those that serve the interest of people in positions of influence. Knowledge becomes just the constructions of interpretations that are considered to be true. Nietzsche did not believe there were any all-encompassing truths that could bring meaning to life.[81] Instead, "truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are; metaphors which are worn out and without sensuous power; coins which have lost their pictures and now matter only as metal, no longer as coins."[82] Nietzsche also believed that without God as a point of transcendence to root values and judgements, all that would remain would be the internal drive towards health and happiness – a "convalescent society".[83]

3.3.2 Truth as Culturally-bound

Karl Marx considered consciousness to be a by-product of social conditions; how individuals think is reflected by the social reality they are found within: "It is not the consciousness of men [*sic*] that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness."[84] Within Marxism, the concept of a universal essence of personhood is removed.[85] Michel Foucault, whose theories take much influence from Marxism,[86] considered knowledge to be specific to time and space. Foucault defined truth as configurations of knowledge that at a specific point in time.[87]

For the postmodernist, all truth is culture-bound, there are "no universalizing [*sic*] epistemology is possible because all truth claims are formed within discourse. There are no universal philosophical foundations for human thought or action."[88] Objects have no deeper value than the

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[80] Barker and Emma, *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*, 214.

[81] G. Harrison, *A Better Story: God, Sex And Human Flourishing* (London: SPCK, 2017), 13.

[82] F. Nietzsche, *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. W. Kaufmann, Portable Library (New York: Penguin Publishing Group, 1977), 37.

[83] Lints, Horton, and Talbot, *Personal Identity in Theological Perspective*, 2.

[84] Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977), chap. Preface, accessed March 24, 2019, https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1859/critique-pol-economy/preface.htm.

[85] Barker and Emma, *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*, 266.

[86] Mark Olssen, "Foucault and Marxism: Rewriting the Theory of Historical Materialism," *Policy Futures in Education* 2, no. 3–4 (2004): 454–482.

[87] Barker and Emma, *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*, 228.

[88] Ibid., 230.

symbolic meanings that they confer. Culture becomes "literally and metaphorically 'superficial'".[89] As John Paul Sartre once said, "there is no human nature because there is no God to have a conception of it… Man [*sic*] is nothing else but that which he makes of himself."[90] The obvious problem with this claim is that it is a statement of universal truth. To state there is no truth except that which is bound by culture is to claim a single universal truth, a fatal self-contradiction.

3.3.3 The Impact of Truth on Self

Where Augustine first encouraged an inward pursuit of the self with God, the modernist turned that pursuit away from God and onto the rational self in the search for the ultimate truth. With postmodernism, Nietzsche and Marx declared truth to be objective and culturally formed. This ended the modernist project to find the "true" self through the discovery of external truths. Instead, truth was confined within the self, and turned identity into a construction project. When nothing is real, except the self, the expression of that self is then required in order to conform the outside world to the reality found within.

Self-expression is first dependent on an awareness of the existence of that self and the ability to observe and interpret the thoughts and feelings of the self. Stanley J. Grenz points out that "self-construction through self-expression requires self-exploration as a first step."[91] This was done by Michel de Montaigne, who coined the term the autobiographical self, and was later used by Jean-Jacques Rousseau to declare his-self 'unique', and 'intrinsically good'.[92] Morality then became self-determined. Where Augustine started the inward search for wholeness in his creator, Rousseau was the beginning of the elevation of the self to the moral arbitrator and through his predecessors, the cosmic-self, to the creator. The self becomes the architect and judge.

3.3.4 Maslow and the Self-Sufficient Self

The concept of a 'self-sufficient, self-constructing self' arose from the Enlightenment's focus on the mastery of the self and Nietzsche prophecy of a convalescent society.[93] Abraham Maslow's "growth and self-actualisation psychology", including his five-step hierarchy of needs, was primed to respond; presenting "self-actualisation" as the end goal of humanity. [94] A later version of Maslow's hierarchy added a sixth and final stage to the original hierarchy, moving the end goal from self-actualisation to self-transcendence. Maslow expressed transcendence as

> "the very highest and most inclusive or holistic levels of human consciousness, behaving and relating, as ends rather than means, to oneself, to significant others, to human beings in general, to other species, to nature, and to the cosmos."[95]

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[89] Ibid., 243.

[90] John Paul Sartre, "Existentialism Is a Humanism," in *Existentialism From Dostoevsky To Sartre*, ed. W. A. Kaufmann (New York: New American Library, 1975), 422.

[91] Grenz, "The Social God and the Relational Self," 74.

[92] R.C. Solomon, *Continental Philosophy Since 1750: The Rise and Fall of the Self*, A History of Western philosophy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 75.

[93] R.N. Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, Perennial Library (New York: Harper & Row, 1986), 127.

[94] A.H. Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being*, vol. 5 (New York: Van Nostrand, 1968), 189–190.

[95] A.H. Maslow, *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature*, Esalen book (New York City: Viking Press, 1971), 269.

Transcendence, up until the Enlightenment, was considered a religious term; here, in the Romantic age, religion and the pursuit of God were replaced by the elevation of self to the level of transcendence previously occupied by God alone. Maslow considered his theory to be morally neutral and the path to the health and happiness which Nietzsche foretold.[96]

3.3.5   The Centrality of Sex

Charles Darwin and his theory of evolution profoundly influenced Sigmund Freud whose theories became central to the development of the postmodern self. Freud's admiration is evidenced by his frequent citation of Darwin in his published works,[97] where he departs from Darwin only in the purpose of sex. Freud argued that reproduction was not the central motivator for humankind, but the sexual act itself – this later became known as the Nirvana principle.[98] The purpose of the self became the fulfilment of desire through any fantasy the unconscious could derive.

3.3.6   The Shattered Self

Freud and the other twentieth-century modernists identified that the modern identity crisis had emerged out of "the dissolution of the classical liberal view of man",[99] and was creating an unhappy and unstable foundation or "psychological man".[100] Freud's theory of psychoanalysis was developed in response to this tension but focused primarily on the process and mechanisms of identity development.[101] Psychoanalysis breaks down the understanding of the self into the Id, Ego and Superego. The Id "contains everything that is inherited… present from birth" primary in the "realm of the illogical";[102] the Ego was considered the rational mind (carried forward from modernism); and the Superego, the 'social conscience'.

Where the modernist created a unified cartesian subject, Freud shattered identity into multiple pieces. The self was no longer whole and driven primarily by rational, cohesive thought, termed by Freud as 'secondary processes'. Freud suggested the very opposite; instead, the unconscious, primitive, primary processes drive behaviour. The cohesive sense of identity modernism produced was considered nothing more than a social construction developed to give a perceived sense of wholeness.[103]

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[96] Lints, Horton, and Talbot, *Personal Identity in Theological Perspective*, 74.

[97] Freud cites Darwin "at least twenty times in his published writing" and within his Autobiographical Study clear admiration of Darwin's work can be found. See: "Darwin, Darwinism, and Psychoanalysis," *International Dictionary of Psychoanalysis* (Encyclopedia.com, n.d.), accessed March 24, 2019, https://www.encyclopedia.com/psychology/dictionaries-thesauruses-pictures-and-press-releases/darwin-darwinism-and-psychoanalysis.

[98] Anthony Storr, *Freud: A Very Short Introduction*, Very Short Introductions (Oxford: OUP Oxford, 2001), 23.

[99] C.E. Schorske, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture*, illustrated, reprint., Vintage books (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 22.

[100] See either Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, 456–466. or J.L. Rider, *Modernity and Crises of Identity: Culture and Society in Fin-de-Siècle Vienna* (New York: Continuum, 1993), 11.

[101] Although psychoanalysis has had a big impact on Western thought, the process and procedures created by Freud are neither scientifically robust nor universally agreed upon. Any approach to build a sense of self on psychoanalytic theory would be considered an unstable or insufficiently tested foundation. Barker and Emma, *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*, 267.

[102] S. Freud and J. Strachey, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. XXIII, The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud Series (New York: Vintage, 2001), 145.

[103] Barker and Emma, *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*, 267.

Grenz claims that Freud "undercut the older concept of the unitary self-characterised by permanence, continuity, and cohesion," within his theory (and practice) of psychoanalysis.[104] Rather than fixing the disillusionment of modernity, the self became "an endless, unpredictable interplay of conscious and unconscious identities," with no recognition of the difference between reality and fiction.[105]

The result was a decentred self that adopts a fragmented identity. A person is not constituted of one identity or self, but of multiple, with no coherent self to hold them together. In Michael Foucault's work, he asserted that identities are not fixed but "mediated by the many rich, dialogical discourses [people] encounter each day".[106] Each fragmented identity pulls in a different direction, so the sense of self adopts and changes.

3.3.7   The Rise of Dualism

Freud was a dualist[107] and took postmodernism thought a step further towards a self, centred on sexual expression, and a step away from Darwin's materialism into a Gnostic view of mind over matter. The escape from the physical world into the metaphysical has created a dualism where the postmodern self places the core of a person in the internal metaphysical dimension. The real authentic self is thus separate (although internal to) the physical body. Philip Rieff describes it as the "triumph of the therapeutic".[108] A culture marked by the ascension of modern psychology that has transformed self-expression into the moral question for the authentic self; isolating a person's sense of self to the internal, regardless of what is happening in the external world. Freedom became a crusade for an individual to become their 'true self', and the expression of their innermost thoughts was to speak as the true, authentic self.[109]

The roots of the gnostic thought have captured postmodern culture: an individual is defined by what they think and feel. Reality is rooted in the inner realm, not in the physical. As N.T. Wright has said, "modern Gnosticism has surged to become a 'controlling myth' of our age."[110] Gnosticism introduces the concept of a dualism within reality where the physical world, that of time, space and matter is secondary to the spiritual, or metaphysical; or, just 'bad'. The outcome of this is a low view of everyday material things, including the human body, because they carry less importance than that of the metaphysical. The solution then becomes to escape from the material world into the metaphysical through the acquisition of 'secret' knowledge. The most substantial acquisition being the understanding of how to be an authentic self.[111]

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[104] Grenz, "The Social God and the Relational Self," 75.
[105] Rider, *Modernity and Crises of Identity: Culture and Society in Fin-de-Siècle Vienna*, 43.
[106] "This identity scheme is suggested in much of Foucault's philosophy, particularly in Discipline and Punish and The History of Sexuality" Steve Urbanski, "The Identity Game: Michel Foucault's Discourse-Mediated Identity as an Effective Tool for Achieving a Narrative-Based Ethic," *The Open Ethics Journal* 5, no. 1 (November 18, 2011): 1.
[107] Storr, *Freud: A Very Short Introduction*, 58.
[108] P. Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of Faith After Freud*, Harper Torchbooks ; TB 1360 (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 5.
[109] Harrison, *A Better Story: God, Sex And Human Flourishing*, 15.
[110] T. Wright, *Creation, Power and Truth: The Gospel in a World of Cultural Confusion* (London: SPCK, 2013), 9.
[111] Ibid., 6.

3.3.8   The Rise of the Individual

Where the traditional sense of identity was validated externally, and arguably resulted in a lack of value of the individual, Foucault's view of the self was distinctly individual. The modern and postmodern self shifted the culture to the opposite extreme and led to the rise of 'radical individualism'. Characterised by the drive for freedom from external authority, individualism took on the concepts of postmodernism to challenge the moral and ethical obligations defined by capitalism, tradition and nature.

The initial drive from 'we' to 'me', the emphasis on sexual freedom, and the drive for equality brought on by first and second wave feminism, resulted in the Sexual Revolution of the 1960s.[112] The feminist movement itself was focused on concerns with the power relations surrounding sexual difference, the dominance it has within modern society, and the view of an imbalance within those power relations resulting in women being subordinate to men.[113]

Mainstream feminist writing relies on a conceptual division been sex and gender; sex is biologically determined, and gender is culturally determined. Difference feminism emphasises how there are essential distinctions between sex and gender with various causes including culture and biology. For feminists such as Mary Daly[114] and Adrienne Rich,[115] the difference between men and women is something to be celebrated and affirmed. Difference feminists would link gender very closely to sex, which would then provide grounds for biological differences that are celebrated. However, for a liberal or socialist feminist, equality is only found within sameness. The differences evidenced between men and women are considered to be by-products of socio-economic or cultural influences, not biology.[116] Gender and sex have a remote link to biology, which is seen as irrelevant to the differences experienced in culture.

None of these views is maintainable within the postmodern framework as biology is not a reality that can be used as a basis for truth. Instead, post-structural feminists use the influence of postmodern culture and apply it to both sex and gender, considering both to be constructs (as all truth is subjective or culturally defined). Male and female, masculinity and femininity, are not considered innate truths that are universal in nature but are discursive constructs formed by a common understanding through language.[117] The split of sex and gender is rejected completely with both being the same socially constructed concept.

These factors combined with post-war prosperity and the rise of the services industry creating more opportunities for women and further straining the traditional gender roles that had provided support for the institution of marriage. The revolution overturned the long-established sexual ethics of Western civilisation and replaced them with the liberalising culture of commitment-free sexual expression.

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[112] M.J. Heale, *The Sixties in America: History, Politics and Protest*, BAAS paperbacks (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001), 13–14.

[113] Barker and Emma, *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*, 268.

[114] M. Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990).

[115] A. Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (New York: Norton, 1976).

[116] Barker and Emma, *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*, 345.

[117] See L.J. Nicholson, *Feminism/Postmodernism*, Feminist theory series (Abingdon-on-Thames: Routledge, 1990). or C. Weedon, *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory* (Hoboken: Wiley, 1996).

3.3.9   The Narrative Self

Rather than shaking off the shackles of oppression from capitalism, tradition and nature, the self instead became hand-cuffed to a community narrative. The postmodern picture of the individual self, envisioned by Foucault, was instead the 'narrative-self', formed through the social and relational interaction enacted within a community of reference.[118]

The narrative-self was based on the thinking of George Mead who considered identity to be a project consisting of two narratives, a past and a future narrative.[119] Mead recognised the role that relationships played in forming an identity. Taylor agrees with this affirming that "one cannot be a self on one's own. I [Taylor] am a self only in relation to certain interlocutors… conversation partners who are essential to my achieving self-definition".[120] Taylor refers to this as the intersecting point in a crossroad within a "web of interlocution".[121] The fundamental point of understanding for postmodern identity is the recognition that it is *relationships that define identity.*[122]

In a globalised fast-paced culture of twenty-first-century living, where relationships fluctuate and change at a high rate an identity built on interpersonal human relationships alone is "is little more than a bunch of fluctuating relations and momentary preferences".[123] This can only lead, to what Fredric Jameson's describes as "psychic fragmentation".[124] The claims of the sexual revolution offering freedom and unadulterated pleasure instead became a movement that Glen Harris declared to be weak and vulnerable, in need of "constant coddling by an army of agony aunts and sex therapists."[125]

3.3.10   Storytellers

These relational interactions then supported the development of identity in terms of multiple narratives. The philosopher Walter R. Fisher coined the term the "narrative paradigm" where the self is constantly testing the current story against the existing stories known already to be true to the real self. Instead of rationality driving human beings, Fisher considered humans to be storytellers constantly testing and adopting stories based on the principles of fidelity and coherence.[126] In the narrative paradigm, decisions are made based on "good reasons" determined by an amalgamation of experiences from influences like "history, biography, culture and character"; rather than rational arguments based on logic and reason.[127]

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[118] Grenz, "The Social God and the Relational Self," 77.

[119] Ibid., 90.

[120] Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, 36.

[121] Ibid.

[122] Mead and Morris, *Mind, Self & Society from the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist*, 138–158.

[123] Grenz, "The Social God and the Relational Self," 77.

[124] F. Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Post-contemporary interventions (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 90.

[125] Harrison, *A Better Story: God, Sex And Human Flourishing*, 94.

[126] See: W.R. Fisher, *Human Communication as Narration: Toward a Philosophy of Reason, Value, and Action*, Studies in rhetoric/communication (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1987).

[127] Walter R. Fisher, "The Narrative Paradigm: In the Beginning," *Journal of Communication* 35, no. 4 (1985): 74–89.

Taylor indicates that individuals do not store facts or ideas about themselves. Instead, they hold in an "imaginative, pre-conscious level" memories in the form of "stories, myths and legends".[128] Taylor goes on to say that a person's sense of good is wrapped up in their understanding of life as an unfolding story.[129] A skill that modern culture has embraced and used effectively in communicating the individualistic moral picture that contemporary culture now exists within.[130]

3.3.11 Summary

An understanding of truth as subjective frames the postmodern inward search for identity. This takes place within a secular culture that has left any sense of a higher being behind, replacing God with a crusade for health, happiness and sexual freedom. Nature, as well as transition, institutions and the systems they represent, are viewed as restrictions that oppress the expression of the reality of the self. Within Haidt's framework, this reflects a reduction in the focus of the moral foundations that drive people together due to the "'suffocating grip' of tradition, and the oppression wrought by 'enemies of the human spirit… heaping shame on ordinary men and women'"[131] that resulted from them. The sexual revolution demonstrated this well, as not just a quest for sexual liberation but a moral crusade against the oppressive control of tradition and the communal focused moral values it represented.

For the postmodernist, this devaluing of communal morality further weakens the first axis of respect, as the third axis of dignity continues to be elevated. The individual, narrative, or relational self becomes the focal point for all meaning, value and existence. To build upon Schaeffer's model, this replaced the clear line between what was objective and what was subjective. Facts are now only interpreted through the values held by the individual. Reality, and the material world, becomes a creation of the 'cosmic self'.[132] This resulted in a shallow view of nature, where the material world is no longer considered 'real', just one individual's perceptive of reality.

Grenz concludes that "the highest value that this self can posit is freedom, which, when understood as the flip side of self-consciousness or self-awareness, involves the capacity either to mould or to actualise oneself."[133] Meaning in life, Taylor's second axis, is found in the expression of the self.

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[128] Harrison, *A Better Story: God, Sex And Human Flourishing*, 46.

[129] Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, 47.

[130] Stories are how ideas are communicated. The media and the success of Hollywood is testament to the value contemporary culture places on stories and the role the media plays in shaping the moral framework of a culture. See: J. Fruzińska, *Emerson Goes to the Movies: Individualism in Walt Disney Company's Post-1989 Animated Films* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publisher, 2014).

[131] Harrison, *A Better Story: God, Sex And Human Flourishing*, 54.

[132] See also Solomon, *Continental Philosophy Since 1750: The Rise and Fall of the Self*, 75.

[133] Grenz, "The Social God and the Relational Self," 74. For more on the concept of moulding the self, see R. May, *Man's Search for Himself*, Delta book (New York: Dell, 1973).

3.4   Christian Identity

A Christian framework for identity emerges not out of progressive cultural developments but from a theological basis. This does not mean there has been no change in the understanding of identity, only that developments in philosophy and development theory influence the understanding of that theological basis, rather than the definition. Within this theological framework, there are two central aspects to the understanding of identity. Genesis 1:26-27 reveals two anthropological themes that sit at the heart of the text. The first being the concept of *imago Dei*, a Latin phrase translated as 'the image of God' referring to how God describes his creation as being made in the image of the Trinity, "Let us make man [*sic*] in our image, after our likeness". The second theme that emerged is one of sexual difference, "male and female He created them". These two themes are fundamental to Christian anthropology and are carried through the narrative of scripture.

3.4.1   The Imago Dei

The history of redemption is a conventional method theological texts apply in order to understand the *imago Dei*.[134] The Genesis account opens with the story of how humankind was created in the image of God. Later in the account, Adam and Eve chose to disobey God and sin enters into the world (commonly referenced as 'the fall'). In the gospels, Christ comes along and redeems all of mankind through his death and resurrection. Finally, Revelation paints a picture of the end, where God will restore all that was corrupted. As the history of redemption is examined, it is essential to take note of the present stage of redemptive history against the stage in which the account was set in. The fall has happened, Jesus has come, but Christians are still waiting for the full restoration that is promised.

The foundational understanding of the self, for much of Christian history, has rested on the link between humanity and the *imago Dei*. Claus Westermann asserts that *imago Dei* is the "most striking statement" of the whole creation account.[135] Paul reveals in Colossians 1:15-20 that the true understanding of the *Imago Dei* is revealed through Christ. Christ is firstborn (prōtotokos) of all creation (1:15) and firstborn from the dead (1:18).[136] Grenz develops this to determine that "humankind created in the *imago Dei* is none other than the new humanity conformed to the *imago Christi*". At the heart of Christian identity is the understanding that people are made in the image of God, and that their true identity can only be found within that understanding, which has been revealed through Christ.

Margaret E. Thrall explains that this "assimilation to Christ as the image of God produces a visibly Christ-like character, so that the divine image becomes visible in the believer's manner of life".[137] The Apostle Paul talks of the assimilation or the conformance of the Christian to Christ in Romans 8:29, but it is in his letter to the Corinthian church where he connects the imago Christi with the resurrected new humanity (1 Cor. 15:49). Building on the Adam-Christ typology

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134 Lints, Horton, and Talbot, *Personal Identity in Theological Perspective*, 5.
135 Ibid., 78–79.
136 Ibid., 80–81.
137 M.E. Thrall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians. 1. Introduction and Commentary on II Corinthians I - VII*, vol. 1, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians: Introduction and Commentary on II Corinthians I-VII (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 285.

set out in v.20-28, Paul uses the resurrection of Christ to show: firstly, that its eschatological resurrection is guaranteed; and secondly, that the resurrection body of Jesus is an archetype for all who carry the image of God. Grenz refers to this as Paul's "eschatologically orientated Christological determined anthropology".[138]

Although God's purpose for humanity is assimilation or conformity to Christ, this does not mean uniformity with Christ.[139] Every individual is still unique. Grenz goes on to suggest that the telos of the Old Testament creation story points towards the "eschatological community of glorified saints"[140] In fact, the whole redemption narrative is leading up to the point where God will restore His image fully to His people.

3.4.2   Sexual Difference

The second theme taken from the Genesis narrative is the creation of "sexually differentiated and hence relational creatures."[141] Grenz comments at Adam's delight at the creation of woman, when no partner could be found among the animals. Adam, an embodied creature, yearns for completeness.[142] Karl Barth[143] introduced this concept of the relationality of male and female defining human relationship into mainstream scholarship, although the initial idea could be traced back to Dietrich Bonhoeffer.[144]

Within the male-female relationship, Barth draws from the I-Thou character of the Trinity to suggest that within the male-female bond there is a recognition of both sameness and difference, just as there is between the persons of the Godhead. What Adam could not find amongst the animals, he found in Eve. But Eve was not the same as Adam, as there is also a recognition of difference, a "mutuality within a plurality",[145] Grenz remarks. Ray Anderson points out that in relationships that follow the I-Thou characteristics both individuals "encounter their own being in the other".[146]

Although Barth's method has been considered weak, with some critics calling it faulty,[147] the theological construct of the close relationship of *imago Dei* and sexuality remains intact.[148] The

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[138] Grenz, "The Social God and the Relational Self," 83.

[139] Balswick, King, and Reimer, *The Reciprocating Self: Human Development in Theological Perspective*, 34.

[140] Grenz, "The Social God and the Relational Self," 83.

[141] Ibid., 86.

[142] Ibid.

[143] K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics The Doctrine of Creation, Volume 3, Part 1: The Work of Creation*, vol. 3, Church Dogmatics (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2004), 194–195.

[144] D. Bonhoeffer and M. Rüter, *Schöpfung Und Fall*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Werke (Kaiser, 2002), 29–30.

[145] Grenz, "The Social God and the Relational Self," 88.

[146] Ray S. Anderson, *On Being Human: Essays in Theological Anthropology*, reprint. (Pasadena: Fuller Seminary Press, 1991), 46.

[147] Phyllis A. Bird, "'Male and Female He Created Them': Gen 1:27b in the Context of the Priestly Account of Creation," *The Harvard Theological Review* 74, no. 2 (1981): 132 n. 8.

[148] Grenz comments that Barth correctly identifies in the text that the idea of male and female involves the recognition of both sameness and difference, where he strays is in his analysis is through the abandonment of human sexuality. Grenz, "The Social God and the Relational Self," 88.

self is not individual, but relational in nature. A concept that Alistair I. McFadyen develops in his understanding of personhood as dialogical and dialectical.[149]

This relationality is not to be confined to genital sexual expression, which will ultimately be left behind in the new creation.[150] Instead, it is the relational "dynamic of bonding" which continues to operate "beyond the eschatological culmination"; reflecting the dynamic between new creation humanity and the triune God.[151]

This understanding of humanity as male and female leads to an understanding of the image of God not as revealed through a single individual but in the "relationality of persons in community".[152] The community which God has ordained in the New Testament is the church. Grenz describes the church as the "prolepsis of the new humanity", and as a result, he concludes that the relational understanding of self, drawn from the biblical account, is in fact, the 'ecclesial self'.[153]

3.4.3   The Reciprocal Self

Just as there is no father without a child, by definition an individual's uniqueness is rooted in relationship with another. As Jack O. Balswick, Pamela E. King and Kevin S. Reimer note, "the other provides an orientation for the self to be made known".[154] The *imago Dei*, therefore, does not exist on the individual level but on the relational level. This leads Grenz to conclude that a relational ontology is required that can combine the "divine prototype and the human antitype together".[155] The view of the self as social has already been examined within the modern thinkers of the Enlightenment period (including William James and George Herbert).[156]

An understanding of the self must then start with an understanding of God whose image humankind bares. God is *perichoresis*; He is understood as a community of three persons in one being: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. His particularity is central to who He is, as each individual person of the Trinity is distinctive. The three persons of the Trinity "mutually inhere in one another, draw life from one another, 'are' what they are by relation to one another".[157] An understanding of the Imago Dei comes from an understanding of God as fundamentally relational.[158] To be human, to image God, is to be "created in and for relationship with divine and human others."[159]

Building on the understanding of trinitarian relationships as mutually giving and receiving, it is sensible to conclude that this expression of relationship mutuality enables "the self to be known

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[149] A.I. McFadyen, *The Call to Personhood: A Christian Theory of the Individual in Social Relationships* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 9. I am grateful to Janet Penny for drawing my attention to this work.

[150] Grenz, "The Social God and the Relational Self," 88.

[151] Ibid., 89.

[152] Ibid.

[153] Ibid.

[154] Balswick, King, and Reimer, *The Reciprocating Self: Human Development in Theological Perspective*, 39.

[155] Grenz, "The Social God and the Relational Self," 90.

[156] See Section 3.2.

[157] As described in C.M. LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 270–271.

[158] Balswick, King, and Reimer, *The Reciprocating Self: Human Development in Theological Perspective*, 37.

[159] C.E. Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many*, reprint., Bampton lectures (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 222.

most fully in the process of knowing another".[160] Balswick, King and Reimer go on to note that "in such relationships there is space to simultaneously be oneself and to be in relationship with each other."[161] This relationship element, essential to the concept of relational identity, is not limited exclusively to human relationships nor that of the divine. Only through both divine and human relationship can the unique self be fully understood as intended by the God who created it; and in so doing, the self enables others to fully understand themselves too in community with the Father, by the Son, through the Spirit.[162]

How the self is understood emerges through the participation of being "in Christ", which is rooted in Paul's pneumatology and forms the basis of understanding for the ecclesial self.[163] Where Mead's picture of the social-self resulted in the construction of identity through the subjective self, the New Testament paints the picture of relationality formed, through the indwelling Spirit, to conform the self to the *imago Christi,* through the ecclesial self. As Grenz encapsulates,

> "the indwelling Spirit proleptically comprises the new humanity as the *imago Dei* after the pattern of the *perichoretic* life of the triune God, the Spirit constitutes continually the "self" of the participants in Christ's ecclesial community and, by extension, the "self" of the world."[164]

3.4.4   Summary

Taylor's second axis of meaning, the very telos for which humankind was made, is expressed through the glorification of God as the ultimate expression of the *imago Dei.*[165] The mutual giving and receiving of the trinitarian relationship modelled in the reciprocal self, frame the ongoing balance between respect and dignity. Through an individual's contribution towards the ecclesial body, and in worship to God, the self is focused externally on others. As the *imago Christi,* the individual is filled with the power of God himself and reassured through the truth that they were made in His image and are unconditionally loved by a God who placed their life before the life of His Son (John 3:16). The self is the ecclesial-self: just as God is fully sufficient within His Trinitarian nature, an individual understands who they are made to be through their co-dependent relationship with the ecclesial body and God himself.

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[160] Balswick, King, and Reimer, *The Reciprocating Self: Human Development in Theological Perspective*, 41.

[161] Ibid.

[162] Ibid., 47.

[163] Grenz, "The Social God and the Relational Self," 91.

[164] Ibid., 92.

[165] S.J. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei*, vol. 1, Matrix of Christian theology (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 327.

4 Examining Gender Through a Christian and Postmodern Framework

4.1 Introduction

Now that a solid foundation of identity has been developed, and an understanding of how that is expressed through postmodernism defined, the next step is to evaluate how these foundations have led to the concept of gender identity. Through Taylor's understanding of identity as value, the role of the body and objective truth can be understood within both the postmodern and Christian approaches to determine the philosophical differences. Finally, a validator for each approach is proposed, and evaluated in order to assess the impact those validators have on an individual's sense of self through each approach. For Christians, the role of God and the Church will be used, and for postmodernism, the transgender community will be used as a strong expression of postmodern gender identity.

4.2 Gender Identity: Value

Value is what an individual or self holds as important to them. Here the central topics of the body, the role of objective truth and the understanding of suffering are examined within each of these approaches to identity.

4.2.1 The Body: Sex and Gender

The approach to gender and biological sex within the postmodern framework is most clearly expressed through the transgender movement. Trans ideology is rooted in the work of post-structural feminists like Simone De Beauvoir, Shulamith Firestone and Judith Butler. Butler argues that both biological sex and gender are social constructs in need of deconstruction and aims to "uproot the pervasive assumptions about natural or presumptive heterosexuality".[166] For Butler, biological sex is a construct that has been forcibly materialised over a period of time and is not in any way linked to the biological body.[167] She argues against the "the naturalisation and reification of heterosexist norms".[168]

As Butler identifies as a lesbian,[169] Nancy Pearcey criticises her for not even attempting to do "objective research" but instead arguing to "legitimise her own minority sexual practice".[170] For Butler, any categorisations used are fictitious and subject to deconstruction. As a result, the concepts of biological sex and gender break down completely, as there is no difference at all: both are socially constructed.[171] Trans ideology accepts the Darwinian view of nature having no moral significance or purpose. Instead, the experience or feeling of 'gender' and 'sex' become the

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[166] J. Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Routledge Classics (Abingdon: Taylor & Francis, 2011), 31.

[167] J. Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex,"* Philosophy. Gender studies (New York: Routledge, 1993), 1–2.

[168] Ibid., 58.

[169] Butler describes herself at a "butch" lesbian. Maria Cyber and Judith Butler, "Maria Cyber Interviews Judith Butler," *Judith Butler Interview | Gender | Ethnicity, Race & Gender*, accessed March 24, 2019, https://www.scribd.com/doc/56581872/Judith-Butler-Interview.

[170] Pearcey, *Love Thy Body: Answering Hard Questions about Life and Sexuality*, 207.

[171] Barker and Emma, *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*, 286.

driving force for its very definition. Nature, or more specifically, the body, bears little weight against what the mind perceives to be true.

De Beauvoir once said: "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents to society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine."[172] De Beauvoir advocated for the removal of choice for women, arguing it was required in order to achieve equality: "No woman should be authorised to stay at home to raise her children… Women should not have the choice, precisely because if there is a choice, too many women will make that one".[173] Freedom was no longer the end goal, as the original feminists set out to achieve. Freedom does not go far enough if people do not take advantage of that freedom. Instead, they should be forced, not so equality can be achieved, but sameness.

Firestone built on the ideas of De Beauvoir and Marx to declare that the end goal of the feminist revolution to be "not just the elimination of male privilege but of the sex distinctions itself: genital differences between human being would no longer matter culturally."[174] At the end of this revolution, she considered that "the tyranny of the biological family would be broken."[175] Although the post-structural feminism heavily influences trans ideology, the movement has progressed beyond the initial picture set out by De Beauvoir, Firestone and Butler. This has led to the popular phrasing that "Sexual orientation is who you go to bed with. Gender identity is who you go to bed as".[176] The questions of identity 'who you are' are wrapped up in who you choose to sleep with and the person you want to be when you sleep with them.

Educational resources now being supplied to schools outline five areas that are suggested to culminate into a psychosexual identity: gender identity, gender expression, sex *assigned* at birth, physical attraction and emotional attraction.[177] The word assigned is crucial and represents a fundamental change in the cultural understanding of sex. Both the National Health Service (NHS)[178] in the United Kingdom (UK) and the American Psychological Association[179] in the United States (US) now define biological sex as assigned, rather than observed. Compare this to 2005 when the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) rights group, the Human

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[172] S. de Beauvoir, C. Borde, and S. Malovany-Chevallier, *The Second Sex* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2009), 294.

[173] B. Friedan, "A Dialogue with Simone de Beauvoir," in *It Changed My Life: Writings on the Women's Movement* (New York: Random House, 1976), 397.

[174] S. Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (Fort Mill: Quill, 1970), 11.

[175] Ibid.

[176] A common phraseology that is difficult to source the origin, but is found attributed to a patient of Dr Norman Spack, in A.E. Nutt, *Becoming Nicole: The Extraordinary Transformation of an Ordinary Family* (London: Atlantic Books, 2015), 116.

[177] See: "The Gender Unicorn – Trans Student Educational Resources," n.d., accessed March 24, 2019, http://www.transstudent.org/gender/.

[178] "Biological sex is *assigned* at birth, depending on the appearance of the genitals." The biological fact is not observed, but the sex is now assigned though a cultured understanding. "Gender Dysphoria," *Nhs.Uk*, last modified October 23, 2017, accessed March 24, 2019, https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/gender-dysphoria/.

[179] "Sex is *assigned* at birth, refers to one's biological status as either male or female, and is associated primarily with physical attributes such as chromosomes, hormone prevalence, and external and internal anatomy." "About Transgender People, Gender Identity, And Gender Expression," *American Psychological Association*, Answers to Your Questions (2014), https://www.apa.org/topics/lgbt/transgender.pdf.

Rights Campaign, referred to biological sex as "birth sex", rather than "assigned sex",[180] or to 2009, when the NHS still considered gender to be something someone was "born with".[181] Medical professionals like Dr Deanna Adkins consider gender identity to be "the only medically supported determinant of sex". She goes to say that "it is counter to medical science to use chromosomes, hormones, internal reproductive organs, external genitalia, or secondary sex characteristics to override gender identity for purposes of classifying someone as male or female."[182]

The result of this is a shallow view of the body. The obsession contemporary culture has with body image is driven not from a value of the body as it is, but from the desire to change, mould, and reshape the body into what the self perceives it should be. Pearcey goes as far as describing the postmodern conclusion to be that the body is a "morally neutral piece of matter that can be manipulated for whatever purposes the self may impose on it."[183] What is of value is the internal reality of the self, not the biological body. The self's view of gender must be expressed in the 'constructed' reality of the material world.[184]

4.2.1.1 *Christian Perspective*

Within the traditional Judeo-Christian perspective, the body is understood as being an integrated psychosexual unity".[185] In the Genesis account, when God looked at Adam and Eve, He declared His creation to be very good. Eugene H. Merrill argues that although this could be understood in terms of aesthetics, this must also be interpreted as a moral evaluation. Adam and Eve were made in God's image, and "God could hardly have been well represented by a flawed being".[186] Pearcey comments that "teleological morality creates harmony between biological identity and gender identity".[187] Unlike other creation narratives in the ancient world, the Bible paints a picture of humanity as a whole, not just men, or kings, but both male and female being image bearers of God (Gen. 1:27) and both male and female being very good (Gen. 1:31).

As gendered beings, human beings are also sexual beings. Sexuality expressed not only by the physical act but through the uniquely male and female particularised "sensations, desires, and indeed gender-grounded emotional or cognitive capacities".[188] Gender, as one aspect of sexuality, comprises of not just the physical aspects (including genetics, gonads, hormones) but also the

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[180] Brian Moulton and Liz Seaton, "Transgender Americans: A Handbook for Understanding" (Human Rights Campaign Foundation, n.d.), https://www.ithaca.edu/sacl/lgbt/docs/basicresources/understandingtrans.pdf.

[181] "Gender Dysphoria - Overview - Introduction," last modified January 22, 2009, accessed March 29, 2019, https://web.archive.org/web/20090122062710/http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/Gender-dysphoria/Pages/Introduction.aspx?url=Pages/What-is-it.aspx.

[182] "Expert Declaration of Deanna Adkins, M.D. from Joaquín Carcaño Et Al., V. Patrick Mccrory Et Al.," (United States District Court For The Middle District Of North Carolina, n.d.), accessed March 24, 2019, https://www.aclu.org/sites/default/files/field_document/AdkinsDecl.pdf.

[183] Pearcey, *Love Thy Body: Answering Hard Questions about Life and Sexuality*, 204.

[184] Intersex will be discussed briefly in Section 4.2.2.

[185] Pearcey, *Love Thy Body: Answering Hard Questions about Life and Sexuality*, 32.

[186] E.H. Merrill, *Everlasting Dominion: A Theology of the Old Testament* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2006), 199–200.

[187] Pearcey, *Love Thy Body: Answering Hard Questions about Life and Sexuality*, 32.

[188] Stanton L. Jones and Mark A. Yarhouse, "Anthropology, Sexuality, and Sexual Ethics," in *Personal Identity in Theological Perspective*, by R. Lints, M.S. Horton, and M.R. Talbot (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2006), 123.

metaphysical dimensions (psychological, emotional and relational) expressed through gender roles and sexual desire.[189]

The goodness of this embodiment is reinforced through the doctrine of the incarnation and the bodily resurrection of Jesus. If the body was something intrinsically wrong, as traditionally Gnosticism and "New Gnosticism"[190] would suggest, then God could never have become a man. If Jesus could take on human flesh and dwell among us and still be without sin, then the body cannot be evil. Secondly, the end state of humanity, redeemed and with God, will be in resurrection bodies. Throughout scripture there is recognition that human beings are more than just bodies; the metaphysical, spiritual or soulish element is vital; but it is the embodied resurrected bodies, that humankind will enjoy with God forever, not the soul alone.

4.2.1.2   Summary

To accept the postmodern view on gender is to deny the moral goodness of the body and its part in the integrated psychosexual unit that forms a unique individual. The postmodern and Christian understandings of the body, and its relation to the self, stand in contention with each other. It is not possible to hold the view of the body as morally good and human beings as embodied gendered beings while at the same time advocating that: truth is all subjective; reality is confined to the metaphysical; and the purpose of the material world and the bodies that dwell within it, is limited to self-expression.

4.2.2   Objective Truth: Science, Morals and Medicine

The shift in understanding of 'truth' has been traced through modernity and postmodernity which has resulted in an understanding of truth as not universal, but culturally bound or even individually bound within the construct of the self. As a result, the influence of science and reason, like that of the church and morals, is slowly being eroded. This section will examine how the postmodern view of sex and gender compares to the scientific understanding,[191] and the impact that has on the treatment of Gender Dysphoria (GD) or Gender Identity Disorder.

Before entering too deeply into this area, it is important to discuss two points. The first point is that this discussion is profoundly complex and fundamentally under-researched. The pursuit for understanding in this area must be made in recognition of the limited data available. A subset of

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[189] Ibid.

[190] A term used by Sherif Girgis in reflect of the postmodern view of personhood driving the changes in legal recognition of marriage in the Supreme Court's decision in Obergefell v. Hodges. "That conclusion suggests that the body doesn't matter. When it comes to what fulfils us, [humans] are not personal animals—mammalian thinkers, to put it starkly—who come in two basic forms that complete each other. We are subjects of desire and consent, who use bodily equipment for spiritual and emotional expression. Fittingly, then, has this new doctrine been called a New Gnosticism." Sherif Girgis, "Obergefell and the New Gnosticism | Sherif Girgis," *First Things*, last modified June 28, 2016, accessed March 23, 2019, https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2016/06/obergefell-and-the-new-gnosticism.

[191] This relies on a Christian understanding of rationality and the relationship with the natural world, as atheist philosopher Thomas Nagel points out "evolutionary naturalism implies that we should not take any of our convictions seriously, including the scientific world picture on which evolutionary naturalism itself depends." John Horgan, "Can Faith and Science Coexist? Mathematician and Christian John Lennox Responds," *Scientific American Blog Network*, accessed March 24, 2019, https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/cross-check/can-faith-and-science-coexist-mathematician-and-christian-john-lennox-responds/.

the available sources of research will be used and appropriately evaluated in the following section. However, this is not an easy or straightforward problem with a succinct answer. With the suicide rate among transgender people already at a high level,[192] and with one study suggesting this gets worse after reassignment surgery,[193] caution needs to be made with the progression of any action or treatment based on the data currently available. Behind each statistic is a real, hurting person who deserves a well-thought-out response based on evidence that will help them deal with the issues they are currently wrestling with. The reality is there is not currently enough empirical information to do this, though the relevance of this within the postmodern and Christian understandings of truth will be discussed.

The second is to acknowledge the existence of intersex people, who are born with ambiguous genitalia, often caused by combinations of chromosomes that fall outside the standard XX and XY. Due to the ambiguity of the genitalia at birth, this has led to doctors in the past 'assigning' sex to the infant, based on the premise that they were a blank slate in reference to their gender identity. Assigning sex has had "catastrophic mental health consequences for the individuals involved",[194] most notably the case of David Reimer.[195] As a baby, the circumcision on Reimer was unsuccessful, causing damage to the penis. On the advice of John Money, a psychologist and sexologist at John Hopkins Hospital, who argued in favour of gender being a social construct, his parents made the decision to raise him as a girl and remove the damaged penis and testes. Raised alongside his identical twin brother, Reimer never felt comfortable in his identity as a girl. Eventually, he was told the truth, and transition back to align with his biological sex. However, the damage had already been done. After two unsuccessful suicide attempts in his twenties, Reimer took his life at the age of thirty-eight.

Considering biological sex as something that can be assigned can terrible consequences. In the intersex cases where the genetic material makes this observation difficult (XXY, XXX), doctors now advice waiting prior to completing any non-essential treatments, at the consent of the intersex individual.[196] It is worth noting that the majority of intersex individuals do go on to identify with the gender binary of male or female, rather than identifying as non-binary.[197]

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[192] One study identified that "female to male adolescents reported the highest rate of attempted suicide (50.8%), followed by adolescents who identified as not exclusively male or female (41.8%), male to female adolescents (29.9%)," this was against "female adolescents (17.6%), and male adolescents (9.8%)". Russell B. Toomey, Amy K. Syvertsen, and Maura Shramko, "Transgender Adolescent Suicide Behavior," *Pediatrics* 142, no. 4 (October 1, 2018): e20174218.

[193] The Swedish study cites 19.1 times increase in suicide for post-op transsexuals against the random population control. Cecilia Dhejne et al., "Long-Term Follow-Up of Transsexual Persons Undergoing Sex Reassignment Surgery: Cohort Study in Sweden," *PLOS ONE* 6, no. 2 (2011): 1–8.

[194] Barker and Emma, *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*, 352.

[195] Phil Gaetano, "David Reimer and John Money Gender Reassignment Controversy: The John/Joan Case | The Embryo Project Encyclopedia," last modified November 15, 2017, accessed March 23, 2019, https://embryo.asu.edu/pages/david-reimer-and-john-money-gender-reassignment-controversy-johnjoan-case.

[196] "Shifting the Paradigm of Intersex Treatment | Intersex Society of North America," accessed March 31, 2019, http://www.isna.org/compare.

[197] 75% in a 2015 survey. Morgan Carpenter, "New Publication 'Intersex: Stories and Statistics from Australia,'" *Intersex Human Rights Australia*, last modified February 2, 2016, accessed March 23, 2019, https://ihra.org.au/30313/intersex-stories-statistics-australia/.

4.2.2.1 *Scientific*

Research into the natural world informs the understanding that for sexual beings (as opposed to asexual) there are two sexes: male and a female. It is only together, as male and female, that any sexual species can reproduce; whether any one member of the specifies is male, or female, is determined by their chromosomes (XX for female and XY for male). This means for human beings and animals alike, that sex is rooted in reproductive roles. Pearcey summaries this by stating that "biologically, physiologically, chromosomally, and anatomically male and female are counterparts," they complement each other.[198] Even down to the cellular level, each cell has a sex. Cardiologist Paula Johnson states that "every cell has a sex – and what that means is that men and women are different down to the cellular and molecular level. It means that [men and women] are different across all of our organs, from our brains to our hearts, our lungs, our joints."[199] Even down to medical treatment, the same treatment has different effects on the individual depending on their biological sex.[200]

The postmodern understanding of sex and gender is already reflected in the guidance issued by the General Medical Council in the UK. The guidance states that a patient can change the sex on their medical record at their request, without the need for a Gender Recognition Certificate or an updated birth certificate.[201] Disclosure of the patient's gender history is unlawful, unless "it is directly relevant to the condition or its likely treatment".[202] This puts the referring medical professional in an incredibly difficult position in guaranteeing the welfare of their patient when a referral is made to another medical professional for an undiagnosed condition, where it is unclear if gender will be influential.

4.2.2.1.1 *Brain-Sex Theory*

Postmodernist and transactivists use multiple theories to legitimise the claims of the trans ideology. These can be summarised under the banner of 'Brain-Sex Theory', though there are different areas of study within this. In more general studies of the brain, differences between the two sexes have been identified in every aspect of the brain, but the cause of those differences or the impact those differences have, is neither transparent nor agreed.[203]

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[198] Pearcey, *Love Thy Body: Answering Hard Questions about Life and Sexuality*, 29.

[199] Paula Johnson, *His and Hers ... Health Care*, n.d., accessed March 24, 2019, https://www.ted.com/talks/paula_johnson_his_and_hers_healthcare?language=en.

[200] Vera Regitz-Zagrosek states that "major sex and gender differences have been reported for the efficiency and adverse effects of heart failure drugs, such as digitalis, angiotensin-converting enzyme inhibitors and anti-arrhythmics. Similar effects have also been found in analgesic, neuropsychiatric, anticancer and cardiovascular drugs, as well as in the effects of anti-tumour necrosis factor-α and antiviral drugs. These differences are related to the efficacy of the drugs and to their appropriate dosage and administration for each gender." Vera Regitz-Zagrosek, "Sex and Gender Differences in Health. Science & Society Series on Sex and Science," *EMBO reports* 13, no. 7 (June 15, 2012): 596–603.

[201] "A patient's request to change the sex indicated on their medical records should be respected; they do not have to have been granted a Gender Recognition Certificate or have acquired an updated birth certificate for this to be changed." "Trans Healthcare - Advice Based on GMC Guidance," accessed March 24, 2019, https://www.gmc-uk.org/ethical-guidance/ethical-hub/trans-healthcare---advice-based-on-gmc-guidance.

[202] Ibid.

[203] J. McCredie, *Making Girls and Boys: Inside the Science of Sex*, Gay lesbian bisexual transgender and Intersex (Kensington: University of New South Wales Press, 2011), 79–80.

At a high-level, Brain-Sex Theory states that men have 'male' brains and women have 'female' brains, and therefore it is possible for a man to have a 'female' brain, and a woman to have a 'male' brain. Transgendered individuals would be those who had a brain that is opposite to their biological gender. Mark A. Yarhouse concludes that there are numerous issues with these studies.[204] When examining the three most cited studies on the neuroanatomic brain differences hypothesis,[205] all three studies use small sample sizes (single digits), and candidates had often undergone hormone therapy before the study (potentially influencing the results). In general, the majority of studies reviewed also focused on the morphology of the brain (the structure), which at best provides a limited picture. Research on brain morphology would need to be combined with brain activity, connectivity, load, and efficiency before firm conclusions could start to be made.[206]

Gina Rippon states that at birth the brain is entirely neutral, there is no such thing as a female or a male brain that a baby can be born with, merely 'a brain'.[207] Although this point is less contentious, her view that this remains the case has been challenged by other experts like Simon Baron-Cohen, who states that "most biologists and neuroscientists agree that prenatal biology and culture combine to explain average sex differences in the brain."[208] Both biology, through hormones and genetics, and culture have a significant role in how the brain develops and the sexual differences that have been identified. Even at a very young age studies have shown that male and females behave differently. With girls tending to direct their attention towards faces and boys directing attention towards objects.[209] Dr Michelle A. Cretella states that "one of the chief functions of the brain is to perceive physical reality", whether something fits with reality or does not. When an individual perceives something to be true that is not this is "at best, a sign of confused thinking; at worse it is a delusion".[210]

4.2.2.2 *Medical*

There are three main factors Kenneth J. Zucker identifies that can lead to experiences of GD: social cognition, co-occurring psychopathologies and family dynamics. Zucker's work has been

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[204] M.A. Yarhouse, *Understanding Gender Dysphoria: Navigating Transgender Issues in a Changing Culture*, Christian Association for Psychological Studies Books (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015), chap. What Causes Gender Dysphoria.

[205] Jiang-Ning Zhou et al., "A Sex Difference in the Human Brain and Its Relation to Transsexuality," *Nature* 378 (1995): 68–70. Chris W. Pool et al., "Male-to-Female Transsexuals Have Female Neuron Numbers in a Limbic Nucleus," *The Journal of Clinical Endocrinology & Metabolism* 85, no. 5 (May 1, 2000): 2034–2041. Wilson C. J. Chung, Geert J. De Vries, and Dick F. Swaab, "Sexual Differentiation of the Bed Nucleus of the Stria Terminalis in Humans May Extend into Adulthood," *The Journal of Neuroscience* 22, no. 3 (February 1, 2002): 1027.

[206] Yarhouse, *Understanding Gender Dysphoria: Navigating Transgender Issues in a Changing Culture*, 73.

[207] As discussed in: *Transgender Kids: Who Knows Best - BBC Documentary Banned in Canada*, n.d., accessed March 24, 2019, https://vimeo.com/247163584.

[208] Simon Baron-Cohen, "The Gendered Brain by Gina Rippon Review — Do Men and Women Have Different Brains?," *The Times*, March 8, 2019, sec. Saturday Review, accessed March 24, 2019, https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/the-gendered-brain-by-gina-rippon-review-do-men-and-women-have-different-brains-vq757qnph.

[209] See: Gerianne M. Alexander and Teresa Wilcox, "Sex Differences in Early Infancy," *Child Development Perspectives* (June 2012), accessed March 24, 2019, http://doi.wiley.com/10.1111/j.1750-8606.2012.00247.x.

[210] Michelle A Cretella, "Gender Dysphoria in Children and Suppression of Debate," *Journal of American Physicians and Surgeons* 21, no. 2 (2016): 51.

heavily criticised in the media, even resulting in the closing of his clinic and his dismissal, although the claims against him were later revealed to be without a base.[211]

The influence of culture and the rigid stereotypes that define how sex is expressed can result in young children experiencing a sense of GD. Zucker identified that young children tend to "conflate gender identity with surface expression of gender behaviours" and therefore it is not uncommon for a girl to express the belief that they would become a boy by merely dressing as she sees other boys doing and engaging in activities that she sees other boys doing.[212] Some studies suggest that those who suffer from GD also exhibits symptoms of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) at a higher level than the general population.[213] This is because both GD and ASD involve a "predisposition for obsessional or focused interests and extreme rigid thinking".[214] For children with GD, gender becomes the focal point of that obsession.

The importance of the family and parental relationships was another factor Zucker, and his team identified, observing that around three-quarters of boys experiencing symptoms of GD has "an insecure attachment relationship to their mother".[215] Trauma or abuse were also factors identified by Zucker that could influence an unhealthy developmental understanding of gender. With these factors in play, even if the experience of GD were a reflection of an individual's 'true self', it would still be good medicine to rule out the other contributing factors that could impact the individual's wellbeing. Especially as "all competent authorities agree that between 80 and 95 per cent of children who say they are transgender naturally come to accept their sex and to enjoy emotional health by late adolescence".[216] Even some liberals concede that "there is strong evidence… [that] many children with rather severe gender dysphoria will, in the long run, shed it and come to feel comfortable with the bodies they were born with." Those who critique the research do not "come close to debunking what is a small, but rather solid, strikingly consistent body of research".[217]

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[211] This was only after an enquiry, conducted by two 'experts' with little to no knowledge of the field, resulting in a report that was riddled with bias and false information. Jesse Singal, "How the Fight Over Transgender Kids Got a Leading Sex Researcher Fired," *The Cut*, last modified February 7, 2016, accessed March 24, 2019, https://www.thecut.com/2016/02/fight-over-trans-kids-got-a-researcher-fired.html. Eventually the report was withdrawal, an apology issued, and large settlement payment made to Zucker. "CAMH apologizes without reservation to Dr. Zucker for the flaws in the process that led to errors in the report not being discovered and has entered into a settlement with Dr. Zucker that includes a financial payment to him". "CAMH Apology | CAMH," last modified October 6, 2018, accessed March 29, 2019, https://web.archive.org/web/20181006142514/https://www.camh.ca/en/camh-news-and-stories/camh-apology.

[212] Kenneth Zucker et al., "A Developmental, Biopsychosocial Model for the Treatment of Children with Gender Identity Disorder," *Journal of homosexuality* 59 (2012): 377.

[213] Derek Glidden et al., "Gender Dysphoria and Autism Spectrum Disorder: A Systematic Review of the Literature," *Sexual Medicine Reviews* 4, no. 1 (January 1, 2016): 9.

[214] Zucker et al., "A Developmental, Biopsychosocial Model for the Treatment of Children with Gender Identity Disorder," 379.

[215] Ibid., 360.

[216] Gerard V Bradley and Tory H Lewis, "Brief of Amici Curiae Dr. Paul R. Mchugh, M.D., Dr. Paul Hruz, M.D., Ph.D., And Dr. Lawrence S. Mayer, Ph.D. In Support of Petitioner," *Supreme Court of the United States* (n.d.): 29.

[217] Jesse Singal, "What's Missing From the Conversation About Transgender Kids," *The Cut*, last modified July 25, 2016, accessed March 24, 2019, https://www.thecut.com/2016/07/whats-missing-from-the-conversation-about-transgender-kids.html.

Instead, activists advocate for treatment plans that range from social transitioning, puberty blockers for children as young as twelve,[218] and double mastectomies. This position is not one backed by strong medical research but driven by an ideological position that views physical reality as something to be confirmed to the internal "true" reality perceived by the self. Carl Heneghan, Director of the Centre for Evidence-Based Medicine (CEBM) at Oxford University confirmed in his 2019 review of the medical treatment of GD that "the current evidence base does not support informed decision making and safe practice".[219]

Social transition can appear harmless, but only when disregarding the role culture has in shaping a child's understanding of gender identity. By encouraging a child to act in a certain way, it reinforces beliefs that could lead to long term persistence of GD when the natural progression of puberty could have resulted in a resolution of the dysphoria. The impact of social transitioning in adults would have to be carefully considered in the development of any pastoral response to gender dysphoria.

In one study from a Dutch clinic, every one of the children placed on puberty blockers continued to experience symptoms of GD and, in general, went on to further treatment.[220] Compared to the 5-20 per cent in other studies, it would not be unreasonable to propose that the puberty blockers did not help resolve the symptoms of GD, but instead served to enforce it.[221] This should be of concern especially when a recent internal report branded the UK's only gender services clinic for children as "not fit for purpose"[222] and "woefully inadequate".[223]

For some, this type of treatment does serve to make them more comfortable with the dysphoria they experience. However, there are also many cases of individuals who are not, and make the decision to detransition after treatment, subsequently working out (at incalculable cost) that

[218] There are no restrictions in the US. Kate Lyons, "UK Doctor Prescribing Cross-Sex Hormones to Children as Young as 12," *The Guardian*, July 11, 2016, sec. Society, accessed March 24, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/society/2016/jul/11/transgender-nhs-doctor-prescribing-sex-hormones-children-uk. Puberty blockers prevent the natural development of the body as puberty is considered undesirable by activists as it "creates difficult barriers with enormous lifelong disadvantages". Cari Stella, *Response to Julia Serano: Detransition, Desistance, and Disinformation*, n.d., accessed March 24, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9L2jyEDwpEw.

[219] Carl Heneghan, "Gender-Affirming Hormone in Children and Adolescents," *BMJ EBM Spotlight*, last modified February 25, 2019, accessed March 20, 2019, https://blogs.bmj.com/bmjebmspotlight/2019/02/25/gender-affirming-hormone-in-children-and-adolescents-evidence-review/.

[220] Paul W. Hruz, Lawrence B. Mayer, and Paul R. McHugh, "Growing Pains: Problems with Puberty Suppression in Treating Gender Dysphoria," *New Atlantis* 52, no. Spring (2017): 34.

[221] Either that or the clinic was able to succeed where no one else has in accurately identifying only the children who would persist with their GD. The treatment recommended by activists puts all children who suffer from GD on "a protocol of impersonation and pubertal suppression that sets into motion a single inevitable outcome (transgender identification) that requires life-long use of synthetic hormones, resulting in infertility." This process is "neither fully reversible nor harmless". Cretella, "Gender Dysphoria in Children and Suppression of Debate," 51.

[222] Jamie Doward, "Governor of Tavistock Foundation Quits over Damning Report into Gender Identity Clinic," *The Observer*, February 23, 2019, sec. Society, accessed March 20, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/society/2019/feb/23/child-transgender-service-governor-quits-chaos.

[223] Andrew Gilligan, "Staff at Trans Clinic Fear Damage to Children as Activists Pile on Pressure," *The Times*, February 16, 2019, sec. News, accessed March 20, 2019, https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/staff-at-trans-clinic-fear-damage-to-children-as-activists-pile-on-pressure-c5k655nq9.

"transitioning does not fix the underlying ailments".[224] This is an area that desperately needs more research, in a cultural climate where research in this area is becoming harder to conduct.[225]

4.2.2.2.1   Summary

The conflict at the very heart of the issue is that if all scientific truth is relative, as the postmodernist would advocate, then regardless of what the science shows it can be accepted or reject entirely based on its merit to support the viewpoint of the individual. The Christian approach to identity is constructed on the existence of universal moral truth, and universal and purposeful natural truth, rooted in an unchanging God. To accept that truth is altogether relative is to undermine the concept of God's immutability, the existence of right and wrong and the need for salvation.

To encourage treatment like puberty blockers or hormone therapy for GD that is at best experimental, cannot be concluded as a loving thing to do, the evidence available does not support that conclusion. The concept of *imago Dei* means that even in a fallen world, there is an expectation that God has given humanity the gift of reason as a means of making sense of the world around them.[226] To accept the whole transgender treatment plan for GD would involve compromising on both the love of neighbour and the foundation of the gift of reason from which the natural world is interpreted. Too simple to do nothing, equally, may not give sufficient weight to the issue and experiences of those suffering from GD.

4.2.2.3   Moral

The postmodern moral framework emphasises the needs of the individual through the axis of dignity, so moral decisions are made based on the concerns of the individual. This has led to developed countries, such as the US and UK, to "become more egocentric," leading to the rise of an "emotivistic framework" in ethical decisions making.[227]

In Christ, as the archetype of Christian identity, all six of Haith's foundations for moral reasoning can be observed. There is a consistent balance between the needs of individuals and the advocation of principles that bring a community together and protect against individualism. The concept of universal truth common to Platonic, Aristotelian, and Christian philosophical frameworks has become lost within the individualistic emotivism of postmodernism.

This can be detrimental to the wider consensus on human rights. Human rights, by definition, are rooted in a universal truth that humanity has some form of rights prior to the existence of the state. If gender identity is not rooted in some way in biology, then gender becomes

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[224] Walt Heyer, "Hormones, Surgery, Regret: I Was a Transgender Woman for 8 Years — Time I Can't Get Back," *Usatoday*, accessed March 20, 2019, https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/voices/2019/02/11/transgender-debate-transitioning-sex-gender-column/1894076002/.

[225] Fraser Myers and James Caspian, "My Battle with the Transgender Thoughtpolice," accessed March 20, 2019, https://www.spiked-online.com/2019/02/22/my-battle-with-the-transgender-thoughtpolice/.

[226] Harrison, *A Better Story: God, Sex And Human Flourishing*, 14.

[227] Urbanski, "The Identity Game," 1.

something defined by the mind and recognised only by the state. The power, rather than being inherent, is shifted to the state for recognition.

A central feature of the western moral outlook is to "conceive people as active co-operators in establishing and ensuring the respect which is due [to] them".[228] The postmodern importance of the individual extends the concept of human rights to include freedom of expression, in whatever way that individual desires.[229] This has led to a conflict in terms of resolving the tension between individual expression and wider societal issues such as permissible sexual behaviour or the correct portrayal of violence.[230] Is the right of self-expression more important than the universal values that previously underpinned the whole of western society?

The challenge presented is that an individual cannot have one set of beliefs resting on one philosophical framework, and a second set, resting on a different framework. To accept an expression of either the modern or postmodern framework, in this case for gender, is to accept the underlying beliefs of that framework. For an individual to apply the postmodern framework to conclude that sex and gender are both social constructs, requires the acceptance that universal moral and natural truth do not exist. Another framework that relies on universal moral or natural truth cannot then be applied to other concepts without contraindicating the already established view on gender and sex. The postmodern framework must then be applied consistently across the moral and natural domain in order to avoid internal conflicts at the very centre of the self.

This conflict is evident in the trans movement when advocating for gender to be both fluid and fixed. For gender to be fixed, it has to have a foundation in the physical domain, such as biology. This would embrace the modernist framework, and leverage research surrounding Brain-Sex Theory as evidence. For gender to be fluid it cannot have a foundation in biology, as chromosomes, with the exception of intersex discussed briefly previously, are binary, either XX or XY.[231] Therefore, gender fluidity must find its foundation in the metaphysical. This would embrace the postmodernist framework and reject any scientific claims of truth as subjective. To argue for both to be true is both a contradiction of terms and a claim to universal truth, both of which are philosophically incoherent.

4.2.2.3.1 Summary

The danger with the postmodern moral framework is the overemphasis on the needs of the individual which no matter how well-intentioned, risks harming many in the name of a few. To overemphasise either axis of respect or dignity is damaging. A balance must be found between the needs of the many and the needs of the few to avoid the oppression of the minority and harm to the majority. As Glynn Harrison argues, within each of the personal encounters of Jesus in the gospels He effectively "integrated justice and compassion for the individual with

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[228] Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, 12.

[229] Ibid.

[230] Ibid.

[231] Intersex disorders can have multiple different causes including over exposure to testosterone for XX intersex, or various problems with the testes impacting the production of testosterone in XY intersex. In both cases they are caused by something that should not have happened and causes development to stray from the original path. "Intersex," *MedlinePlus Medical Encyclopedia* (U.S. National Library of Medicine, n.d.), accessed March 29, 2019, https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/001669.htm.

uncompromising obedience to God's word and his moral law."[232] This means that within the Christian framework there resides a balance between individual desires and the communal need, between the axis of dignity and respect.

In some cases, this results in a need to limit an individual's wants in recognition of what is best for the community. C. S. Lewis provides an example of the principle in his recognition that although he does not enjoy the company or presence of children, Lewis recognised this as a flaw within himself, rather than a truth to be expressed.[233]

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[232] Harrison, *A Better Story: God, Sex And Human Flourishing*, 39.
[233] C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, Riddell memorial lectures (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 1999), 48.

4.3 Gender Identity: Validator

The postmodern identity finds its locus in self-definition, formed through the interchange of stories and narratives within a community of reference. It is here, in the "space of moral and spiritual orientation" that an individual's most significant "defining relations are lived out".[234] It is, therefore, appropriate to consider the communities and relationships which are most influential within these two approaches to identity. Within the model of the reciprocal self, there is one primary validator in the form of the trinitarian God. The Creator is the only validator able to truly affirm an individual's unique self as the one who created them. The ecclesial community of the Church performs the second role to create the trinitarian picture of the self, which can only be realised in community with the divine and human.

When considering the postmodern focus on gender, and gender identity, the most apparent community of reference to turn to would be the trans community. The term 'trans' is an umbrella term used "to describe people whose gender is not the same as, or does not sit comfortably with, the sex they were assigned at birth".[235] Whether in person, or online, the community provides a 'safe space' for individuals seeking answers to the questions of identity when they do not feel they fit inside the traditional gender binary. For both frameworks, other validators could also influence an individual's understanding of their identity. This can include the role of family or friends, and their level of influence could be relative to their participation in either of the two communities referenced.

4.3.1 The Source of Moral Framework

The trans community provides that base for a relationship out of which identity is formed. The values of the community become adopted by those who take on the relational identity propagated by the group. Similarly, the church community provides a relational base from which the framework is defined and adopted into the sense of self. The main difference between the two groups is the source of those values, and by extension, the origin of the identity that emerges. In a church context, the values come from God, expressed through Scripture. One of the central roles of the community is to wrestle over what is written in order to follow the ways laid out by God for full human flourishing. This process also enables the community to understand the Creator better and by extension themselves, as His creation. This foundation is built on the belief that because God is immutable (Malachi 3:6) and God is good (Luke 18:19), there is a set of objective truths that can be identified through scripture.

Within the trans community, it is harder to pinpoint a single source of values that are adopted and propagating to members of the community. The influence of many modern and postmodern thinkers is evident and has already been explored in detail. This has resulted in an array of cultural ideas that have collided together within the context of a post-truth society. View that, after careful examination, are concluded to be philosophically contradictory.[236]

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[234] Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, 35.

[235] "Glossary of Terms," *Stonewall*, sec. Trans, last modified August 8, 2015, accessed March 23, 2019, https://www.stonewall.org.uk/help-advice/glossary-terms.

[236] Ryan T. Anderson, "The Philosophical Contradictions of the Transgender Worldview," *Public Discourse*, February 1, 2018, accessed March 23, 2019, https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2018/02/20971/.

4.3.2 The Influence of Society

The postmodern relationship requires society as a validator. Identity is not just about being able to express that self-perceived identity on an individual level but requires that society recognise and celebrate that individual's sense of self. Where the Christian approach looks to God for final validation, the postmodern, despite the attempt to idolise the individual and limit identity to self-definition, still requires the external validation of society. Self-expression is therefore insufficient; the ultimate goal is social recognition and celebration of the self-definition. This has driven the need for postmodernism to deconstruct[237] some of the social values that have defined western culture up until the twenty-first century.[238]

4.3.3 Relationships and the Self

In both the postmodern and Christian identity frameworks defined, a community of reference is a vital role in the development or understanding of the self. Balswick, King and Reimer propose four tenets of the validator that are required for healthy formation:[239] first, that relationship is defined by unconditional commitment, rather than conditional; second, that when failure occurs, relationships promote a culture of grace, and not a culture of shame; third, that relationships are used to empower, not to control; and fourth, that relationships are defined by "an openness that can lead to intimacy rather than isolation".[240]

4.3.3.1 Unconditional Commitment

Grace is a relational word expressed through covenant. Opposed to grace is a culture of shame; where perfection to the 'law' is required, and rules and regulations are used to define relationships. For people struggling with gender dysphoria, the church has time and time again failed in the standard set by and demonstrated by God. God's love is unconditional, but the church often falls short of the standard set by God. Many churches will approach the issues of gender dysphoria from the perspective of an integrity framework.[241] Yarhouse defines this framework as one that "identifies the phenomenon of gender incongruences as conceding the sacredness of maleness and femaleness and specific resolutions as violations of that integrity".[242] The result of this is not a relationship with the church that promotes grace but often a relationship that promotes shame in individuals struggling with GD.[243] The integrity framework alone does not offer a gospel basis for identity. Instead, it allows an individual to be defined by a single attribute, and, by extension, determines their ability to engage with the Christian community and the Father who made them. One participant in a study conducted on transgender Christians wrote that: "The negative message from the Church did irreparable harm to [their] self-esteem that took most of [their] life to recover from."[244]

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[237] A philosophy introduced by Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, reprint. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

[238] Including gender, sex and marriage.

[239] Balswick, King, and Reimer, *The Reciprocating Self: Human Development in Theological Perspective*, 57.

[240] Ibid.

[241] Yarhouse, *Understanding Gender Dysphoria: Navigating Transgender Issues in a Changing Culture*, 52.

[242] Ibid.

[243] Balswick, King, and Reimer, *The Reciprocating Self: Human Development in Theological Perspective*, 65.

[244] A.A. Lawrence, *Men Trapped in Men's Bodies: Narratives of Autogynephilic Transsexualism*, Focus on Sexuality Research (New York: Springer New York, 2014), 27.

Where the integrity framework fails, the diversity framework employed by the transgender community steps in. The strong form of the framework advocates for the deconstruction of sex and gender on top of the weaker form of the framework which "highlights transgender issues as reflecting an identity and culture to be celebrated as an expression of diversity".[245] The result is the opposite of the integrity framework, instead of feeling shame and uncertainty, an individual struggling with GD finds affirmation and purpose in defining themselves wholly by their sense of incongruity.

4.3.4   Grace Not Shame

Within the context of identity politics, where participants are urged to "mobilise around a single axis", this can create pressure on participants to define themselves wholly by the axis of the community. Then, "generalisations made about [the group] may come to have a disciplinary function… dictating the self-understanding that its members should have".[246] For the trans community, participants are encouraged to mobilise around gender and any disconnection experienced in reference to the biological binary. This becomes the central tenet of identity. As a result, the initial relationship may appear grace-filled but is dependent on the individual continuing in their expression of identity in ways the community considers acceptable. To reject the community's basis for identity, through the decision not to transition or to express regret following on from transition, leads to ostracism from the community and the family and friends that play a central role in the reinforcement of that.

Often anger is felt on both sides, with those transitioning proportioning blame on the community for their regret. One blogger stated how they felt other people's judgements had "got inside [their] head" and "infected how [they] saw [themselves]" until eventually, they questioned whether they were really female at all.[247] Maria Catt directs her anger regarding her transition towards "the people who were cheerleaders for my transition" and the "enthusiasm [they had] for all these limits I was placing on my life".[248] There are also stories of those who have transitioned and remained happy with the decision they made and the role the community had within that.

Guilt and shame both have their places in scripture, in healthy grace centred relationships. Guilt is the feeling associated with doing something wrong, a healthy response when breaking a just law. Shame is the feeling of being wrong; its place is seen in the Genesis account after Adam and Eve sought wisdom apart from God. However, the type of shame that develops in "non-gracing personal relationship is neurotic or toxic shame",[249] it is common in the church promoting the integrity framework and neglecting the wider gospel connotations of forgiveness and God's unconditional love.

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[245] Yarhouse, *Understanding Gender Dysphoria: Navigating Transgender Issues in a Changing Culture*, 52.

[246] Cressida Heyes, "Identity Politics," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, July 16, 2002, accessed March 29, 2019, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2012/entries/identity-politics/.

[247] Crash, "An Open Letter to Julia Serano from One of The Detransitioned People You Claim To 'Support,'" *Crashchaoscats*, August 8, 2016, accessed March 20, 2019, https://wp.me/p3GFZ9-77.

[248] "Detransition," *Transgender Trend*, n.d., accessed March 20, 2019, https://www.transgendertrend.com/detransition/.

[249] Balswick, King, and Reimer, *The Reciprocating Self: Human Development in Theological Perspective*, 66.

Even when people fall short of the standard God has set for each of us individually, and the church collectively, God continues to offer grace – both to those in the trans community, those suffering from GD, and those who fail in their love towards them.

4.3.5   Empowerment and Intimacy

In the garden, Adam and Eve felt no shame, even though they were naked before God and each other (Gen. 2:25). There was an openness to their relationships that allowed them to be themselves before others. Ray Anderson observes that this was "the power of subjectivity expressed as cohumanity. The vulnerability is in the defencelessness each has in the presence of the other".[250]

When the gospels talk of the covenant as the basis of relationship, this is not something formed by law or rules, but grace:

> "In the covenantal root metaphor, law and covenant belong together. The dyadic relationship necessarily involves creating specific forms, rules, and laws to guide community and personal relationships. The need for law, understood as relative to the actualisation of dialogical-dialectical relationships, the creation of whole persons-in-community".[251]

This does not mean there are no rules, but from this relationship of grace, patterns and responsibilities emerged that provide order. Rogerson makes some interesting observations around the Jewish law, specifically from texts like Exodus 22:25-27, and how the passage establishes 'structures of grace'. Rogerson defines these as "a social arrangement designed to mitigate hardship and misfortune, and grounded in God's mercy",[252] the purpose for which was to strengthen relationships and "counteract the forces that undermined the family".[253] The law specifically focused on the protection of the communal elements of Haidt's moral foundations.

In the trans movement, because the community is built around an identity that is formed around the collective experience of disconnection from the binary gender, this dictates an understanding the member should maintain to be part of the community. It then becomes problematic to doubt or challenge what has become integral to membership within the community. The of the ability to challenge and discuss the connecting tenant of the community represents a relationship seeking conformity and control.

This spills over into the broader culture as the expectations of the community are transferred onto the culture it resides within. An internal report cited that NHS staff working at the Tavistock Gender Clinic were fast-tracking patients partly due to staff being "afraid of being accused of transphobia if they questioned the "rehearsed" surface presentation" of the patient.[254]

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[250] Anderson, *On Being Human: Essays in Theological Anthropology*, 64.

[251] S. McLean, "The Language of Covenant and a Theology of the Family" (presented at the Consultation on a Theology of the Family, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA, 1984), 24.

[252] J. Rogerson, "The Family and Structures of Grace in the Old Testament," in *The Family in Theological Perspective*, by S.C. Barton (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 41.

[253] Ibid.

[254] Gilligan, "Staff at Trans Clinic Fear Damage to Children as Activists Pile on Pressure."7/3/2019 4:39:00 PM

To question the ideology of the movement is interpreted as an attack on a person's sense of self and often ends in the accusation of hate speech or the label of "bigot"[255] or "gatekeeper".[256] When a person's sense of self is so tightly bound up in their primary (or only) community of reference, there is very little space to question what is being said, only an expectation of conformity. This can lead to the isolation of individuals in moments of doubt or questioning. The church has the same problem when promoting a culture of conformity to rules, over the development of a relationship. Communities must provide space for vulnerability to be expressed and doubts to be discussed in order to resolve the internal tension that arises.

4.3.6 A Stable Foundation

In recognising an approach to identity as a project, a process of discovering a framework of meaning, it becomes intelligible that the search could either fail, for reasons in or outside of the individual's control, or, they could find nothing.[257] This creates a sense of instability at the core of the individual in both modern and postmodern approaches to identity. For gender, this is most noticeable in the fluid approach to gender, where there exists no stable foundation on which to base the sense of self because gender, as the defining attribute of the self, can and will change. Gender then rests on what is understood by gender in reference to the cultural, exemplified in stereotypes. Often those who identify as transgender will do so due to a close association with the stereotypical behaviour of the other binary gender, for instance, a boy who prefers to play with girl's toys. Sam Albury observes that when individuals transition, the stereotypical characteristics of the other binary sex are often emphasised.[258] Pearcey argues a similar point with Queer Theory that it serves to reinforce gender stereotypes.[259] Instead of addressing the issues of narrow cultural stereotypes, the trans community are advocating for fixing the people that do not conform to the rigid stereotypes by conforming them to the opposite stereotype.

A stable sense of self is "integral to healthy psychological development and well-being".[260] The problems of contemporary culture have given rise to the self-help movement, which stepped in to attempt to address this instability that arose, by giving people a sense of self-worth through personal affirmation. However, studies have shown that "rather than producing new improved versions of the self, these attempts at self-affirmation leave people with low self-worth feeling more depressed than ever."[261] It is possible, although further research would be needed, that the rise in mental health issues could be linked to the instability of the modern and postmodern self,

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255 Sofia Lotto Persio, "Dame Edna Creator Defends 'grotesquely Interpreted' Anti-Trans Remarks · PinkNews," accessed March 20, 2019, https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2019/03/17/dame-edna-anti-trans-remarks/.

256 Jamie Shupe, "I Was America's First 'Nonbinary' Person. It Was All a Sham.," *The Daily Signal*, last modified March 10, 2019, accessed March 20, 2019, https://www.dailysignal.com/2019/03/10/i-was-americas-first-non-binary-person-it-was-all-a-sham/.

257 Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, 17–18.

258 "What proves [Bruce] Jenner's womanhood, is those very stereotypes themselves." Ravi Zacharias International Ministries, *"How Can I Know My Gender?" | Sam Allberry*, n.d., accessed March 20, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Kaex8EA2y4.

259 Pearcey, *Love Thy Body: Answering Hard Questions about Life and Sexuality*, 198.

260 Sima Kotecha, "Self-Harm Hospital Visits 'Rising,'" December 12, 2014, sec. Health, accessed March 20, 2019, https://www.bbc.com/news/health-30414589.

261 Joanne V. Wood, W. Q. Elaine Perunovic, and John W. Lee, "Positive Self-Statements: Power for Some, Peril for Others," *Psychological Science* 20, no. 7 (2009): 860–866.

since the "modern self is simply too weak, [and] too insecure, to sustain a sense of its own worth."[262] The cultural expectations created by gender stereotypes are causing long term damage to both sexes. Laurence Carter identified that low self-esteem, and a self-perceived failure to attain what is culturally perceived as success, are two of the roots causes of depression and drug abuse amongst men.[263]

4.3.7   Summary

The same problem exists in both the church and the transgender community. The church shames people for struggling with traditional forms of sexuality. The trans community, in turn, shames people who disagree with the choices and values the community represents. As humanity is sinful, the only persons that can fit the role of the validator without also causing damage is God. This provides a challenging foundation for the self to be understood when the principal validator is anyone other than God. As the Creator, God made each person and is uniquely positioned to reveal who they are. Not through a single attribute or label, but as a whole person, more than just their gender or the struggles they experience with gender. The role and importance of the Church cannot be ignored within the view of the self as ecclesial. There is much work to be done to address the failures that have resulted in the trans community becoming a more open and accepting community, than the Church, for those experiencing issues with Gender Dysphoria.

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[262] Harrison, *A Better Story: God, Sex And Human Flourishing*, 118.

[263] L. Carter, "Sunday Mowing," in *Men's Ways of Being*, ed. C. White, by C. McLean and M. Carey, New Directions in Theory and Psychology (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996), 249.

5 Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to develop a robust understanding of the formation of the postmodern self within contemporary culture and to determine the challenges this may present to Christians. In order to do so, the contemporary issue of gender has been used to contrast the developed postmodern and Christian approaches.

This began with a clear outline of how identity is understood as the culmination of what an individual values and what an individual allows to validate themselves, through a dialogue with Charles Taylor. This led to the conclusion that identity is intrinsically linked to an individual's sense of 'ultimate good' and therefore their moral framework. Within different cultures, one or more of the three-axes of respect, meaning, or dignity, influences how an individual makes moral decisions and determines what is or is not of value to them. The culture, community and relationships that surround the individual continually serve to validate or rebut. This understanding of identity was then applied to the key thinking of the postmodern period to conclude that the postmodern identity invites the self into a reality of its own construction, where there are no rules or limits. The self perceives that reality and truths are individually defined and culturally-bound.

The postmodernist inherits the view of the body from modernism – it has no purpose in and of itself, no inherit telos, just a biological collection of cells that have randomly come together. By devaluing the physical, the metaphysical – the spirit, mind, will and emotions, becomes the only remaining area of value. The self becomes the only thing of real value. The purpose of the body is therefore to fulfil the reality perceived by the self, and the end goal of the self is centred on health, happiness and sexual expression.

The body and the natural world do not stand in the way of the dominant cultural narrative that 'being yourself' is all that matters. Even when 'being yourself' requires the world around you to be 'fixed' in order to meet the internal perception of reality. This leads to the view that it is acceptable to "carve up a person's body to match their inner sense of self but bigoted to help them change their sense of self to match their body".[264] The concept of there being something wrong with the internal self is foreign, as the internal self is intrinsically good, and the only valid point of reference available from which to understand the rest of the world.

The Christian worldview opposes the self-construction of the self and rejects the notion of truth being self-defined instead advocating for the universal truth of God and His word, revealed through scripture, as the foundation of moral understanding. For the postmodernist, the centre of the self often resides in a single attribute that is of the utmost importance. However, for Christians, gender does not define the sum of an individual; it is just one of many characteristics revealed in the reality of His making. What the central attribute is, does not matter; whether gender, sexuality, or career, the self should not be limited to one attribute, although this is the tendency of human beings. James K. A. Smith identifies that human beings "can't not be lovers; we can't not be desiring some kingdom. The question is not whether we love but what we

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[264] Pearcey, *Love Thy Body: Answering Hard Questions about Life and Sexuality*, 223.

love."[265] That which is loved, valued or validating a person is what defines their identity. A single attribute will always be a poor counterfeit as it continues to neglect that "identity is deeper and more many-sided than any [individuals] possible articulations of it."[266]

Only from this understanding of both Christian and postmodern identity can a pastoral response to the gender issues of contemporary culture now begin to be developed. A response that holds the needs of the individual in tension with the integrity of scripture and ultimately loves the individual. A response that creates an environment where both those considering transition, undergoing transition, or de-transitioning, can feel welcome to meet with God and explore their experience of dysphoria. An approach must be developed that enables every human being to understand that they are created in the image of God and that as God's creation they are intrinsically good. As God's creation, they are invited on a journey with their Creator; not to construct themselves, but to discover with Him who they really are, as an integrated psychosexual ecclesial-self, modelled on the *imago Christi*.

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[265] J.K.A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom (Cultural Liturgies): Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*, Cultural Liturgies (Ada: Baker Publishing Group, 2009), 75.

[266] Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, 29.

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