

Rebecca Davis: “Religion, Marriage, and Sexual Counterrevolutions”

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(Keynote address at Religion and Sexual Revolutions in the United States: A Graduate Student Conference)

Emily Johnson

All right, I think we’re going to get started. Welcome, thank you everyone for coming. I already gave a short round of thank-you's at the conference that preceded this all day, but I would like to just reiterate my gratitude to the John C. Danforth Center’s wonderful staff – Sheri Peña, Debra Kennard, as well as all of the fellows and faculty here who have been so supportive and wonderful this year.

So welcome to the keynote speech of the Conference, as well as an open public talk, “Religion, Marriage, and Sexual Counterrevolutions” by Rebecca Davis. Rebecca Davis is an associate professor of history at the University of Delaware. She is the author of the book *More Perfect Unions: The American Search for Marital Bliss*, and more recently of the essay “My Homosexuality is Getting Worse Everyday: Norman Vincent Peele, Psychiatry, and the Liberal Protestant Response to Same Sex Desires in Mid-Twentieth Century America,” which was the winner of the 2011-2012 LGBT Religious History Award from the LGBT Religious Archives Network.

Her talk today explores the history of marriage in the twentieth century United States as a case study for the religious history of sexual counterrevolutions, which is a tie-in with the Conference we’ve had today about sexual revolutions and religion. So, without further ado, join me in please welcoming Rebecca Davis.

Rebecca Davis

I also want to begin with some quick thank yous. First and foremost to Emily Johnson for organizing such a terrific conference. And I was struck as I was listening to papers earlier today that the talk I’m planning to give this evening is already enriched by having heard so many of these talks. I haven’t had time to incorporate all of it yet, but it’s really exciting to see the direction that this work is taking. I also want to thank Rachel Lindsey, Sheri Peña, and Debra Kennard at the Danforth Center for just doing everything to make this a smooth trip here for me with my four-month old, and really accommodating us in a way that’s really heartwarming. Also, to Marie Griffith and Leigh Schmidt, thank you for being role models for me intellectually, as historians of American religion, but also about having balance in your life, having a life, is something that I observed when I was a postdoctoral fellow at Princeton for the study of religion, and has continued to be sort of an inspiration to me that it’s possible to be, for them at least so far, it’s possible to be a really brilliant scholar and have a lovely life as well, something that I, in both regards, aspire to.

So, I now want to share with you a talk that comes from an essay I'm working on now. And this is a review essay on the history of heterosexuality. What I'm doing is reading everything I can get my hands on, where other scholars have talked about the history of heterosexuality. It's a field in which I see myself as a participant. When I finished my book and reflected, 'Okay, what was that really all about?' I sort of figured out that that's where it was at. And tonight my talk looks at how religion has played into this history of heterosexuality. So, I'm very interested for your feedback during the Q&A, because this work is something that I'm still developing and I think I've figured out something of how it fits together, and I'd love to hear your reflections of whether you're convinced of that.

Now, as I start to think about religion, marriage, and sexuality, I'm of course brought to think about the debates over marriage equality that are ongoing, and I wanted to reflect on how quickly, and how dramatically, that topic, that issue, has changed. When I entered graduate school in 2000, the literature was pretty clearly one of evangelical political ascendancy. And that the religious right was incredibly powerful, and then in 2004 with all this statewide issues that put in place state constitutional bans on marriage equality, it really seemed like that narrative of ascendancy was accomplished, yet we've seen just in the last year, really last ten months, an enormous change, and polling numbers give us one indication of that. So, quick snapshot: in 2003, 59% of people in a nationwide poll said they opposed marriage equality; just this past March of 2014, 59% of people in a nationwide poll supported marriage equality. Since the major Supreme Court cases of last summer, judges of Utah, Michigan, and Ohio, have overturned some of those very statewide bans that were put in place in 2004. Judges in Kentucky, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia have also ruled those bans unconstitutional, but those rulings have been stayed, pending appeal.

One thing that we see here is the importance of religion, and religiosity, to people's position on this issue. White evangelical protestants consistently poll as the religious group most opposed to marriage rights for same-sex couples, but even here, we see generational shifts. So, they're even more conservative on the issue than republicans, but if you look at millennials, they are more than twice as likely than the silent generation to support marriage equality. And at the same time, this is from a 2013 poll, 'Churchgoing' remains the most pronounced indicator of opposition to marriage equality, and people with no religion, are the most likely to support marriage equality. Now, I'm not a political scientist, so I'm not going to try to interpret these statistics on a deeper level, but I want to come back to this question at the end of my talk, of how did we get here? With religion being such a pronounced indication – religion and religiosity, such pronounced indicators – of where people stand on the issue of marriage and sexuality?

This has caused major complications within a lot of religious denominations. Probably many of you in the room are familiar with problems for the Episcopal Church. The Anglican Communion, which is culturally very conservative, is growing in the United

States, causing all kinds of problems over ordination and church property. Within the United Methodist Church, there have been highly publicized debates over whether to defrock or otherwise discipline United Methodist clergy who officiate at the marriages of same-sex couples. And in a number of these cases it has been United Methodist ministers officiating at the marriages of their sons to other men. And doing so is explicitly forbidden in the United Methodist book of discipline. In 1972, that defined homosexuality as a practice “incompatible with Christian teaching,” and as recently as 2012, the United Methodist Church issued a statement on human sexuality that further explained that “sexual relations are formed only within the covenant of monogamous heterosexual marriage.”

Now, here’s the reason that I’m going into this detail. Just last week, a governing body within the United Methodist Church decided to draft legislation to amend church law regarding LGBT people, opening up the possibility for a vote of greater inclusiveness at the 2016 general meeting. And my one hesitation in starting my talk on this subject was by the time I printed my paper out in Pennsylvania on Wednesday and gave the talk on Friday night, I would have missed some major development in the story – perhaps I have.

And we’ve seen Orthodox Judaism issue a sort of more tolerant statement on homosexuality in 2012 that people shouldn’t be pushed into psychiatric treatment for it. We see a major split within Roman Catholicism between – Roman Catholic lady poll is pretty supportive of marriage equality, and of course the Roman Catholic hierarchy is not supportive of it. But on March 1, 2014, Ross Douthat, who’s a columnist for the New York Times and a catholic, had a column called “The Terms of Our Surrender,” in which he basically said “We lose. We lost this one, and we need to move on. We’re not going to win this issue, we never will, and we need to put our resources elsewhere.” Which is striking. Other groups, Seventh Day Adventist Church, just last month, reaffirmed its opposition to same-sex marriage rights, or even really welcoming open LGBT people into their congregations. So a lot is happening.

One development that I find really interesting is that in North Carolina, a group of progressive religious leaders filed a lawsuit just last month saying that that state’s ban on marriage equality violated their religious freedom. This was clergy from United Church of Christ who said that they wanted, as part of their spiritual calling, to be able to officiate at legally recognized marriages for same-sex couples. And for those of you who are familiar with the work of Jakobsen and Pellegini, I think this is really putting into practice their idea of sort of disestablishing religion to defend freedom of expression and sexuality.

Where does all of this bring us? Well, my work, and what I’m interested in talking about for the bulk of my presentation this evening, is that religious individuals and institutions played a central role in the twentieth century in the invention of the categories of heterosexuality and homosexuality, and they did so very often through their investment in marriage. This intensifying preoccupation with marriage profoundly affected religious life in the United States, and religious actors and institutions became central to pro-

marriage culture. Now as I look at this chronologically, I find that religious voices in the earlier twentieth century were more prominently ambivalent about heterosexuality, heteronormativity. But I also find that once they embraced it, they did so with fervor. Importantly for my argument, American religious leaders and institutions were more preoccupied with heterosexuality and heteronormativity than with homosexuality for the first half of the twentieth century. And I see that they invested in heterosexual marriage in a way that set the stage, at least in several key regards, for their subsequent obsession with homosexuality. Finally, I find that this interest in marriage, faith, and heterosexuality, was deeply intertwined with ideas about race, ethnicity, class, and citizenship. And it's this last piece that I talk about in far greater detail in my larger essay, and that I will spend the least amount of time talking about this evening, but it's extremely important to the overall argument, and I'd be happy to talk more about it later.

As I segue into this, I gave a very short version of this essay at the American Academy of Religion meeting this past November, and Wallace Best was the commentator on it, and he said "So basically, your question is how do we get from the YMCA to Anita Bryant?" So, with that idea in mind, sort of, how do we get from the YMCA to Anita Bryant, I have this very sort of rough chronology of the invention of heterosexuality as I've been starting to think it through. And this is where we move now into the bulk of my talk – I don't have many slides from this point forward. I want to ask as we move through these historical periods, how important has religion been to this story of the invention of heterosexuality? And to what extent have religious people or ideas disrupted or complicated ideas of heteronormativity?

The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (the time that I'll spend the least amount of time on this evening): basically, I see here a dominant model of patriarchal marriage. This was an idea of marriage that had to do with male dominance, in many aspects, and not necessarily with anything we would today call heterosexuality. We see in the eighteenth and nineteenth century in terms of religion, many Protestants and Catholics, and I'm going to look to Sheri to teach me about Jews as well during the nineteenth century, preoccupied with questions of sexual morality. They're worried about sexual morality, but they weren't necessarily worried about heterosexuality. What I mean by this is you see lots of religious people writing and talking about the evils of masturbation; about this idea of sexual countenance, or sort of moderation, even within marriage; sensationalized panics dealing with allegedly nefarious things going on with Catholic clergy; clergy sex scandals, we learned more about that this morning; polygamy among the Mormons; complex marriage among the Oneidans; spiritualist free loves. There were all kinds of sexuality that had to do with religion that got people to talk and be concerned. They were much less likely to be talking and writing about sodomy, and they were also really not talking about any particular erotic configuration of what today might be called heterosexual marriage.

The next period though, is when we begin to see that conversation change. The 1880s to the 1920s is our transition to modernity. We see major change during this period

for a couple reasons. First, we have sexology, the study of sex and psychiatry, which proliferates the categories of sexual desire and pathology. And heterosexuality and homosexuality first appear as words thanks to these sexologists, but they're both coined as 'species of pathology.' Both of them are but a litany of things, like pederasty, bestiality, all kinds of various sexual problems that a person might have – heterosexuality being a term coined to describe a bizarrely focused interest in only having sex with people of the opposite sex, or sort of a compulsion towards sex with people of the opposite sex. But we also see an emphasis on what we today would call heterosexuality within the new leisure culture, which promoted new kinds of heterosocial – mixed sex – respectable leisure activities. In the nineteenth century, there might have been a few women in the saloon, but they weren't the nice kind of women your parents would want you to hang around with. Whereas by the late-nineteenth, early twentieth century, new commercial leisure places are openly courting and celebrating mixed sex social spaces. There was a lot more attention also to female sexual pleasure within marriage. Ideas about marriage change to talk about it more as a site of emotional and sexual fulfillment as a new ideal. These changes were controversial, especially insofar as they expanded rights for women, and there was a deeply conservative response to the proliferation of the heterosexual ideal.

All of this occurred amid profound racial and ethnic upheaval in the United States: the arrivals of millions of immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe; the gradual re-disenfranchisement of African American men and the policing of their bodies through the terrorism of lynching; efforts to force Native Americans off reservations and into nuclear family units; and new American imperial projects in the Pacific and in the Caribbean. As several scholars have noted, the particular anxiety that emerged about white masculinity during these years was involved in these new typologies of human sexuality. So you see at the same time efforts to sort and categorize immigrants and racial groups as you see efforts to sort and categorize different kinds of human sexuality.

So I observe in my reading two themes in religious conversations about sexuality in this period. The first is a defiant queerness: a resistance to the shift towards categorization of sexuality. And the second is an emerging campaign to celebrate marital heterosexuality, often at the expense of women's full emancipation, and also in cooperation with these new domains of social scientific expertise.

Religious people like everyone else were caught up in efforts to name, sort, and distinguish among sexual categories, but religious people were often at odds with the emerging scientific and legal taxonomies of sexual difference. Into the 1920s and even the 30s, we see religious institutions defending gender-based systems of identifying sexual deviance, not yet adopting any sort of binary based upon sexual object choice.

And there are a few historians who have helped me think this through. George Chauncey's now classic 1985 essay "Christian Brotherhood or Sexual Perversion," discusses a scandal at a Newport, Rhode Island Naval Training Station in 1919. Enlisted men were commanded to investigate so-called 'immoral conditions at the station,' which led to the

arrests of more than twenty sailors and sixteen civilians. One of the accused was an Episcopal minister who worked at the Newport YMCA. The key point from Chauncey's argument for my purposes is that not only did participants in these events disagree over whether some of the men having sex with men in Newport were queer, or how to categorize them, the "disagreed how to distinguish between a sexual and a nonsexual relationship." The navy defined certain relationships as homosexual and perverted, which the ministers claimed were merely brotherly and Christian. So really resisting. We have scholars who help us show how by the 1940s the military and the federal government were very effective in teaching Americans how to know when something's heterosexual versus homosexual, here we have instances of the military trying to teach a group of people what these categories are and really seeing this religious group push back against those categories.

We also have the work of John Gustav-Wrathall, who has a book on the YMCA called *Take the Young Stranger by the Hand*, that I think confirms Chauncey's narrative. By the 1910s-1920s, the YMCA was actively trying to promote marriage among its all-male corps of secretaries (its officers were all called secretaries). Previously, the YMCA had been very proud of its bachelor culture, had been really proud of the fact that its secretaries were effectively 'married to the YMCA,' that they gave their life to this work, and instead began to actively promote marriage for all of its officers. By the 1920s, the YMCAs became increasingly heterosocial spaces. The all-male YMCA began to invite in women for some of its programs on things like sex education and marriage education. It also promoted marriage as a pathway to moral behavior. Thus, I think what I'm seeing here, and I'm interested to hear your feedback about this, is that the YMCA was not moving towards a heterosexual/homosexual model so much as it was saying that marriage is the norm. Right, there's all these kinds of aberrant sexuality out there, and they might involve aberrant sex between men and other men, or men and women, but here we can claim sort of marital normativity as a safe space in which we can pursue our moral agenda.

I also am really interested in the provocative work Katie Lofton has done, where she talks about fundamentalism, and she looks at the first generation of scholars who authored the 12 pamphlet series, "The Fundamentals." She says, "Fundamentalism at its origins is a queer movement, ambivalent in its gender talk and classificatory intonations." And so Lofton also finds that religious individuals – for Gustav-Wrathall these were YMCA officials, for Lofton these are fundamentalist scholars – resisted the binary as articulated by the U.S. military and law, and instead had a queerer panorama of sexual and emotional possibilities.

Interestingly, when I look at this period, I see religious progressives very invested in trying to shore up distinct gender roles within a heteronormative framework, with very tepid endorsements of women's rights. My own work on the history of companionate marriage in the 1920s finds religious figures from across the political and theological spectrum almost universally opposed to Judge Ben Lindsey's proposal for what he called companionate marriage. This involved a two-year marriage contract that would permit

contraceptive use and easy divorce. These clergy linked marriage to Western civilization, to sort of the fate of the universe, and to capitalism. And they saw the importance of wage earning and ownership to conceptions of marital dependency. So they were interested in seeing heterosexuality as very contained and seeing this relationship continue to sustain male power within marriage, even as they were talking about sort of mutual affection between spouses. So, to summarize, during this period, we see a clash between queer spaces of evangelical religious organizations and a broader cultural concern with normal sexuality as linked to heterosexuality in marriage. Among the Protestants who, for the most part are whom these historians study (I have a few Rabbis in my article but that's decidedly missing from this literature), we see a move to marriage more than heterosexuality. And I think I'd like to suggest that here maybe the binary is between marriage and queer, and see if that is productive as a way to think through the questions that I'm asking.

Audience Member

I have a question on characterization. Can you say what 'queer' means in this context?

Rebecca Davis

Uh, non-normative. And it can mean – I don't know if it was defined earlier in the day either. Non-normative sexuality, it's a meaning that talks about sexuality at the margins, but also as a way of thinking through people or desires that exist outside of the norm. So, it often is in regard to same-sex desire and practices, and that's often how it's employed. It's used differently, used by scholarship. I'm sort of speaking from a background in what's called queer theory which talks about destabilizing binaries, getting away from fixed ideas of what makes someone male/female, what makes something masculine/feminine, what makes something gay/straight. So really trying to trouble, piece apart those boundaries, and find where they're in fact, not quite so distinct.

Audience Member

So you were saying some of the Fundamentalist founders had non-normative orientations?

Rebecca Davis

That's the work of one of the scholars that I was referencing, Katie Lofton, yeah. There was a sex scandal involving one of the authors of these pamphlets, and in the letters that went back and forth among the religious authorities who were involved in sort of prosecuting him within the church body, there was a way in which he was also trying to describe the sex he was having with other men as not being sinful. Right, he was trying to create a space in which the sex he was having was moral. Or say that perhaps it wasn't sex

at all, that it was this kind of brotherly, Christian love. And that's how she talks about it, as sort of a queerer understanding of sex. Rather than saying, if you have sex with this person, that makes you this, if you have sex with this person, that makes you that, that well, it sort of depends. I hope that that's helpful. That's one of those words we use all the time, and having to define it on the spot is really challenging, but really important, so thank you for the question.

And one of the things that I've noted as going through the literature is that we know far more about these conversations regarding men than we do women. And I'm interested to know what it would look like to write this history of this religious transition and modern sexuality with more attention to women. And it's possible that I'm just forgetting about some literature that I should be engaging with.

So, the next period that I look at is the 1950s-1960s. And I think this is sort of the key moment in a lot of these debates. During these decades, we see a growing conversation about heterosexuality explicitly so-named and so-discussed as a psychological, economic, and political ideal, embedded in ideas of citizenship and mental health, proliferated through agents of the federal government, military, law enforcement, culture, social scientists, mental health professions, and I argue, we see it in religious individuals and institutions and their conversations. This is the period in which historian Margot Canaday has talked about the creation of the 'Straight State' during which federal policies and immigration welfare and the military began to explicitly name heterosexuality as a condition of normative citizenship, and to confer very specific rights upon the heterosexual citizen. We also see that this government investment in heterosexual citizenship had profound implications for American religious debates over sexuality and marriage in later decades. Heteronormativity was increasingly integrated – the idea that heterosexuality is the norm was increasingly integrated – into ideas about racial equality and class status. It was also central to how religious leaders, especially interestingly liberal and progressive ones, articulated the contours of moral living. This American religious preoccupation with teaching heterosexuality (and this is also one of the things that I'm really trying to tease apart here), they're really interested in teaching heterosexuality to their children. And I'm finding that this occurred before, and helped set the stage for, subsequent obsessions with curing homosexuality. So there's a real awareness of heterosexuality as a goal, and as a precondition for a health, happy, moral life, but also was something that though natural, still requires a lot of instruction.

So, returning to this idea of queerness, the degree to which there's queerness in religious subcultures by the 1930s-1960s is increasingly precarious. These are the decades of sex crime panics, of the lavender scare, and of all kinds of increased surveillance of gay life in the United States. It was increasingly difficult to be openly involved in same-sex relations because of enforcement of criminal codes, and because it was defined as a mental illness. We have some examples of clergy whose congregations knew that they engaged in

same-sex sex. So, Wallace Best in his study of Pentecostals in Chicago has a few examples of congregants who sort of said “yes, but sort of whatever. We know that about him, but it’s not going to make or break whether he’s our minister.” That era of toleration could not survive the increasingly harsh policing of same-sex desires after World War II, and we have studies of Prophet Jones, who was a preacher in Detroit in the 1940s and 50s. He was African American, and African American clergy and middle-class African Americans in general, welcomed Jones, and sort of tolerated his queer self-presentation until he was arrested on a morals charge in 1956. So, there’s a study that looks at the ways newspapers described him before his arrest and after his arrest. They went from describing him as ‘flamboyant’ before 1956, to describing him as ‘a deviant’ after his arrest. You have from talking about his sort of particular manners, to talking about him as a pervert and a criminal after that period of time. There was a real effort then to distance themselves from this sort of sexually suspect person. The work of John Howard, who studies gay life in Mississippi during the post-World War II era, sees in some rural areas an ability to sustain a sort of more nebulous sexual identity further into the mid-twentieth century, but I think outside of... his book is titled *Men Like That*, so people in the community would know, yes, he’s “like that,” but it was sort of a ‘Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell,’ kind of mentality towards sexuality, that maybe lasted a little bit longer in some Southern rural areas. What we do see, though, is a concerted religious investment in heterosexuality as a precondition for a happy marriage. This was integrated into ideas about psychological wellbeing and maturity. New ideas about religious education saw it as part of sexual identity formation. So I’ve studied marriage counselors in my work, and it’s very clear that by the 1930s, heterosexuality is named, and identified as sort of a problem, and something that needs to be taught and cultivated in order for marriages to survive. Marriage was defined as moral and normative, but heterosexuality was not to be taken for granted. And parents bore a lot of responsibility for how this turned out. Non-normative gender identities and sexual desires were understood as impediments to marital happiness, and thus to full spiritual life, but they were not insurmountable obstacles.

One of the guys I studied was a liberal Protestant Minister in Columbus, Ohio, named Roy Burkhart – very well known as a sort of expert on pre-marital and marital counseling, and he was published in all of the pastoral counseling journals, and gave a lot of talks, so I like to look at him as sort of a representative figure. Burkhart was at a community church, he was very sort of non-denominational in his approach to Christianity, and not terribly theological in his approach to Christianity either, but he described his ministry as a sort of developmental step ladder, the highest rung of which was the marriage altar. So here’s he’s talking about what path one takes on the route to becoming a spiritually enlightened person, and marriage is sort of the apex of that journey. Parents are at the bottom rung of this ladder, with the mother carrying inside her a new life on the cusp of marriage preparation. He explained that the relationship between the husband and wife determined the child’s ability to love and be loved. Now, he’d read a lot of psychology, and he was

playing, sort of riffing on that idea. Pre-marital counseling, he wrote “should begin with the birth of the baby, or even with conception.” Right, so that the whole journey of life is all about getting married eventually. This journey from uterus to marriage alter, culminated in what he described as heterosexual freedom. He defined freedom as liberation from neurotic hang-ups, the capacity to enter into a loving relationship with God, and the attainment of psycho-sexual maturity. And here I have my favorite quote that I’ve probably ever come across in my research: “Heterosexuality is right and follows naturally. If father and mother are well-adjusted and love each other, the child will catch the spirit of it.” Now, you could spend a long time trying to unpack that quote. “It’s right and follows naturally,” but it also requires the parents to teach it to the children. I don’t think he saw any sort of internal contradiction in this. I think he was talking about the ideal that people would strive for. And I think he probably, in his understanding of Freudian theory, understood that people had sexual desires that went in lots of different directions. His point was that for a moral life, and for a psychologically balanced life, you need to channel all of your desires towards heterosexual marriage. And he had this in a book called *The Freedom to Become Yourself* (which is a sort of wonderful 1957 guide to everything, how to just be happy in all areas of your life), that having this sort of integrated personality was the key to all kinds of success, and all kinds of happiness in life. Beyond yourself though, it would ward off social disintegration because the immature homosexual, he associated with social disarray. As he explained in a pre-marital counseling pamphlet, “When two people are mature, they are heterosexual.” So this idea that a society of stable, high-functioning people, required that these people be heterosexual.

I can talk about this more – there’s really interesting work on the way that the inner-city comes to be associated with racial minorities and also sexual disarray – the work of Chad Heath, his book *Slumming* is fascinating. And how the suburbs become associated with white, middle-class, suburban, heteronormative family life. And I think that there’s a really interesting connection here, I don’t know the religious piece of that story yet, though.

But I think marriage counseling fit within a suburban religion that was about producing these heteronormative families. And the back story to all of this – the way I came up with my dissertation topic initially, that became my book – is that I was interested in writing about religion and homosexuality, so I looked in pastoral counseling journals, and used the indices to try to find where Rabbis and Ministers and Priests were talking about homosexuality. And I kept finding it mentioned in articles on pre-marital counseling. So, it’s why, when they were talking about marriage, were they concerned with homosexuality? And I think it’s because they were really worried about heteronormativity. They were really worried about gender roles, and about people finding heterosexual marriage, more so than about homosexuality as a kind of relational life.

Many other clergy shared Burkhart’s view that parents were enormously important. So, in 1957, Catholic marriage counseling guide reminded parents that “a display of affection between the parents promotes a healthier attitude towards sex in the children.”

Unless you think that I'm reading too far into this, what they meant by healthier attitude toward sex, they continue, that parents shouldn't worry if a child doesn't seem normally sexed, because "most homosexuals want to be cured." So, even if you sort of fail as parents initially, don't worry, your homosexual child may want to be cured later. They explain that because homosexuals could not feel desire for members of the opposite sex, they remain trapped by adolescent longings for people of the same sex. And again, this is that these are adolescent rather than adult or mature longings. This idea that to be a mature, well-integrated, high-functioning member of society, you needed to be heterosexual.

The response to homosexuality, meanwhile, avoided theological questions, and really turned to psychiatry. And I've written about this in my article on Norman Vincent Peale. Peale was a very well-known Protestant Minister who had a congregation, but was most well-known for publishing books and articles. His book was called *The Power of Positive Thinking*, which sort of gives away his whole philosophy, and he had a column in *Look Magazine*, called "Norman Vincent Peale Answers Your Questions," and that was exactly what it was. The magazine came out every two weeks, and there would be maybe four to eight series of questions and answers, and I went through and counted them all up, and there were about 800 sum of these Q&As over the course of the column, and one time he dealt with homosexuality. A nineteen-year-old had written in, and said "I fear that I am homosexually inclined, and I wonder what you can do to help me with my problem." And in his response, Peale did not mention, never said the word homosexual again, "I believe that someone with *your condition* can be cured," but he recommended psychiatry. He said, basically, go see a psychiatrist. There are only two or three other instances in all these 800 Q&As where Peale did not tell someone either to pray, to do some sort of positive prayerful thinking, to engage in some sort of prayerful practice, or mental practice, to get themselves where they need to be, and I've tried to puzzle this out. What I think I've come to understand about him, was that for Peale (as for Burkhart and others), it was all about marriage. And from this nineteen-year-old's perspective, the problem was that he was not going to be able to get happily married. So he needed to go get fixed by a psychiatrist so that he could then go get back on the spiritual path – that was where Peale could come back in – "once you get fixed by psychiatry, then I can help you find the job that you want, and find the woman that you want, to have the life that you would like." And this apparently was enormously appealing advice to a lot of people, because I found a stash of letters in Peale's archives from people saying, "Oh my goodness, I am just like that young man. How can you help me? I want to be cured because I want marriage and a family." We have to remember that this was in the mid-1950s, this is the era of the post-war domestic emphasis on, the baby-boom generation, domestic tranquility, this is the midst of the cold war, this idea of the American family sort of holding off communism and all kinds of other disarray. It was very painful and very difficult for the people who wrote to Peale to identify within themselves desires that they felt would prevent them from having that piece of the American dream.

But we also, during these years, hear incredible silences. So, in a memoir about his fundamentalist protestant upbringing, marriage, and eventual coming out, Mel White describes the silence that engulfed all aspects of sexuality, but that especially, for him, concealed homosexuality. White was born in 1940, so he would have been a teenager, a young man, during the years I've been discussing. He learned during his early adolescence that his religion abhorred homosexuality, but he grappled with glaring omissions in his religious education. He writes, "I can't recall one sermon on homosexuality in all my early years of church and Sunday School attendance. In fact, I hardly remember anyone, including my loving parents, mentioning sex at all." So, in other words, what I'm saying, is that if you walked into a liberal Protestant church in the 1950s, you may have been more likely to hear discussions of something like homosexuality or heterosexuality than in a conservative Protestant church. There were warnings about sexual sin in the Sunday sermon, but no singling out of homosexuality, per say. And this is also in a wonderful collection called *Letters to One* – One was a magazine of sort of homophile, early gay rights activists, and people would write in their questions, and an anthology came out in 2012, and in that, as people were talking about their sexuality and their faith, there are also comments on "The minister gave a sermon about sin. I read into that that he was talking about me, but yet I've never heard anyone say anything directly about homosexuality from the pulpit."

This changes again with the sex crime panics. So by 1960 we start to see, for example, in Atlanta, Southern Baptist Ministers standing alongside the Chief of Police and the Mayor, speaking their outrage over public sex happening in libraries and things like that. So, to summarize for this period, queer religious identities become more difficult to sustain in the midst of a massive national consolidation of sexual identities according to a newly explicit heterosexual/homosexual binary. We see progressive religious figures more worried about the tenuousness of heterosexuality and a heteronormative ideal, than with homosexuality. I've been finding a relative absence of Jewish voices from these debates, so I've been looking for them and am hopeful that new scholarship will help us figure that out.

So the last period I want to talk about is the 1970s-1990s. Here, we see the religious preoccupation with homosexuality really become pronounced and louder, and I think it's building upon the way that religious people had been talking about heterosexuality. Liberals by the 1970s start to really embrace the idea of a heterosexual/homosexual binary, and the idea that there are identities that are core to a person's being, while religious conservatives begin to construct alternate binaries. I see this in the context of ongoing social and cultural revolutions, which were filled with language about rights and individualism. For conservative Evangelicals in particular, the idea that heterosexuality was fragile, easily disrupted through 'gay recruitment,' or by feminists, reinforced the importance of heterosexual parenting. So, some of the arguments against the Equal Rights Amendment were that feminism was about recruiting women to become lesbians – that through equal rights, by getting rid of certain gender distinctions, you would produce

lesbianism. Marriage became a symbol, both of the proof of heterosexual maturity and a site for an ongoing tutorial in normative sexuality.

We can see during this period shifting cultural and political terrain as it affected Americans religious attitudes. So, Burkhart, my 1950s Minister in Columbus, his views were pretty mainstream for liberal Protestants in the 1950s, but they had stopped being okay for liberals to say by the 1970s, but were being vocalized by religious conservatives. So, the 1960s and 70s are a key period for religious progressives on the question of LGBT rights. By the 1960s, thanks to the work of Heather White, we know a lot about the Committee on Religion and the Homosexual, where Protestants began to adopt the homophile, the definition of the homosexual minority – that homosexuals were an identifiable minority group who had rights. The first openly gay minister, James Stoll is ordained a Unitarian Universalist in 1969, and that same year, Troy Perry founds the Metropolitan Community Church, which was open to GLBT membership – it had a pro-gay approach. We see the formation of LGBT organizations within denominations: Dignity for Catholics in 1970; Integrity for Episcopalians in 1974; the first openly gay Episcopal Priest in 1976; in 1977, reformed Judaism really banned discrimination against gays and lesbians.

But we also see at the same time, a new Evangelical Protestant public conversation about sexuality, often through sexual advice manuals. We see Evangelical Protestants taking up the post-war Pop Psychology about marriage counseling, and putting it into a narrative of family salvation. They start to name those desires that had been silenced during the 1950s and 60s. And I've talked about this in some of my work on Marabel Morgan and other Evangelical authors of marital and sexual advice guides, but with Emily here, I'm going to let her be the Marabel Morgan expert from now on – hand off to you. But basically, this idea that a Christian wife engenders her husband, she reinforces his sense of his masculinity. And this is part of bringing the whole family to salvation. These marital advice guides by Evangelical women like Marabel Morgan have chapters on housework, on self-care, on child-care, on sex, and then the final chapter is about conversion, usually. Sort of this whole narrative concludes with the husband being converted through this careful attention that his wife has been giving him.

I really have been struck by an insight in Mark Jordan's book, *Recruiting Young Love*, that by the 1970s, for religious conservatives, the operative binary was not between heterosexuality and homosexuality, but between Christianity and homosexuality. And this is an argument echoed in Lynne Gerber's study of contemporary Evangelical weight loss and ex-gay movements called *Seeking the Straight and Narrow*. And I really think this is helpful in thinking through Anita Bryant's "Save our Children" campaign in Florida. Again, here we see, in 1977, as Bryant and her allies successfully campaigned against a gay-rights ordinance in Miami Dade County, this idea that they needed save/protect children from homosexual influence, that children could be recruited to homosexuality. And historian Gill Frank has also traced this discourse of parental authority. Heterosexually vulnerably children might be recruited by gay pornography, by gay teachers, even by witnessing a gay

pride parade. As Jordan points out, Bryant and other Ministers called upon gay adults to return to full heterosexuality. So, you might be recruited as a child, but then as an adult you could go to an ex-gay Ministry, and be brought back, so to speak, to heterosexuality. And Jordan writes, "Recruitment to homosexuality must be reversed by recruitment to Jesus." So, I think that that's interesting, and one of the things that Gillian Frank's work talks about is that it's the liberal activists in Florida who are insisting against Anita Bryant and her allies, that no, homosexuality is inborn. That there are heterosexual people and there are homosexual people, and therefore, this ordinance is unjust. This agrees with the work of Melissa Wilcox on the Metropolitan Community Church. She did an ethnographic study from the 1990s and found that LGBT Christians had adopted essentialist understandings of sexuality, even saying that God had made them that way, that this was an intrinsic part of who they were, was also part of their relationship with God. These fears, though, of gay recruitment, and thwarted salvation and the Christian family, animated conservative Christian polemics against the welfare state. And there were really political stakes involved in deciding in what this heterosexual/homosexual binary is. And this becomes increasingly important with the growth of the Straight State. So, as more and more of your life as a citizen depends on things like marital status, the stakes in this debate get much higher.

So, this is sort of my last example here, bringing together these threads of thinking about the welfare of children, and also the politics that we see today, there is a Christian psychologist, W. Peter Blitchington, who published a book in 1981, called *Sex Roles and the Christian Family*. He had a preface by Tim Lahaye, and an endorsement on the back cover from James Dobson – so sort of his credentials from the religious right. He stressed the importance of family for socialization. This will sound familiar by now, he writes, "The homosexually inclined child can have his sexual preferences channeled along healthy lines by a strong father." But what's different about Blitchington is that he's using this in order to make a polemic against welfare. And he's basically saying, he characterized the African American "ghetto" as a repository of sexual chaos, characterized by "female-headed homes, father absence, and the lack of a clearly defined provider role for the male." He seamlessly blends conservative critiques of big government and sexual abrasion, and adds, "welfare has taken away from men their role as provider." Now, this is important for him because he says that discrete gender roles, with the husbands as the providers, and the wives as the dependents, are biblically based. So, he's talking about federal programs that he sees as going against biblical prescriptions. So, society *needs* distinctive sex roles, he explained, lest we end up basically with the hedonism of Greece and Rome: "If people rearrange our own sex roles, then you would undoubtedly be led to endorse polygamy and homosexuality."

Such claims were reiterated in books that often left out their explicitly religious content, by proponents of what was called the Marriage Movement of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Coming right out of Blitchington is Catholic Maggie

Gallagher, a former President of the anti-gay National Organization for Marriage. In 2000, she published a book called *The Case for Marriage: Why Married People are Happier, Healthier, and Better Off Financially*, which purports to defend the argument of its subtitle. Gallagher and her colleagues in the marriage movement, appear to be losing ground today, in a general public that's increasingly supportive of equal rights for same-sex couples. But, their arguments about the connections between heteronorms, public welfare, and the state, endure in federal and state anti-poverty programs. And she makes this same sort of argument there: we need discrete gender roles, federal welfare programs really just get in the way of all of this, and things that might look racial, they're really about the problems of the welfare state. So thus we see the intersections of racial and sexual social construction, and the ongoing process of inventing the hetero/homosexual binary, which continued well into the second half of the twentieth century. We see an idealization of marriage as a bulwark against sexual chaos, racial justice, and government intervention in the family.

So, to conclude: how do we get from Anita Bryant to today? There was a bit of a conversation recently following an article in the conservative magazine *First Things*. The article was called "Against Heterosexuality." I don't know if anyone here came across it, it was a really provocative and well-written bit of polemic about how, from a Catholic theological perspective, applying Foucault and Judith Butler, and basically saying, "These are socially constructed categories. There is no such thing as a sort of sexual essence to a person, and it distracts us from this sort of profusion of sexual sin that exists in the world, that we're really as Catholics supposed to be worried about. So spending all of this time debating heterosexuality versus homosexuality, we're not only theoretically missing the boat, but we're theologically on the wrong path." And it was interpreted by someone writing for *Slate* as an attack on gay rights, and I think that sort of missed the point. I think it was a really interesting and curious return to a sort of queerer understanding of sexuality within a conservative, religious framework. At the same time, we see religious liberals and progressives evermore defensive of the idea of sexual identity, particularly as it involves them in debates over marriage rights for same-sex couples.

I've tried in my talk today to outline how religious individuals and institutions participated in the invention of heterosexuality and homosexuality, and how marriage became an agent of a gendered counterrevolution, a means of promoting heteronormative ideals. I think we see the increasing importance of marriage within American religion, and I think we can talk about heterosexual marriage as a twentieth century invention as it became a religious norm. Thank you.