

A CRISIS OF MODESTY IN THE EVANGELICAL CHURCH

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Introduction

This is written by me, Greg Wertime, a Christian man in the U.S. and observer of our society, to address Christian women who casually expose parts of their breasts, butt and/or midriff, and to address their fellow travelers, male or female, who agree with and support the casual exposure of these body parts. Though I am concerned about the partial exposure of these body parts in public space at large, I am particularly concerned about it in church and other areas of serious endeavor. By an “area of serious endeavor” I am referring to public spaces where people engage in mental, emotional and spiritual concentration, particularly places of work and worship. It is true that many aspects of sexual suggestiveness have infiltrated the culture throughout the past few decades. However, I am writing this essay in response to this recent trend that began back in 2002 of partially exposing intimate body parts with casual disregard for any boundaries of time and place. I am convinced that this behavior is contradictory to the teachings of Jesus and Paul, even after accounting for the cultural flexibility that is built into the Gospel¹. As I’ve tried to address this issue to various Evangelicals over the past four years, I have encountered many objections, which it has taken me all of these four years to be able to answer.

For the sake of convenience in this writing, I will refer primarily to what *women* are doing. I know that this will be jarring to people who think that I am “painting with too broad of a brush”, especially to women who are not participating in or condone the behavior that I am challenging. I will refer to what *women* are doing for the sake of convenience, even as I am actually calling into question what our culture is doing – women and the men who support and encourage it. I will refer to what *women* are doing, referring generally to the behavior of many Christian and many more secular women,

¹ I am using the term “Gospel” as it is understood in the Matthean Great Commission as being a) the sum total of Jesus’ commandments and b) our call to be disciples who obey those commandments and teach others to do the same. In this understanding, apostolic teaching is an elaboration on Jesus’ teaching, and is therefore part of the Gospel.

though this writing is specifically addressing behavior that has become prevalent among Christian women.

Modesty and the Modesty Problem

Modesty in the broadest sense is the practice of creating an environment that is friendly to the practice of sexual self control and focus on God. This is based on the principle that God has created sexuality as precious aspect of our being. As such, we are called to walk carefully with God in the experience of our sexuality, allowing God to have the full claim to all of His commands, guidelines, warnings and blessings that are directed toward our sexuality as outlined in Scripture. In Scripture, God makes severe claims on sexual behaviors that seem small and inconsequential by worldly standards. In addition to our physical sexual behavior, God makes claims on the fleeting jolts of visual sexual pleasure that we traffic in via our heart behavior and via our very “eye behavior”. In this light, a Christian practice of modesty is to actively create a social space that is friendly to our discipleship as we allow God to transform our hearts as we submit to all of His claims on all aspects of our sexual behavior. Christian leadership is entrusted with the task of making sure that this space exists in the church and that the value for this space is carried by Christians into the other realms of their lives.

For Christian leaders to create and maintain these boundaries requires continually confronting the encroachment into the church of worldly notions of sexuality. It is a worldly assessment of sexuality that sexuality is not constructed around any Godly or spiritual sense of our being. As such, sexual pleasure as it is understood by worldly people is not a precious experience to be limited to particular times and places wherein people can manage the experience of sexuality with the understanding that they are eternal beings. Rather, life is short, and sexuality is an experience that should be made banal enough to be available in public space without regard to boundaries so that it can be experienced as much as possible. It is with this value system that sexual pleasure becomes the “coin of the realm” of a social and economic marketplace that is built around making disposable sexual pleasure as available as possible. It is as a “coin of the realm” that worldly people press the pleasure experience of sexuality beyond the bounds of intimacy and into the realm of public space.

What one chooses to wear might seem like the most insignificant aspect of one's sexual behavior. As I will elaborate in much greater detail in this writing, the very mundanity of clothing makes it ubiquitous in public space, making the issue of clothing pertinent to the issue of social/sexual boundaries. In regard to the specific question of modest dress, dressing modestly means confining the act of dressing in a sexually suggestive way to the realm of intimacy. At a minimum, dressing modestly means confining sexually suggestive dress with regard to boundaries of time and place, confining sexually suggestive dress to specific areas that give others the social to space to choose whether they want to be exposed to it. Of course, dressing modestly in the realm of public space and places of serious endeavor means, of course, dressing in a way that is not sexually suggestive.

What makes this complicated in Evangelical Christianity is that Evangelical Christians rightly factor a certain amount of cultural flexibility into Paul's call to modest dress. In 1 Timothy 2:8 there is a call for women to dress for public worship with decency and propriety in contrast to the ostentatious and distracting displays of pearls and braids, etc... In 1 Corinthians 11:5-6 Paul calls specifically for women to cover their hair in worship. The New Testament is silent on the specific issue of sexually modest dress outside of worship. However, Paul's discourse on the church as a body, where he speaks of intimate parts being treated with "special modesty" in 1 Corinthians 12:23-24, implies that modesty is a value for the body as a general principle and not merely in worship. It is by an extrapolation from the New Testament value for modesty in worship and for the New Testament general value for sexual purity, along with the idea of modesty in Paul's Corinthian body metaphor for the church that church tradition has understood that the Christian value for being modest goes beyond the confines of Sunday worship.

In dealing specifically with Paul's call for women to cover hair, the church has often debated what aspect of the instruction to be modest is "time-transcendent" – relevant for all times and places, and which aspect of the instruction to be modest is "time specific" – relevant to only a particular time and place. Most Evangelicals interpret this passage in Corinthians to contain a "time specific" element; that uncovered hair was sexually suggestive for the time in Corinth, so covering it for the time was appropriate as a statement of modesty. Evangelicals also interpret a "time transcendent" element; that we should not be sexually suggestive based on what our culture considers to be sexually suggestive. As a result of this

interpretation, most evangelical churches do not call for women to cover their hair today, recognizing that exposed hair does not mean the same thing as in Paul's time and place.

Based on this analysis of time-specific and time-transcendent on the issue of modesty, to the extent that sexually suggestive is a flexible cultural reality, the question of what is modest will also be a flexible idea. What is not a flexible idea within this analysis is that Christian modesty is a counterpoint to the behavior that is recognized in a culture as being sexually suggestive. This is the tricky question confronting the Evangelical church in these times—how does the church accurately interpret what a culture considers to be sexually suggestive so that it can derive an accurate idea of what it is to be modest?

Intimate parts

Despite various fetishes that one might have for any body part, breasts, butts (and of course genitals) are primary physiologically intimate parts throughout the female population. A homunculus is a rendering of the human body for the purpose of anatomy instruction wherein nerve endings are placed in equal distance from each other, which distorts the rendering of the body so that body parts that have many nerve endings appear to be very large, and those that do not have many nerve endings appear to be very small. It is no surprise that intimate body parts appear very large on a homunculus. It is for this reason that these body parts are not merely claimed as being intimate for purely cultural reasons, as there is a physiological basis for it. These body parts are rightly taught to children as being intimate and private and not for adults to touch and are rightly understood legally as “intimate parts” within sexual harassment law. Here, intimate parts are too special to touch, too special to mention, and in the case of anti-leering codes, too special to openly gaze at.

Even as our culture is capable of recognizing that these body parts and are intimate, our culture has also allowed them to become “no big deal” for the purpose of being used for their visual energy. I will get more in depth as to how this has occurred when I discuss feminism in greater detail later in this writing. For now, I will say that this phenomenon is due to a bifurcation in the sexual politics of feminists who were interested in not being sexually “objectified” yet also wanted to participate in the sexual revolution. From this tension came two tandem feminist narratives: a) that we need to be

protected from male chauvinism in order to be taken seriously and not be treated as sex objects and b) that from a position of personal choice we can decide to be sexually suggestive as an act of liberation.

To the tune of incalculable dollars, these intimate body parts –both completely exposed and partially exposed -- are used throughout many related industries including porn, fashion, advertising, and entertainment for their explicit purpose of being sexually distracting to men. These industries are combined together into what I will refer to in this writing as the “distraction industry”. These body parts are employed with the specific intent of using voyeuristic distraction to draw attention to a person, product or service. In the advertising industry in particular, a sub-segment of the distraction industry, the partial exposure of intimate body parts in advertising, media and beyond is used for its calculated effect to distract. This is what is meant by “sex sells” within the ad industry and beyond, meaning, specifically, “titillation sells”.

Feminists have had valid concerns about male chauvinism. However, the feminists who prosecuted male chauvinism did so from an incorrect assessment of male and female nature. Women who are interested in not being “objectified” by men are also interested in validating their sexual power by knowing what turns men on, asserting their sexual power among men and among other women with whom they compete. As such, the markets have gone where gender ideologies have feared to tread. In this context, women have relegated their concern for intimate body parts to the realm of sexual harassment law as a means to prosecute bad male behavior. Meanwhile, since the marketplace does not make any overt moral demands on them, women have allowed the marketplace to be an arena to explore their sexual liberation. This complements the interests of the distraction industry who will gladly claim that they are not “forcing” anyone to buy their products (“Hey, it’s what people want”).

This leads to the current phenomenon wherein the partially exposed body parts on men’s magazine covers are the same as on women’s magazine covers. These magazines are gladly provided by the distraction industry for their ability to appeal to men’s desire to be sexually titillated and appeal to women’s desire to sexually evaluate themselves. In this cultural climate, the distraction industry has always avoided the charge that they are objectifying women. By framing their actions in the feminist narrative that women’s exposing intimate parts is an act of their sexual liberation, they have framed

their practice of trafficking in sexual titillation as something that is good/neutral and is therefore “no big deal”. To the extent that women have believed this, they have become fellow travelers with the distraction industry in the act of wearing fashion that partially exposes intimate body parts – as an act of their sexual liberation that is “no big deal”.

Fashion that partially exposes intimate body parts acts as a “tease” for the fraction of the intimate part that is being covered. This provocative clothing creates a tension in the ambiguity regarding intimate parts by saying, “Is it intimate or isn’t it?” It is this tension that adds to its sexual energy. Wearing this clothing, body parts are exposed either directly or only cover the body if a woman is standing ram-rod straight. In this case, the clothing is a “tease” that exposes the body parts when a woman moves in the full range of motion.

Though a midriff is not as physically intimate a body part as a breast or butt, there is still a sexual energy to it. A bikini derives a major part of its visual power by exposing the midriff that a one piece suit covers. The practice of exposing midriffs without regard to any boundary of time and place is a part of this overall trend of exhibitionism. Fashion that barely covers a midriff when a woman stands ramrod straight– that exposes the midriff in the full range of her motion-- acts as a tease for the midriff, playing with its sexual energy.

The Crisis in the Church

The unique situation that the church is confronted with in these times is that this sexually suggestive dress has become so normal that its very normalcy is being used to obfuscate what is, in fact, sexually suggestive dress. In regard to the way many women are dressing, as Bill Maher once said, “What will the hookers wear?² (What will the hookers wear to distinguish themselves as hookers when everyone else is dressing like them?). To complement the overwhelming normalcy of the sexual visual landscape, there are many sophisticated worldly counter-arguments that have arisen to confound any attempt to crisply define what, exactly, it is to dress modestly and what it is to be dressed in sexually suggestive way. It is this very

² Trebay, Guy. “The Skin Wars Start Earlier and Earlier.” *New York Times* (2 September 2003). Section B, page 8.

ambiguity that has been exploited by worldly people to advance the realm of sexually suggestive dress more and more into the realm of public space.

In regard to the Gospel's call to modesty, this ambiguity has also been used by Christians to interpret the cultural flexibility that is built into the Gospel as having room for this sort of dress among Christians in public. Unlike secular women, Christian women cannot throw the idea of modesty out the window. The Christian women who have reconciled their behavior of partially exposing intimate body parts in public space *with the idea that they are also being modest* have done so by borrowing from the same ambiguity that is being used by worldly people to advance their sexual id in public space.

This encroachment of sexually suggestive dress and the ambiguity that justifies it into the realm of Christian behavior and thought has happened in the context of a larger tension within the Evangelical Church. One constituent element of the Evangelical Church has made an effort to be "seeker sensitive" operating on the premise, "We must fit in with the culture so that people can feel safe and welcome enough to relate to us as we reach them for Christ". With this mentality, this constituency of the Church has taken a more "value neutral" stance toward the culture at large as a counterpoint to the constituent element of the Church that sees itself fighting a cultural war. The culture warrior constituency of the Church tries to fight the spread of worldly ideas through the world at large via organizing people into political phalanxes to advance specific political agendas. The culture warrior constituency of the church has often fought the encroachment of worldly ideas into the church by presenting hard and clear expectations of behavior. It should be noted that these "constituent elements" rub up against each other and may be present together in the same church and even within the conflicted thoughts of the same person.

It is this tension between "seeker sensitive" and "culture warrior" that has rendered the church unable to confront the encroachment of immodest dress in the realm of Christian thought and behavior. The culture warriors have largely overlooked the issue of modest dress in order to fight other cultural/political battles, while the "seeker sensitive" Christians have adopted the stance of letting the culture at large determine what is acceptable for public display, and letting that standard suffice for any in regard to what is modest for the purpose of Christian behavior.

When hard expectations of behavior are not presented with the finesse of a ministry that is listening carefully to God's direction and is ministering carefully to people's hearts and reasoning, these hard expectations become a form of legalism. It is legalism that interprets the instructions of Scripture as the Pharisees did without regard to the liminality of God's spirit. This approach to Scripture results in people violating the flexibility of the Gospel and violating the space in people's hearts and minds that Christ claims for His ministry of sanctification. To the extent that the "culture warriors" have been legalistic in their attempt to define boundaries, they have turned many away from the church. It is this legalism that the "seeker sensitive" constituent has tried to avoid.

In addition to the concern of violating the gospel's flexibility by being legalistic and Pharisaical, many Christians are generally afraid to broach the difficult topic of modesty for the purely cultural concerns that they will be perceived as politically incorrect, unhip and unchivalrous—and therefore not "sensitive". I am convinced that the fear of being politically incorrect, unhip and unchivalrous stems from the tremendous and deep cultural and philosophical power underneath these ideas that is holding sway over Christians' thinking. In confronting these ideas, I am attempting to outline an alternative lens to interpret the culture at large; a lens that challenges the church's current practice of deferring to the culture at large to gauge sexual suggestiveness and modesty. In doing so I am attempting to confront the problems with the "seeker sensitive" approach in such a way that avoids the pitfalls that have often characterized the "culture warrior" approach.

"But times change"

Postmodernism, as it is understood as a set of 20th century intellectual arguments, would require a separate set of essays to address specifically. I am concerned with postmodernism as it is understood by people on the street, which for this writing I will define as "street postmodernism". "Street postmodernism" is based on the postmodernist idea that there is no truth that can be absolutely known and absolutely communicated. Street postmodernism is a populist application of this idea that seeks to protect people throughout society from those would try to dominate others with their ideas about what is true. It upon this concern that street postmodernists construct their ethic of deferring their decision making to whatever they see others around them doing. It is this broad collective of others and what they are doing that is known as the "times". Among street postmodernists, if the

broad collective is doing something new or allowing something new to happen, then the “times” have “changed”.

Street postmodernists believe that following the times is the path to maximum freedom for themselves and for others. For street postmodernists, the “times” is the organizing premise of society wherein people can believe what they want to believe as long as they do not “impose” it on others by uttering it publicly. As such, underneath the idea that “anyone can believe whatever they want to believe” is an enforced ethical system for people to follow the “times” and not openly question them. It is for this reason that street postmodernist “freedom” is understood much more in terms of the freedom to express desires than it is to express thoughts.

“Times change” is the slogan adopted by many in our culture to handle the complexity of life. As for our intellectual development as Christians, the complexity of life does need to be confronted in all of its mystery. I have other writings that address in more depth what it means to be on an “intellectual journey of faith” that is daily confronting this mystery in heart and in mind with God. “Times change”, however, is based on a secular attempt to handle complexity that does not involve an individual’s intellectual journey of faith. “Times change” is a slogan that people use to declare a value system that says that cultural trends, not the mental effort of any individual, should be used to sort out social boundaries.

The Gospel, however, calls us to an intellectual journey of faith wherein we actively engage God daily to take our hearts and the culture around us captive to His will and purposes. By embracing this intellectual journey of faith, we are able to have the finesse in ministry to avoid being legalistic, while confronting the destructive parts of our culture and guiding ourselves and others toward the best that God has for us. We are to confront our hearts and the culture around us as we see these things through the prism of our thoughts. It is for this reason that Paul tells us to take every thought captive, every “thought” including personal thoughts, thoughts that pervade the church and thoughts that pervade the culture at large. Our thoughts are connected to our feelings and comprise an important part of our “mind’s eye”, the “eye” that Jesus referred to in Matthew 6:22. This is why we must continually examine our thoughts and feelings before God to give God the space to confront and transform how we feel. As such, the Gospel holds us accountable for how we feel, recognizing that certain feelings and affections are “virtues” while other feelings are “vices”. It is in the experience of God

changing our heart from vices to virtues that we experience our authentic selves as ones sanctified by the in-dwelling Holy Spirit. The problem for Christians who have adopted “times change” as a way of sorting out the complexities of the culture around them is that street postmodernists have embraced “times change” as an alternative to an individual taking thoughts and feelings captive to Christ.

As street postmodernists have adopted a belief that precludes the heart and the mind taking thoughts captive to Christ, street postmodernists have looked to their id as the basis of making ethical decisions. It is by embracing the id and enshrining the id as the essence of authenticity that street postmodernists define the nature of “freedom”. It is for this reason that street postmodernists do not describe freedom as a person’s freedom from sin and bondage. Rather, they describe freedom as a person’s id being uninhibited after having come out from under repression.

It is in the advance of id-based freedom that our culture has embraced lust as an important id-based desire and has sought to expand the expression of lust by re-negotiating social boundaries to better facilitate it in public space. Through a variety of simultaneously operating trends, our culture has increasingly brought sexual voyeurism into the realm of public space so that individuals can better satiate this aspect of their id. The partial exposure of intimate body parts in areas of serious endeavor is one part of a larger trend, interconnected with other trendy behaviors that are bringing sexual voyeurism more and more into public space to facilitate sexual id.

Elevating id-based desires is part of a larger struggle by street postmodernists against the very idea of being serious. Being serious implies that one can find deeper meaning in an endeavor after having concentrated one’s attention on it, which is based on the idea that one can find truth and meaning beyond the experience of one’s immediate desires. The very idea of being serious implies a constraint on id-based behavior in order to concentrate, which would constrain street postmodernists’ sense of id-based freedom. It is this street postmodernist belief that under girds the flippancy with which street postmodernists treat places of “serious endeavor”.

The church can be understood both in terms of its formal leadership and the body politic of churchgoers. The church, in both aspects of the term, has accepted a certain amount of street postmodernism in an effort to be friendly, hip, relevant and sensitive to the “times”. There is a form of

sensitivity that is consistent with Gospel and how we practice the Gospel in our dealings with others. I elaborate on that form of sensitivity in other writings. The church, however, has borrowed from street postmodernism's notion of sensitivity and has alloyed it with the idea of presenting a welcoming Gospel without adequately taking street postmodernism captive to the Gospel. As such, the church has brought many of street postmodernism's assumptions into its practice and understanding of the Gospel. It is in this context that being "seeker sensitive" has influenced both the ministry practice and the worldview of many Christians.

Christian women partially exposing intimate body parts in church is one fruit of this union of the Gospel with street postmodernism. The chill on dialogue on the topic of sexual modesty is the fruit of the church attempting to alloy the Gospel with the intellectual assumptions of street postmodernism. Modesty is about creating a space for sexual holiness for one's self and others. As such, the idea of modesty and modest dress makes claims on people's public behavior that contradict the id-based freedom that is at the core of street postmodernism. That the behavior of partially exposing intimate parts has not been confronted in the church is the fruit of both aspects of the church— body politic and leadership —being under the sway of the intellectual methods whereby street postmodernists defend their id-based freedom.

"But who's to say?"

For street postmodernists, advancing id-based freedom throughout society is inseparable from the goal of "protecting" individuals from the truth claims of other individuals. It is in defense of id-based freedom that street postmodernism is built on confounding any attempt to clarify or codify "truth"—truth that can be "exported" beyond the realms of one's own imaginings and be offered as a guideline for others to follow. Toward this end, street postmodernists employ a variety of slogans that summarize the idea that truth is far too ambiguous to ever be known and, as such, to ever be accountable to. It is in this spirit that President Bill Clinton asked what "is" is to employ ambiguity as a means to question whether he did, in fact have sex with Monica Lewinsky. "Who's to say?" is a rhetorical question uttered by street postmodernists that has the answer already built into it – "No one". Actually "Who's to say?" specifically means, "Which individual among us has a right to say by exercising her/her own personal judgment?". As such

“Who’s to say?” is street postmodernist code for saying that the impersonal collective of the “times” should say.

In regard to modesty, the acting of “saying” is the act of confronting and clarifying sexual boundaries of behavior and clothing that is friendly to the practice of sexual holiness and self-control beyond one’s own whims and imaginings. To the extent that the church has adopted the “who’s to say?” attitude of street postmodernism, it has imported into the church the chill that street postmodernism imposes on anyone being bold enough to “say”—to clarify what, in fact, it is to be modest.

It is understandable that Christians want to avoid being legalistic. However, to the extent that Christians adopt the “Who’s to say?” attitude from the culture around them as the means to avoid being legalistic, they will never rise to Paul’s exhortation to take every thought captive (2 Corinthians 10:5). As such, they will never mature into becoming the spiritual person who “makes judgments in all things” (2 Corinthians 2:15). Therefore, Christians who adopt the street postmodernist idea of “Who’s to say?” will never be able to lead themselves or others, but will end up going along with the world by deferring judgment to the “times”.

As a general phenomenon, the collective intuition of many people in a society results in new ideas being “in the air”. Though intuition can be a valuable thing, ideas that are “in the air” need to be carefully vetted by individuals who are taking the ideas captive to Christ (in the same way that we are called to “test the spirits”). Street postmodernists, however, do not have a value for an individual’s own thinking, but, rather, have confidence that whatever is “in the air” at any point in time represents an increment of progress over what was “in the air” before. As such, when street postmodernists say “Times change” they are assuming that the “times” have changed for the better. As street postmodernists have enshrined the id as the basis of freedom and authenticity, the collective intuition of street postmodernists has become the “collective id” which drives the “times”.

The collective id is reflected in what is popular at the moment. The collective id is used by street postmodernists as an ethical yardstick to determine what is acceptable in public space. If an “id-expression”—a means of expressing one’s desires through culture, pop art, fashion, etc...—has become popular, it is understood as having been ratified by the collective id. It has been ratified as being acceptable behavior in public space.

Partially exposing intimate body parts in public space is one “id-expression” among many that has passed the test of acceptability for street postmodernists. Here, if an id-expression graduates from popular into being normal, its ethical status is unassailable and is exempt from any questioning as to whether it is good or bad.

“But it’s normal”

It is on this basis that many women deny that they are, in fact, being sexually suggestive on the grounds that what they are wearing is normal and acceptable. Within this understanding, what is “sexually suggestive”, by definition, lies outside the boundaries of what has become normal and acceptable. This way of thinking belies the conflict that occurs in women who borrow from street postmodernism while also wanting to believe that they are being modest. When a woman says “But it’s normal” as an argument against the charge that she is behaving immodestly, she is attempting to present what is normal and what is sexually suggestive as though they are mutually exclusive. She is not allowing for the possibility that it has become normal to be sexually suggestive and is not allowing for the possibility that the culture at large has become saturated with sexual suggestive behavior. As such, the objection, “But it’s normal”, does not factor in the possibility that normal has become corrupted. Rather, it belies the faith that she is placing in the collective id to ratify what is normal as something that is unassailable and beyond questioning.

The idea that partially exposing intimate body parts is “normal” is used by both the distraction industry for commercial reasons and by individual women for personal reasons. Partially exposed intimate body parts is an “industry standard” that is understood by the distraction industry as something that society has granted it permission to use. In other words, the distraction industry looks out on society as a whole— a vague construct—to justify what it does as being acceptable. Meanwhile, individual women who are partially exposing intimate parts also look out on that same vague social construct as a means to justify their behavior.

Street postmodernists look out on this same vague social construct known as “society”, a.k.a. the “times”, to justify their behavior. The “society” that individual street postmodernists look at to justify their behavior is comprised of the aggregate of many street postmodernists who are each looking out on that same “society”. In this context, “society” is an ecosystem comprised of

many individual street postmodernists who have each networked together their moral and ethical decision making. In this context, no one person within this construction of “society” is taking responsibility for where the society is headed. Instead they are letting the society, understood as a fluid construction aka the “times”, decide it for them.

Street postmodernists are an ever-expanding segment of society that has embraced id-based freedom and has relinquished a certain amount of rational thought. Here, the “society” that street postmodernists are looking to for guidance is moving in a predictable direction to advance id expression into public space. By looking to the “times” for ethical guidance in this way, the individual street postmodernist can both a) enjoy the id experiences that are being made available and b) relinquish responsibility for having both participated in and having advanced the overall trend of bringing id experiences into public space.

The “society” that street postmodernists are using to make ethical decisions with is seen by street postmodernists through their lens of the media and popular trends. It is the very distraction industry that has tremendous power over this media that is being used as the lens through which street postmodernists view the world. The distraction industry has a particular interest in advancing the id experiences that are available to experience in public space. The more sexual id that is graduated into public space the more the distraction industry can draw on its power to distract and the more bonded people become to the distraction industry in the many ways that the distraction industry services their id. Furthermore, the distraction industry must continually come up with something new as old becomes old very quickly to satisfy people’s ever-hungry id. As such, the distraction industry is continually in the business of servicing this id and manipulating the media to expand the id experiences that are available in the realm of public space. While it may be possible that certain members of the distraction industry act like a secret cabal, it is more accurate to say that the whole can be described like an ant colony—no one ant is very intelligent, but the whole operates with a unified agenda and an organic, if impersonal, sort of intelligence in advancing its interests.

The distraction industry has a very particular way of achieving this goal to advance this interest. “Pushing the envelope” is an idea that taps into the pioneer idea of America as the frontier. “Pushing the envelope” is a term borrowed from airplane test flight – it makes the envelope pusher feel like a

cultural pioneer, a cultural Chuck Yeager so to speak. In actuality, “pushing the envelope” occurs within a matrix of social ratification beyond the industry and precedent setting within the industry. Within the distraction industry, the “success” that any one player in the distraction industry has in pushing an envelope will set a precedent for all other players in the distraction industry. If one member of the distraction industry “gets away with it” the others now know what they can also get away with and must follow suit in order to keep up. As such, like the street postmodernist out in society, the individual players within the distraction industry operate in an ecosystem of networked ethical decision making.

The distraction industry continually manipulates the media to push the envelope to advance sexual id into public space in increments that are small enough to either a) not be noticed by enough people or b) cause just enough of a stir to gain notoriety and not enough to cause an earthquake of outrage. The distraction industry measures its success in pushing the envelope based on whether it has avoided the earthquake (like the earthquake over Janet Jackson at the Superbowl). The earthquake is hard for those who object to the envelope to achieve, because it requires that enough people take their attention off of everything else that they are focusing on and overcome their inertia to voice their outrage. In pushing the envelope, the distraction industry considers everything short of the earthquake is considered a success. In this way, by avoiding the earthquake, the distraction industry plays a “rigged game” wherein its agenda is calculated to win most of the time. Individual people know this on some level, which is what contributes to the inertia and apathy people have about asserting how they feel. Many people whom the distraction industry counts as being part of the “who cares?” category or “isn’t it great!” category are actually in a vast “what can you do?” category. Among street postmodernists who hold a low view of any one person’s ability to judge, the ennui of saying “what can you do?” has been enshrined by the notion, “oh well, I guess the times are changing/I guess it’s now normal”.

As such, in this context of street postmodernism, “pushing the envelope” is more accurately understood as an act of “pushing the ecosystem”, manipulating a social ecosystem that is primed for manipulation. It is for this reason that the idea carried by individual women that partially exposing intimate parts is “normal” is an idea of normal that has been shaped in no small part by the distraction industry and its affect on the culture at large. In this system, women can look to “society” to justify what they wear with the

idea that it is normal, while the distraction industry can look to “society” to justify its use of intimate parts with the idea that it is normal. Here, each party is using “society” to justify their behavior, without also looking at their effect on the society that they are using as a source of justification. In using the same society of people who have networked together their ethical decision making, the idea of normal among individual women and the idea of normal within the distraction industry exist in a symbiotic relationship with each other. As a result, women’s idea of “normal” that is used to justify their partial exposure of intimate parts for personal reasons is part of a social construction that, in its very design, facilitates the idea of “normal” that is exploited by the distraction industry.

“But what about fetishes that can render any part of the body sexually suggestive?”

Fetishes are the exceptions to the rule. Even though body parts such as ankles and hair can be fetishized and can be part of a sexually charged presentation, for the purposes of a social contract for clothing in a cosmopolitan society they are not sexually intimate relative to the broad sense of the population.

In regard to the issue of modesty, denying generalities is an intellectual practice among street postmodernists that has the specific utility of maximizing public space for the expression of sexual id. Since no body part will ever be sexually suggestive in quite the same way to all people, street postmodernists operate on the premise that no body part should be *verbally* acknowledged as being intimate (Who’s to say?). Street postmodernists believe that any social boundaries that exist should be interpreted *tacitly* through people’s behavior as they tune in to the way that those social boundaries are continually being negotiated and re-negotiated throughout the times. Here, the idea of what is “correct” for a social boundary supplants the idea of what is “true” so that “correct” can operate as a fluid construct as “times change”

As I said earlier, the “times” are on a road, paved by the beliefs of street postmodernists, toward advancing more and more id experiences into public space. In this context, street postmodernists have created a very low social threshold of acceptability for one to experience one’s id in public space. In a society where people are looking to the “times” for guidance, if one does not

feel that one is experiencing enough of one's id in public space, one only has to wait a little while until the "times" change some more in that direction.

Modesty involves the practice of actively making claims on public space and on one's social environment to create an environment friendly to the practice of sexual self control. Street postmodernism is set up to subvert this. In street postmodernism, the exceptions, which, in this case, are the fetishes, are pitted against the generality, which, in this case, are the generally known intimate body parts. Here, street postmodernists consider the generality to be an invalid basis of a social boundary because street postmodernists are concerned that the generality will operate as an absolute among those who enforce the social boundary. Street postmodernists are concerned that a social boundary that is defined by a generality will not be administered with the flexibility to allow for the exceptions to function in society. For this reason, street postmodernists enforce a social contract wherein a social boundary must account for any and all potential exceptions to the rule. Since street postmodernists consider this ability to perfectly articulate a boundary across generalities and exceptions to be an impossible task for any one person, the "times" are granted the role of arbitrating social boundaries, while individuals are each encouraged to say, "Who's to say?"

In this context, street postmodernists are able to subvert any discussion on modesty, because any generality that is employed to articulate a social-sexual boundary with the goal of establishing modesty can be reduced to nothing by the exceptions. In regard to fetishes, a street postmodernist says, "What about fetishes?" in order to subvert both a) the covering of the fetishized body parts and b) the covering of the generally known intimate body parts, since neither one can be held up as an absolute social boundary. In this way, the question of what does or does not get covered in public space is beholden to the fluid, ephemeral, ever-changing construction of what is "correct". Since what is correct is a fluid construction that floats down the river known as the "times", the question of what is a correct social sexual boundary at any given time is defined as "what can I get away with in these times without too many raised eyebrows?"

Generalities and Exceptions and the Crisis in the Church

Beyond the specific problem of subverting modesty, emphasizing exceptions at the expense of generalities is part of a larger problem. Being able to intellectually recognize generalities is necessary for being able to make

conscious judgments. Making generalities is also necessary for one to be able to “bookmark” reality while one is also exploring the reality of various exceptions to the rule. For a Christian, employing the mind in this way in partnership with God is the substance of an intellectual journey of faith.

Among street postmodernists, encouraging the individual to emphasize the exceptions at the expense of the generality has the utility of taking the task of judging away from the individual. The act of putting into words what is obvious requires that one’s mind be given the permission to make generalities. As an individual denies himself the permission to make generalities, he effectively thinks his way out of thinking³. When an individual has surrendered his ability to make judgments by saying “Who’s to say?” it is the end-game of his ability to think. This has a deleterious effect on an individual’s ability to grapple with reality and encourages an individual to take a casual approach to the interpreting the culture by letting the “times” sort it all out for him.

Street postmodernists emphasize exceptions at the expense of generalities with the idea that they are maximizing diversity in public space. Street postmodernists have the understanding that people who see the world in generalities will perpetuate a social system that hurts the people who represent the exceptions. Therefore, street postmodernists see the generality, and by extension, those who support the generality, as the enemy to their interest in advancing diversity that nurtures and protects the underdogs.

In this context, it is important for Christians to understand street postmodernism as a very flawed attempt to handle the reality of change and diversity. It is this issue that cuts to the bone of the current crisis in the church. Street postmodernism represents, in a refracted way, a valid criticism of people—especially Christians—who turn social generalities into absolutes. In other words, street postmodernism is the world’s way of making sure that people do not become judgmental and legalistic. As such, Street postmodernism has been attractive for Christians who are trying to avoid these things in order to be “seeker sensitive”.

The problem for Christians who have adopted street postmodernism’s method of dealing with change and diversity in an attempt to be “sensitive”

³ I must acknowledge Dennis Prager, who, in his radio broadcasts, often speaks of the importance of generalities as a crucial tool for one to have wisdom.

is that street postmodernism does not deal with change in such a way that allows the individual to be on a redemptive intellectual journey of faith. Street postmodernists, rather, create their operating premise of society on the understanding that a) everyone is beholden to their id and b) that attempting to clarify truth only leads to prejudice which leads to violence. This is part of the reason why street postmodernists are interested in the diversity of id experiences, not necessarily in the diversity of thought or verbal speech. Street postmodernists, in fact, do not trust an individual person to think and consider it a sign of progress and enlightenment that an individual gives over his/her judgment to the “times” as an impersonal, collective mind.

As I said earlier, I have other writings that deal more in depth with the intellectual journey of faith as means of avoiding the pitfalls within the “culture warrior” and “seeker sensitive” approaches to Christianity. Suffice to say that it is the quality of a Christian’s intellectual journey of faith that gives a Christian the finesse to avoid coming across as legalistic when communicating the claims that Christ makes on our heart and behavior. It is this intellectual journey of faith wherein a Christian can provide the reasoning whereby a boundary exists based on the inevitability of God’s order in creation and not based on the arbitrary whim of an individual who is pontificating. It is this intellectual journey of faith wherein a Christian can invite another to think for himself/herself to reckon with the boundary in a way that simultaneously recognizes the existence absolutes, generalities and exceptions. It is the quality of a Christian’s intellectual journey of faith that will render a Christian “sensitive” to meet the intellectual demands of unchurched and dis-churched people who are confronting complexity and are therefore truly “seeking” the truth (and not merely “shopping” for what feels good).

***“What about all the different notions of modesty throughout the world?
Who’s to say what’s modest and immodest?”***

It is true that there are varying levels of acceptable nudity and partial nudity throughout the world. I am convinced that “leaving the topic there” and being relativistic in regard to modesty is an intellectually lazy way to deal with the reality of public nudity and partial nudity throughout human societies and does not rise to a Christian standard of taking thoughts, trends and cultures captive to Christ. This is part of a larger thesis that I am still in the process of working out completely. My thesis is comprised of 4 main points:

- a) The nude body has the power of sexual energy.
- b) The power of the nude body “finds a way” to express itself in a culture wherein the nude bodies are exposed.
- c) The power of the nude body in a tribal society finds its expression in goddess worship, while the power of the nude body in a cosmopolitan society finds its expression in prurience.
- d) Cultures can contain a mixture of both tribal-ness and cosmopolitan-ness.

Cultures can be roughly classified along a continuum that has primitive and tribal on one end of the continuum and modern and cosmopolitan on the other. In the middle of the continuum are the vast numbers of cultures that contain elements of both tribalness and cosmopolitanism combined in complex ways.

The more tribal and homogeneous a culture is, passing on its social boundaries on from one generation to the next, the more it is capable of containing the sexual energy of public nudity. In a primitive tribal society, the powerful pre-modern taboos can be passed intact from one generation to the next. Operating among a tight-knit group of people bound by the rigors of survival, these taboos can provide some of the sense of sexual boundary that clothing provides in a cosmopolitan society. Therefore, a tribe with commonplace nudity will not devolve into prurience and licentiousness the way that a cosmopolitan society will with commonplace nudity.

Public nudity in tribes: A tribe – that is bound by the rigors of survival and strong, pre-modern trans-generational taboos, and that incorporates nudity into its culture – channels, but does not extinguish the unique power of the publicly nude female body. The taboos, rather, act as a “membrane” that filters out a certain amount of prurience and licentiousness in the culture, but nevertheless lets the power through. In primitive tribal societies, men are usually in awe of the power of the female body for its sexual and reproductive qualities and have some way of expressing that fear and awe.

A polytheistic or pantheistic tribe extrapolates the sexual, nurturing and life bearing power of the female into a cosmology that includes female gods. It is in the tribal cosmology of female gods and the subsequent rituals of devotion to those gods that tribal men express their awe of the female. As such, it is my thesis that a tribal culture that has commonplace and/or ritual nudity also has a goddess cosmology that is a refraction of the nude body’s power that is being existentially experienced. In other words, the worship

and awe of female goddesses is the doppelganger to the tribal men's experience of female sexuality that is banal and commonplace in the day-to-day living of the tribe, each having a role to play in reinforcing the other.

As evidence for this, African tribes that are polytheistic or pantheistic have female toplessness as part of their culture, while tribes that are monotheistic do not. It is my thesis that the power of female toplessness, while not used purely in pantheistic tribes, "finds a way" and is connected to pantheistic tribes' understanding of the spiritual world. Likewise, non-toplessness in monotheistic tribes is connected to their spiritual understanding of the world.

It is this same power that is converted into prurient energy in a secular cosmopolitan society. Looking at women in pornography is a secular man's way of confronting his unacknowledged awe with female sexual power. It is unacknowledged because he does not have an understanding of the universe that has a place for his awe. Instead, he simultaneously makes the female form a subject of both awe and degradation. Here, his awe is suppressed under the "it's no big deal" attitude and is extruded through his ennui as an experience of nameless sexual thrill. The closest approximation that secular men have to constructing a goddess cosmology is to intellectually downplay masculinity and enshrine the collective will of females in society as being the source of wisdom and "correctness". (I have other writings that deal with a Christian approach to confronting the awe of the female)

Because a cosmopolitan society has the degree of personal freedom, privacy and leisure time that it has, the naked body in a cosmopolitan society is seen much more through the prism of sexual pleasure than it is in a tribe. A nudist colony, for example, must impose a strict "nude etiquette" on its members in order for the nakedness to not devolve into something overtly sexual. Imposing "nude etiquette" is an attempt to create a cultural distance between naked and naked aroused. In a nudist colony, the members have all self-selected themselves to be under the constraints that the nudist colony imposes. That same "nude etiquette" could never be imposed on society at large that requires laws to function. In a nudist colony, the sexual energy of the naked body is not extinguished but is rather sublimated under the force of this "nude etiquette" for people attempting to contextualize the energy of the naked body within an experience of "naturalness" (Since it requires the imposition of "nude etiquette", the "naturalness" as it is conceived of in a nudist colony is as much a construction as any other human social organization).

Tribal societies uphold the particular role of woman as nurturer. In regard to the nude body, this understanding of nurturer provides a lens to view the sexuality of the female body. In a cosmopolitan society where the female role of nurturer is less vaunted and often rejected, the female body is seen more exclusively through the lens of raw sexual pleasure. It is for these reasons that the more cosmopolitan and heterogeneous a culture is, the more necessary clothing is as a social sexual boundary.

Public nudity in Europe: Intellectuals who are cultural relativists in regard to public nudity will often hold Europe as an example of a place “where it can work”, where it’s “no big deal”. To the extent that there are any social boundaries in Europe that mitigate against wanton nudity, it is due to cultural boundaries that have been refined over centuries. In other words, European cultures retain some of the tribal ability to impose social boundaries across generations and impose a degree of “nude etiquette” on public nudity. Having more entrenched social and geographic boundaries, European societies have an ability to impose trans-generational tribal taboos that is almost completely lacking here in the United States where we are living continually on some sort of “frontier”.

Meanwhile, in Europe, intimate body parts are still staples in porn, while varying amounts of nudity are allowed in public space throughout Europe. On the surface it would seem that, in Europe, porn is a place where these body parts are interpreted sexually while the beach and other public spaces are places where they are not. European societies, to an extent, have arrived at a social contract that imparts certain civil boundaries on behavior without having to resort to laws (in a way similar to the French who do not need underage alcohol prohibitions because they have a culture of wine drinking that is capable of imposing those boundaries on children and adolescents). One could try to argue that the sexual boundaries created by this social contract make for a viable, stable social sexual membrane that allows for an innocence and purity of public nudity that is made separate from the prurience of porn.

The problem with ending there in one’s understanding of Europe on this topic is that continental Europe, like America, is also on the “frontier” to the extent that it is a cosmopolitan society. In the case of Europe, it is on the cutting edge of bringing prurience and licentiousness into public space. Porn on French prime time TV, the new Dutch pedophile party, and

Germany being a hotspot for the international sex trade are examples of this phenomenon. It is my thesis that these phenomena are connected to the nakedness that is allowed in public space, and that these are not things that operate in wholly separate spheres.

It is possible for a particular individual to believe in a social contract wherein casual public nudity is OK and still believe that this encroachment of sexuality in European public space is wrong. The intellectual weakness of this viewpoint as an organizing premise of society is that exposed intimate body parts have sexual energy to begin with — they gain added sexual energy in the tension that exists in a cosmopolitan society between total prurience and existing but vulnerable social boundaries. In this context, intimate body parts gain their prurient energy from the tension that exists in a society that will not be able to maintain divide between public nakedness and public sexual display over the long haul. In European societies, the cosmopolitan forces are gradually subverting the social forces of trans-generational taboos, making any “nude etiquette” that currently exists a fragile sexual membrane. Through this membrane, the sexual energy of porno and licentiousness bounces off the sexual energy of public nakedness and vice versa in the undercurrent of liminal social boundaries. Understood in this context, public nudity and porno are both part of a foundation of the acceptance in society of nakedness in public space, where explicit public porno is the “doppelganger” of muted public nakedness. This is why many of the intellectuals who think that public nudity is OK arrived at that idea by believing that sex, in general is no big deal.

The exhibitionism and voyeurism facilitated by public nudity is one form of disposable sexual experience among others that has been made available in public space based on this worldview that has made the sacred “no big deal”. To believe that sexual expression is a precious experience requires a belief in the sacred: that the sacred experience of sexuality belongs to special times and places. The rise of late 20th century public nudity and ubiquitous porn in Europe coincided with Europe’s wholesale embrace of secularism⁴; secularism that does not provide any ontological basis for declaring something sacred. For this reason, any current culture of sacredness in Europe that delineates social-sexual boundaries is a cultural remnant of an older idea of sacredness, and a fragile one at that. As this idea of sacredness

⁴ Again, I must acknowledge a debt to Dennis Prager, who, in his radio broadcasts, has often discussed this phenomenon in Europe.

is eroded, the pleasure of sexuality is brought across boundaries of time and place. This elimination of the idea of the sacred has flattened the older hierarchy of human desire that was organized into vices and virtues. With the elimination of the idea of the sacred, all desires are now “natural”, and sexual desires, in all sundry means of expression, are considered pre-eminently good and natural desires. By declaring sexuality “no big deal”, intellectuals protect and advance these sexual pleasures as indispensable aspects of having freedom and authenticity.

The justifications for putting sexuality into public space under the idea that it is merely “natural” are used to continually erode any remaining sense the sacredness and sexual innocence that social-sexual boundaries have existed to protect. If one has arrived at the idea that a lot of sexuality is OK for public space, what could be wrong with just a little more and a little more? I am convinced that the boldness with which a party in Holland is calling for the lowering of the age of consent down to age 12 is connected to this. A society with sexuality in public space has to explain why it is ok for children to be exposed to it. To do this, the intellectuals must explain away the sexual innocence that children are endowed with by saying that children are so “sophisticated these days”. In truth, children are generally not sophisticated enough to comprehend their sexuality, though some of them are clever enough to gain social status in a world in which disposable sexual pleasure is a coin of the realm.

Street postmodernism in cosmopolitan societies: In a street postmodernist society, the taboos are always being re-negotiated along a predictable vector towards more and more id being made available in public space and less and less space being made available to avoid it. When the social sexual boundary is no longer delineated by what is intimate and what is not intimate, the boundary is liminally defined by, “What can I get away with this year?”. In a street postmodernist society, a person or business entity who is asking “What I can get away with this year without too many raised eyebrows?” is renegotiating his/their behavior on the basis of fluid taboos that are based on the ever-changing construction of what is “correct”. The social boundary that is based on people asking the question, “What I can get away with this year without too many raised eyebrows?” is a boundary that slowly changes to allow more and more prurience and nakedness into public space.

As this happens, the very slowness is calculated by those pushing the envelope to ease just enough of the shock and backlash; just enough of the

shock and backlash for the intellectuals who support it to drive a wedge between those willing to openly verbalize their concern and those are not. One tactic used by intellectuals to advance the expression of sexual id in public space is to label a social/sexual boundary as a “social convention” as a way to make the boundary seem like it is merely an artifice of arbitrary construction. Labeling it a “social convention” makes the boundary seem disposable and makes the breaker of the convention seem like a pioneer into a new realm of human authenticity. Another complementary tactic used by these intellectuals is to exploit the difficulty that most people have in seeing the cumulative effect of this slow, incremental envelope pushing. In the immediate aftermath of each push of the envelope, they are quick to declare that “no harm” has been done.

While the slowness eases the shock and backlash, the slowness of the envelope pushing does not ease the power of the sexual energy being unleashed. Rather, the slowness is interpreted through street postmodernism as inevitable change. Here, people sublimate their inclination to verbalize the power of the sexual energy that is being unveiled under the social taboos of street postmodernism. These taboos are created within street postmodernism to police any attempt to articulate social-sexual boundaries, in order to maintain the street postmodernist idea of id-based freedom (“Who’s to say?”). In this context, people are loath to admit the sexual energy that they traffic in, and prevent it from being openly acknowledged and reckoned with by saying something to the effect, “It’s no big deal”. These same people express the power of the sexual energy that they are trafficking in by purchasing it in the marketplace. Here, the power of the sexual energy that is sublimated under speech codes is verified by people buying that same sexual energy from the distraction industry when it is packaged for the purpose of advertising, fashion and porn. In other words, the money “speaks” what the lips won’t.

This brings us to the particular role that provocative fashion plays in advancing the collective sexual id. While soft-core porn is full nudity that is displayed explicitly for sexual titillation, provocative clothing that partially exposes intimate parts is “not quite” soft-core porn. This provocative clothing toys with the very idea of being clothing by toying with the line that separates clothing from nakedness and porn from non-porn. Toying with the line in this way, provocative clothing borrows its sexual energy from soft-core porn. Provocative fashion can be understood as existing on a “nakedness/porn continuum”, as each new manifestation of provocative

clothing in a new fashion trend negotiates a new social sexual boundary of public nakedness. A component of the “lust factor” for men in street postmodernist, cosmopolitan societies is the very power that women have been granted to create these new social-sexual boundaries of nakedness in public space through their fashion choices. Each new trend that advances a new form of socially accepted provocative clothing is a milestone along a cosmopolitan society’s path towards graduating more and more nakedness and more and more sexual energy into public space. This is because provocative clothing exists on the unstable boundary of intimate body parts that are almost, but not quite exposed, or that are some other fraction exposed. In this tension, provocative clothing gains its sexual energy as it both tilts toward the future and borrows its sexual energy from a future of ever more public sexual nakedness.

Increasing public partial nakedness in the form of provocative clothing makes a statement in the echo chamber of a cosmopolitan society that sexuality is a banal pleasure rather than being a precious pleasure. It is for this reason that increased partial nakedness through provocative clothing coincides with society’s increased acceptability of disposable sexual experiences. It is no coincidence that, at the same time that our society in the U.S. has graduated more and more semi-naked clothing into normalcy, the voices who argue for sex being “no big deal” have gotten louder and bolder. At a fundamental level, this is the same basic phenomenon that is occurring in Europe, where the advancement of sexual id expressions into public space is facilitated by the all encompassing idea that nudity and sexuality are not precious but rather are “no big deal”.

Some objections: I should note here that the purpose of this writing is not to present a panacea to fix society. Rather, the purpose is to clarify intellectual honesty in regard to what is, in fact, sexually suggestive behavior for the specific purpose of holding Christians accountable to what their expression is “speaking” (since expression is, legally and ontologically, a form of speech). Of course, even clothing is a sexual membrane that allows a certain amount of sexual energy to go through, and, of course, being fully clothed is not an automatic recipe for sexual holiness across society. One could argue that powerful sexual energy would be there regardless of whether porn, provocative clothing and public nudity were allowed in public. While this is true, the sexual energy would operate within different social boundaries and would not be used to subvert the boundaries that people need to maintain a

sense of sexual innocence and to maintain a higher degree of choice as to how and when they negotiate their sexuality.

One could argue that people have always committed infidelity, irrespective of whether the society valued clothing. While this is true, it is the societies that banalize sexual pleasure that create a popular vocabulary that helps normalize infidelity and fornication. In our culture over the past couple of years, the increased acceptance of disposable sexual pleasure, whether visual or physical, has coincided with the vocabulary, “hook-up”, to describe disposable physical sexual encounters. (Following Jesus’ equating of lust with adultery, a lustful glance exchanged with another is therefore a visual “hook-up”).

Here are related objections to my thesis:

-- One could argue that without public nakedness, there would be porn regardless. While this is true, it would not hold the same prominence in public space.

-- One could argue that it is OK for a society to have a place for one to explore one’s sexuality. I have more to say on this topic in other writings. Suffice to say for now that one cannot explore what one can never avoid because it is always in one’s face.

-- One could argue that the fashion trends over time have gone back and forth in regards to provocative clothing and exposure. In fact, they have generally moved two steps forward and, only occasionally, moved one step back.

-- One could argue that being nude is less provocative than being provocatively clothed. It is true that provocative clothing as a unique sexual energy to it. It is also true that public nakedness in Europe is usually confined to particular places, while provocative clothing goes everywhere and thus carries the edge that it has into every crevice of society. That said, public nakedness in any form, whether whole or partial, has sexual energy that “finds a way” to express the value for disposable sexual pleasure in a cosmopolitan society.

“What about the corsets that women wore centuries ago that showed the upper half of their breasts -- in an age dominated by the church?”

This is an argument from historical relativism, which is actually cultural relativism through the lens of history. For most people in that era of Christendom, the church served an institutional, legal and ceremonial role

and did not necessarily represent the in-breaking of God's kingdom on people's hearts. It was also an age dominated by kings who influenced the society alongside the church under the concept of the divine right of kings. It was the carnal Louis the XIV who originally commanded women in his court to expose their breasts by removing the partlet, the top piece of the corset. Thus began a fashion trend that remained in effect among the nobility long after that. Note that depictions of prostitutes throughout those eras show them wearing the same breast-exposing corsets to ply their wares. Here, the sexual energy of exposed intimate body parts found a way to be expressed through the cracks of the taboos and the social order of the day.

“But in our society, ankles used to be considered intimate, and in the Middle East, hair is still considered sexually suggestive among Muslims”

There is no body part that is completely without sexual energy, and hair is certainly plays a part in one being sexually attractive, and touching someone's hair and scalp can be an act of intimacy. Hair, however, has had special sexual meaning in the Middle East, where a woman's hair has been symbolically intimate. Covered hair as a symbol of intimacy came about in the unique cultures of the Middle East, where exposed hair traditionally meant that a woman operated sexually outside the bounds of the family authority structure and without regard to the sexual boundaries of monogamy. Hair and hair follicles do not have the sexual physiology that breasts, butts and genitals have, and exposed hair is not considered to be sexually intimate in very many cultures beyond the Middle East or beyond where Islam has spread. While it is, of course, possible for an individual to have a fetish about hair, as cultures go, far more cultures throughout the world have exposure taboos on those body parts which are sexually intimate on a more directly physiological basis.

In America, it is true that exposing ankles was once considered immodest. Ankles, like hair, are not a physiologically intimate body part (appearing to be small on a homunculus). It is my thesis that ankles, covered under dresses, acquired the symbolic sexual intimacy of representing what was higher up under the dress. As our country abandoned the code of dresses that covered the ankles, ankles, having no direct claim to being physiologically intimate, ceased to be considered intimate in the main of the population (though odd individuals here and there will always have a fetish for them). That is why, if I were working as a male camp counselor supervising young girls playing soccer, it is perfectly acceptable for me, the

counselor, to administer a band-aid to a little girl who has scraped her ankle, shin or knee.

Because breasts and butts are physiologically intimate, their claim to being intimate persists in our culture despite their also being considered “no big deal” for the purpose of exhibitionist display. As a male camp counselor, it would be improper for me to administer a band-aid to a little girl who had injured these body parts. It is in this tension of being intimate while also being “no big deal” that breasts and butts have their persistent visual sexual energy.

But the sexuality of the human body is impossible to repress, even with clothing. So what does it matter if intimate body parts are fully covered, partially covered or uncovered?

If I were to look a woman in the face while in her presence, the nature of my attention would be such that it was focused on the whole person. If I were to stare at one of her body parts in her presence, the nature of my attention toward her would be such that it emphasized a body part at the expense paying attention to the whole person. While there is a sexual dimension to each form of attention, the nature of one is completely different than the other.

In the same sense that a frame draws attention to a picture, or that the distribution of light in a picture draws attention to something in the picture, so too does one’s attention “frame” another person. The nature of the attention that I give to a woman is received by her as something that either “frames” her as a whole person or that “frames” her primarily through the experience of her body parts.

As it is true in the realm of giving attention, so it is true in the realm of garnering attention. Along with other things—including one’s attitude and behavior, it is via one’s fashion that one frames one’s body for receiving attention. Of course, no fashion is capable of completely suppressing one’s sexuality, nor should it. However the difference between *clothing that expresses one’s sexuality in the context of one’s whole person* and *clothing that is sexually suggestive and distracting* is that the former is not designed to draw special attention to a particular sexual body part. In either case, the clothing frames the body: either it draws attention to the person’s face and thereby conveys a sense of valuing the experience of the whole person or it

emphasizes a body part other than the face and emphasizes the experience of the person via that body part.

Sexually suggestive clothing that traffics in the power of sexual distraction is clothing that is specifically designed to draw attention to a body part by exposing it or by being revealing in some other way that is not appropriate to performing a particular task. Here, a task that is facilitated by certain clothing becomes part of the "frame" in which the body is viewed. In this sense, the task is actually part of the clothing.

For example, when someone is swimming, the clothing that facilitates swimming draws attention to the reality that a person is engaged in the act of swimming, even as the clothing may be exposing much of the body and may be operating as a membrane whereby the physical sexuality of the body is displayed. However, the same swimsuit worn in an environment that has nothing to do with swimming will not frame the body in the same way. Rather, the intent of the person wearing the swimsuit clothing will be completely divorced from the intent to perform a task that requires a swimsuit. Being unframed by a relevant non-prurient task, the act of wearing a swimsuit would reveal a different intent, the explicitly prurient to reveal the body parts that are exposed when one wears a swimsuit.

***“But men are allowed to expose their chests:
it is only fair that women be allowed to as well”***

While exposed men’s chests do have sexual energy, they are not an intimate body part in the way that breasts are for women. As one comedian once put it, the difference in the visual sexual energy that men derive looking at topless women vs. the visual sexual energy that women derive looking at topless men is the difference between shooting a bullet and throwing it. This fact is manifested in a vastly greater amount of money that traffics in exposed women throughout the distraction industry.

It is due to this sexual difference that men do not have the same desires as women to be sexually validated for their exposed bodies. As many women have brought their desire to be sexually validated for their exposed bodies across all boundaries of time and place, it is these women, not men, who are partially exposing their intimate parts across all boundaries of time and place.

Women who have only the feminist value for equal opportunity without also having the Biblical value for sexual holiness may assert that it is only fair that women be allowed to expose their chests as are men. To arrive at this idea of “fairness”, one has to ignore the realities of sexual differences and intimate body parts that are amply manifested in the marketplace. The women who harbor this idea of “fairness” and also harbor the desire to advance their sexual id in public space are partially exposing their chests without regard to boundaries. This idea of advancing “fairness” is part of the feminist narrative that is shaping the personal motivations of women to advance nakedness into public space.

In this context, “fairness” is being used in the same way that “normal” is being used to avoid acknowledging certain realities. In an effort to advance this idea of fairness, many women have made partially exposed intimate parts normal enough so that the normalcy—via their ubiquitous behavior—can join their idea of “normalcy” as an axiomatic ethical yardstick. In other words, the use of normal as an ethical yardstick that says “normal is good and right” is being met with the behavior that is shaping normal in a particular direction according to particular motives.

“The only reason you think it’s a big deal is because it’s been hidden, if it’s exposed enough, you’ll eventually get used to it”

If I were married (which I’m not now) and saw my wife naked every night, I would “get used to it” in a way. The first time I saw her naked, I would feel the sexual energy of her naked body as visceral jolt to my conscious awareness. Over time, due to sheer day-to-day familiarity, I would feel the sexual energy more and more as a muted sexual pleasure. Over time, the power of the sexual dimension of our bond via the nakedness would still be there, but my awareness of the power in its full fury would be sublimated beneath my consciousness.

The problem with “getting used” to provocative clothing is that it is designed to facilitate disposable voyeuristic sexual thrills in public space. As such, the energy that is built into provocative clothing that one must “get used to” is incompatible with any notion of Christian sexual holiness. For one to “get used” to trafficking in this energy is for one to have any potential awareness of the full power of the voyeuristic sexual energy sublimated beneath the realm of day-to-day consciousness: this, while at the same time

that one is being bonded in full to the claims that the sexual energy is making on one's heart.

Instead of bonding one sexually to one's spouse, the energy of provocative clothing bonds one sexually to the society of women at large, each of whom is available in public space each day to facilitate another vague, voyeuristic sexual thrill. Rising to meet the unending demand for this vague sexual pleasure, ubiquitous provocative clothing and sexual media have become ubiquitous enough to give these addicted people a continuous nip of pleasure to get through the day—pleasure that they now do not have to go out of their way at all to find (and now can hardly avoid even if they wanted to).

It is in this context that provocative clothing makes claims on one's sexual energy. Being bonded to this energy comes at the price of being able to harness that energy into a journey into the architecture of one's heart and mind with God. Rather, the cost of one's energy being diverted to voyeurism is ennui and numbness. It is sexual thrill mixed with numbness that begets the vague sexual pleasure that people become addicted to and becomes their sexual "sweet tooth" for disposable sexual experiences.

This vague sexual pleasure is actually a tragic misuse of one's sexual energy. It is the very sexual bond of a lustful glance that Jesus identifies as a form of adultery in Matthew 5:28 because spiritual power of the sexual bond is there regardless of how fleeting and non-physical the sexual encounter is. It is this energy of the sexual bond, in any form, that Jesus claims for our relationship with God.

It's just fashion with a little skin, why is it such a big deal?

This is an argument from banality. By declaring "it's just ... /"it's no big deal", people employ the mundane, banal existence of a thing as the justification for its existence and thereby give themselves a sense of mastery over their world. This sense of mastery is a false mastery that comes at the expense of examining life carefully.

Underneath the effort at a sense of mastery over the world, there is another motive for saying that something is "it's just ..."/"it's no big deal". The titillation that people say is "no big deal" is actually a very big deal within the worldly notion of id-based freedom. When street postmodernists say that something is "no big deal", the slogan is being used for a calculated

effect to enforce a social boundary against id-suppressing generalities and absolutes. Saying that a behavior is “no big deal” is a street postmodernist code for saying that it is appropriate for public space as an expression of freedom and is therefore worthy of being protected from criticism. (It is “no big deal” for a woman to wear provocative clothing despite my objection, but it is a very big deal for her to inhibit her freedom to wear provocative clothing on my account – the “it’s no big” in this case only applies in one direction.)

The social boundary that has been adjusted for each individual to show “just a little skin” has become a collective social reality that’s very far from being “just a little bit of skin”. The very idea that it’s “just a little skin” is facilitating a very powerful and broad social movement that is bringing titillation into all crevices of public space. To the extent that this slogan has been used to justify partially exposed intimate parts in places of serious endeavor, one cannot turn one’s head in the company of women and not be confronted with partially exposed intimate body parts on display. Partially exposed intimate body parts on display on real women and in media images have become part of what Gil Reavill described in his book *Smut: A Sex Industry Insider (and Concerned Father) Says Enough* (New York: Penguin Group, 2005) as the “unchangeable channel” – the channel that you can never turn off in a society that is “wired for smut”.

Intimate body parts on display in places of serious endeavor have become a defining part of an unending visual sexual landscape. The sheer inability of one to avoid intimate body parts on display gives the practice of exposing intimate body parts a dark power to intimidate people into not questioning it. The use of ubiquitous images to sway people’s minds is a propaganda technique employed by dictators. In the case of the distraction industry and its counterpart in the legions of people who participate in the culture of distraction, the regime is not so much located in a cabal of men. Rather, it is a diffuse regime located in a particular set of ideas practiced tacitly among many people. Though the regime is diffuse, it still holds power to intimidate individuals into acquiescing to it.

There is a psychology to this phenomenon of ubiquitous images. Looking at the nature of environments and their power to communicate, any life coach who is assisting you in cultivating a habit towards success will examine the elements in your environment that may be contributing to your downfall. For example, if you’re trying to maintain a diet and you keep a large, fresh

chocolate cake sitting on your kitchen countertop, he/she would advise you to get rid of the cake, or, at a minimum, keep it from view. The environment comprised of the cake on the counter in the kitchen speaks “have a piece of cake” as surely as if “have a piece of cake” were spoken on a repeating loop through a kitchen sound system. You, having a wayward temptable *self*, are trying to impose the value of keeping to a diet onto this tricky *self*, pitting your effort against a message coded into an environment that has no self to control because it just *is*. In this way, you “bet against the house” when you try to control yourself over the long exposure to an environment whose message is contrary to your value. Every the ebb and flux of the self you are trying to control is exposed to the message encoded in the environment, the message gains a foothold.

In the case of intimate body parts, the sheer ubiquity of exposing intimate body parts has become the very propaganda for an idea that justifies its existence – that exposing intimate body parts is somehow either neutral or even benevolent to society and that questioning it is bad or at least unproductive. It is the very ubiquity of intimate parts on display that gives momentum to this idea, especially in a society of street postmodernist people who have thought their way into looking towards the “times” for guidance.

I have focused this writing specifically on intimate body parts partially exposed in places of serious endeavor rather than on harder forms of porn, though I do consider partially exposed intimate body parts as one end of a “porn continuum”. This is because one still has to make some effort to go out and get harder forms of porn (though it is getting harder to avoid all the time). It is partially exposed intimate parts on display that has the greatest ubiquity on magazine racks and among real women and has thoroughly become an unchangeable channel that one cannot avoid being confronted with in any public space.

“But men have always oppressed women with their dictates on clothing; it is a sign of our progress as a society to be past all that”

This demands a discussion of feminism, fashion and the sexual revolution, which began in its present form in the late ‘60’s and is the backdrop for what is happening today. Dealing with feminism and the sexual revolution more thoroughly in the context of modesty and fashion would require another long essay. Here is a whirlwind summary.

Feminism is a wide umbrella of beliefs that all have in common the goal of advancing women in society. Aspects of feminism that are compatible with the Gospel have the goal of creating a society where it is safe for women to develop their hearts, minds and socioeconomic status. Toward this end, there has been a strand in feminism that has sought to advance the dignity of women by confronting chauvinism in men. There are other strands of feminism, however, that have subverted this very intent in the name of empowering women and have actually encouraged chauvinism in men.

Early feminism was interested in promoting the goal of not having women be sexually objectified in order to advance the social standing of women and advance the opportunities of women to gain access to positions of authority. Unique tensions were created within feminism when feminism became woven in with the sexual revolution of the late '60's. As a key example of this, mini skirts on airline stewardesses were protested by the feminists as being objectifying. The very same mini skirt was embraced by women in other public places as a protest against earlier codes of public modesty, which were seen as artificial and generated by male fears. So was the mini skirt objectifying or not? In the context of the street it was considered a sign of liberation; in the context of the airline it was considered a sign of oppression. It was in this tension that feminism alloyed itself with the sexual revolution in this calculus of oppression and liberation -- If a sexual expression was imposed on women to serve men's lust from a position of power, it was oppression, while if women choose an expression as a way to break from the past and to assert their interests, it was liberation. The broader corollary to this calculus of liberation and oppression was the historical narrative of many feminists – that the old gender codes were bad, and behavior that deviated from them was good and a sign of progress.

Feminist intellectuals at that time explained the existence of the gender codes that had long dominated society as being artificially imposed on men and women. In this belief, nurture determined nature, and education could be calculated and adjusted to form malleable children into a society that rejected the old gender codes and created a society of equality between genders. This idea is now known as gender feminism⁵, feminism that seeks to empower women by deconstructing the very idea of gender. Gender feminism, though, resulted in an intellectual tension with the feminist/sexual

⁵ Sommers, Christina Hoff. *Who stole feminism?: how women have betrayed women*. New York. Touchstone, 1995. p. 22

revolution calculus of oppression and liberation. The same feminists who believed that women had been malleable enough to be led to adopt bad gender codes in the past were the same feminists who believed in the supreme prerogative of women to make sound choices toward their own liberation in regard to sexuality for the present and future.

This feminist narrative of women coming out from under oppression did not factor in the possibility that women could be manipulated in a new paradigm too—women could be manipulated toward choosing to adopt an objectifying behavior under the belief that they were choosing their liberation. What that generation of feminists didn't deal with was the new power that the sexual energy of the mini-skirt had given to the collective sexual id of men in society. This collective sexual id is always manifested in fashion and body trends that women strive to meet in order to command sexual attention from men and to compete with other women. Before the late '60's, this collective male id had been more subdued in public space due to the societal demands for more public modesty.

As men embraced the sexual revolution for its easy voyeurism and sex and rejected old notions of modesty, the very mini-skirt was a symbol of this cutting edge trend and contained within it the power to confer hipness/trendiness on the women who wore it and frumpiness/untrendiness on the women who didn't. This trend coincided with women being newly obsessed with being thin enough to look good in the mini-skirt. The early seventies trend of women exposing lots of cleavage was also part of this over-all trend—women breaking from past sexual boundaries in the name of liberation and thereby meeting the voyeuristic sexual id of trendy, sexual revolution men.

At the same time that this was happening, old notions of manhood were being questioned. With this anxiety in regard to manhood came the dual trend of men becoming both more feminine and more hyper-masculine. In the early 70's, at the same time that gender feminism was on the rise, WWF wrestling, steroid-looking GI Joes, swinger men and other rising forms of hyper-masculinity coincided with the different trend of the day to try to make men more sensitive. In an effort to make sure that men stayed on the sensitive side, some gender feminists tried to take their analysis of society all the way into the bedroom (“the bedroom affects the boardroom”) believing that even the most intimate and mundane sexual acts could be a sign of the power dynamics between men and women—power dynamics that could

have an effect on whether or not a gender apartheid was being facilitated in society. (To this day there are still some hardcore gender feminists who protest the “missionary position” in sex)

Fast-forwarding to the 1990’s, many women were able to look back on the opportunities that earlier feminism had facilitated for them in the workplace. They considered themselves sympathetic to feminism without considering themselves radical activists. These women basically adopted feminism’s ideas of non-distinction as a utilitarian ideology – something that had to be said in order to maintain the new social order. This taboo on dealing openly with gender existed in a cognitive dissonance with the ways gender was “finding a way” to express itself in society and erode the gender feminist ideas of the supremacy of nurture in regard to gender. The women’s magazines that made a profit continued to offer “please your man” advice even as the advice became more and more explicitly sexual in nature⁶. Scientific studies on the nature of gender began to confirm the biological basis of gender, and toy companies continued to sell the same basic types of toys to boys and girls.

In the context of our society becoming more “postmodernist” and “post-structural”, adopting intellectually fashionable ideas that logic and reason were passé, postfeminist women did not generally consider it necessary to confront this cognitive dissonance. Post feminist women allowed themselves to admit that they enjoyed sex and enjoyed dressing feminine without admitting to any deeper substantive existence of an abstraction known as “womanhood” or “femininity”. As such this “post feminism” was more of social movement aimed at pragmatically uniting the best of feminism and the best of the sexual revolution without necessarily trying to hammer things out into an articulated, coherent intellectual position. (Public intellectuals who are pro-sexual revolution and pro-feminism, such as Camille Paglia and Norman Mailer, have often looked to Madonna as their cultural icon⁷⁸. Madonna is a postmodern avatar of unfettered female sexual id who re-invents her gender continually, free of any idea of objective structures.)

⁶ Avins, Mimi. “How to Please Your...Readers.” *Los Angeles Times* (25 October 1999). pp. E1,E3.

⁷ Falk, William et. al. “Author Of the Week, Camille Paglia” *The Week* (22 April 2005). p. 24.

⁸ Mailer, Norman. *The Spooky Art: Some Thoughts On Writing*. New York. Random House, 2003. p. 63.

In post feminism, sexual pleasure extruded itself through the taboos that had been placed on openly acknowledging the existence of genders, male and female as being substantive human realities. In this environment, sexual pleasure became the primary basis for any construction of sexuality, and by extension, gender – as understood as a distinct sexual identity of male and female. In post feminism, gender became unspoken and flexible, holding contradictions and cognitive dissonance, as it was being continually renegotiated in the social marketplace to serve the end of facilitating sexual pleasure. As the power of sexual pleasure gathered steam under the taboos that had been placed on openly acknowledging gender, the consumer marketplace became the place where people tacitly negotiated and renegotiated their gender and the new boundaries of their sexual id in public space. In this environment, explicitly sexual music, movies, TV shows, fashion and other forms of pop-art became the new forum of exploring sexual identity.

It was in this forum of pop-art that the narrative was advanced that the advancement sexual id across boundaries of time and place represented the empowerment of women and the crumbling of an oppressive social order. Here, as pleasure became the primary basis for the tacit and flexible construction of sexual identity, so too did anger and resentment, which was understood as the catharsis of women coming out from under the oppression of past constructions of gender. It was in this spirit that a new wave of gender feminism hit throughout the 1990's that sought to stretch the old notions of gender even farther than they had been stretched before. The zeitgeist involved some women experimenting with being "womyn". Lilith, the mythical counterpart to Eve, who had rejected a relationship with Adam, was the namesake of the women's rock festival. The '90's woman warrior and riot grrrl zeitgeist represented new boundaries of gender and a new catharsis of rage against men⁹ and anti-male vitriol and humor that became the staple of TV sit-coms¹⁰.

By about 2002, the '90's womyn/riot grrrl rage had left the zeitgeist as women began to reconcile with the sexual id of men as they embraced their own animal sexual id as women in a new way. The rage morphed into a

⁹ I know that I am limiting this whirlwind examination of feminism mainly to "white society" for the moment, knowing full well that there is a large dimension to this that directly involves black and latino culture. Deal with these cross-racial and cultural concerns in a later writing.

¹⁰ Richmond, Ray. "White Toast." *New Times Los Angeles* (27 October 1999). pp. 32,33.

-muted contempt for men and an acquiescing to the male sexual id as a juggernaut that could not be changed. Raunch feminism was the attempt to turn the resignation at men being sexual animals into a belief that it was the path of freedom and respect for women to also be sexual animals who can play the same game as men.

As such, raunch feminism has become the crass, street postmodernist feminism that is the heir to the feminism that first alloyed itself with the sexual revolution. “Raunch feminism”, a term coined by Christine Smallwood in her review¹¹ of Ariel Levy’s book *Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture* (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 2005), is a form of feminism that seeks to claim feminine power by seeking parity with aggressive male sexual behavior. Raunch feminism finds feminist empowerment in claiming public space for women to use their female sexual power, including the power to command voyeurism, to confront real and perceived power imbalances with men by trafficking in men’s weakness for women’s bodies.

Raunch feminism works backward from the culture of male sexual conquest and chauvinism, assuming these to be intractable facts of life. Raunch feminism sees the “props” that men give each other for their sexual aggression and seeks to expand that form of respect in society to women. To advance this goal, raunch feminism confronts the double standard of disparity of stigma between men and women in terms of the chauvinistic behavior that they are allowed to publicly display by saying, effect, “if they get away with it and enjoy it, why shouldn’t we?” Here, raunch feminism sees the parity of sexual behavior as the prescription to create the parity of non-stigma in society.

Raunch feminism tries to interpret female sexual aggression in the idea of the “ironic slut”¹², reinterpreting behavior that would have been understood by earlier feminists as “objectifying” by redefining it as a form of social power. In this way, raunch feminism borrows its narrative from punk and hip-hop which try to co-opt symbols of oppression into symbols of resistance. (The difference here is that raunch feminism traffics in unspoken

¹¹ Smallwood, Christine. “Girls gone wild.” *Salon.com* (7 October 2005).

¹² “Ironic slut” is my term to describe what Ariel Levy calls a “female chauvinist pig.”

behavior more than it openly tries to re-interpret words. To be truly “punk”, raunch feminists would need to wholly own and re-interpret the word “slut” as a badge of honor like “punk” or “nigga”, which they do not. I’ve just learned, though, that calling each other “slut” has become cool among some young girls¹³)

In street postmodernism, there is a new form of postmodern male chauvinism that has become the complement to raunch feminism. This postmodern male chauvinism contains within it a postmodern notion of chivalry and political correctness that has been alloyed with the male sexual id. A postmodern male chauvinist will give verbal assent to whatever women say that they want. This allows the postmodern male chauvinist man to be “sensitive” and politically correct to the “times”. A postmodern male chauvinist will interpret his masculinity based on his ability to “handle” a woman and function smoothly in the midst of her raunch feminist behavior. Were he to confront her on it, the confrontation would expose his inability to smoothly “handle” her behavior and thus put a question mark on his masculinity. Instead, his “chivalry” towards her is the act of employing his postmodern notion of masculinity to facilitate her wants and wishes. As such, a postmodern male chauvinist and a raunch feminist ironic slut have a complementary social contract – she gets to feel that she is conquering him, and, if he plays along, he gets to have his “conquest” too. Here, his sexual id satisfied at the same time that she believes that she is having her “conquest”.

This largely unspoken but powerful social contract between the postmodernist male chauvinists and the raunch feminists is the basis for the amount of sexual titillation that has been graduated into public space. The fashion trend of partially exposing sexually intimate body parts without regard to time and place and without regard to places of serious endeavor, is one manifestation of this advancing street postmodernist social contract.

Certain fashions did not start out as being part of this street postmodernism social contract of titillation in public space but evolved to conform to it later. The pant suit for women in the 70’s started out as a statement of female parity and equality with men. By 2002, the pant suit had evolved into the tights-with-panty-lines/thong-lines suit. Here, the sexuality caught up to the original politics and the sexuality of post-feminism was extruded through the

¹³ Falk, William. “Coolness.” *The Week* (21 July 2006). From the Editor.

original feminist intent. In another example of this, some young women in '90's aped the ghetto style of sagging pants revealing the upper half of the underwear. By 2002 this had evolved into the practice of exposing the upper thigh and butt over low-waisted jeans. As for the current practice of exposing cleavage, it does not have any provenance of having been started for anything other than serving the culture of today's raunch feminism and postmodern male chauvinism.

And as for the postmodern male chauvinist, women partially exposing their intimate parts in every crevice of public space only shortens the distance he would otherwise have to go to get titillated.

“Other men don't seem to be making an issue of it”

I am convinced that this phenomenon is generally due to the cultural force that street postmodernism exercises to quell what can be said, a force that men are party to as much as women. Specifically, it is due to the unique aspects of postmodern male chauvinism and chivalry that have been adopted by many men in these times to varying degrees. As with other codes of male behavior, postmodern male chauvinism/chivalry contains an element of shaming dissenting men into silence. Postmodern male chauvinism/chivalry takes the street postmodernist chill against openly discussing modesty with women and compounds it by reinterpreting the dissent as a form of male weakness.

As a man is confronted with women partially exposing intimate body parts in areas of serious endeavor, he usually has some combination of the following motives to be silent:

- a) The motive to be silent out of his fear of facing the wrath of offended women
- b) The motive to be silent out of his enjoyment of the peep show and his motive to play along with it
- d) The motive to be silent out of his idea of chivalry/masculinity that he must be tough enough to “handle” it
- e) The motive to be silent out of fear of being ridiculed for being fussy and overly sensitive
- f) The motive to be silent based on his interest in being cool/progressive to fit in with the “times”
- f) The motive to be silent out of his inability to confront the street postmodernist objections that he would be confronted with

g) In the workplace, the motive to be silent out of his fear of being prosecuted under sexual harassment laws for having made women uncomfortable by broaching his concerns about their dress

Of course, there are some men who are truly not distracted by or otherwise bothered by exposed intimate parts. However, it is my argument that the distraction industry offers a window into what distracts most men. In regard to what men find sexually titillating, the distraction industry allows men to express with their pocketbooks what street postmodernism is suppressing them from saying openly to women on the matter. This phenomenon— men being consumers the sexual objectification of women that has been packaged by the distraction industry – is a doppelganger to the “chivalry” that men may express in one-to-one relationships with women by being silent.

Many women have taken this silence on the part of men at face value as a validation for the neutrality/normalcy of their behavior of partially exposing intimate body parts. It is my assertion that this normalcy is a social construction that has been created by many strong but hidden cultural taboos about what can be spoken. As such, the normalcy of women partially exposing intimate body parts is actually a glaze of normalcy that is being used to obfuscate the reality underneath the glaze -- that partially baring intimate body part is still sexually suggestive behavior.

***These sensitive, distractible men should just get over it
and not be so “thin-skinned”***

Though many Christians would not openly say this, the force of this worldly objection is often cloaked in an attitude even if it is not openly stated, so I will deal with it. This statement, when presented as flippant advice to men who have issues with provocative clothing, is in a vast category of worldly platitudes that would like to wish male nature out of existence rather than deal with it squarely. Here, “skin” is being used as a metaphor for one’s mind and one’s eyes. In this context, the platitude that someone should be “thick skinned” makes claims on how one observes reality and how one processes emotions. The problem is that this statement does not reflect any interest in the method by which a man’s eyes and mind are transformed: rather, it is only interested in the result. It is the emphasis on result and not process that belies the intent of the statement— that a man should divert his attention away from reckoning with the issue of modesty so that he does not make any inconvenient claims on others’ behavior.

As such, this statement does not have the goal of facilitating the delicate spiritual process of God turning hearts from stone into flesh. Rather, this platitude works backward from the convenience of those who enjoy partially exposed intimate parts on display and proceeds to wish that men harden their hearts in order to better facilitate that convenience. It is for this reason that this statement reflects a desire that men be “thick skinned” by being “thick hearted”.

“What about men’s responsibility not to look lustfully, etc...?”

To the extent that women have participated in the fashion of partially exposing intimate body parts, they have been complicit in creating the “unchangeable channel” of ubiquitous, perpetual and unavoidable titillation in public space. To focus on the responsibility of men at the expense of reckoning with the visual sexual landscape they are confronted with is an act of intellectual dishonesty. Of course, one will never be able to completely change one’s external environment to one’s absolute satisfaction and, of course, the condition of one’s heart is something that one is ultimately accountable for before God. However, being “responsible” for one’s heart is an endeavor that is not mutually exclusive with taking it upon oneself to confront one’s environment. Rather, these tasks are often complementary.

In regard to the specific topic of provocative clothing, the sexual energy of provocative clothing is not something that I am confronting merely in the realm of my heart and mind as a man, but it is something that is verifiable as operating in the larger realm of society. It is for this reason that the same vocabulary that I am using to confront this reality in the realm of my heart and mind is exportable beyond the confines of my heart and mind and into the realm of debate. It is in the interest of stirring discussion that I am calling Christian women--who comprise part of my visual environment—to examine the effects of their behavior. I am calling women to examine the effects of participating in the culture of partially exposed intimate body parts via a lens that deals critically with what has become normal. Through the observations and conclusions and related vocabulary I am laying out in this writing, I am trying to offer a clear alternative to merely acquiescing to what has become normal, and I am trying to offer a clearer path to intellectual honesty and sexual holiness in the church.

I also know that the compression of many arguments in this writing that focus on *women* might seem as though I am laying undue blame on women in regard to this behavior at the expense of men. As I stated at the beginning of this writing, I am actually confronting the beliefs and behaviors of all people, men included, who participate in the culture of intimate body parts on display whether directly or as fellow travelers. The reason I have not belabored these points regarding men's behavior is that the obvious ways that men participate in the culture of disposable sexuality are not a matter of debate in the Church in terms of being problems. Most of the male participation in the culture of disposable sexuality has been confronted in the Church enough so that Christians, by and large, have at least some understanding that it is wrong and a manifestation of men's fallen selves. It is the current culture of women casually exposing intimate body parts—the culture being both the specific behavior and the ways that the behavior is justified by both men and women—that has crept in under the radar of what the Evangelical church recognizes as a problem in the area of sexual holiness.

“It doesn't matter what I wear, many men will still leer at me”

There exists a large fraction of indecent men at large who will leer at a woman and “undress her with their eyes” no matter what she wears. The quiet majority of decent men, though, will be affected by what a woman wears, and will interpret what she wears as a sign of her intention to be noticed sexually or not. The intent that is encoded into what a woman wears is a part of the sexual energy, good or bad, that she traffics in. It is in the application of this understanding that Christian women should dress for the best in men, not the worst.

***“But I'm not intending to be sexually suggestive;
this is just what I feel like wearing”***

Highlighting the benign, conscious intent of the wearer is frequently raised as an objection to the charge that one is dressing immodestly. This is based partly on the assumption that body parts are sexually suggestive only when used for that expressed purpose and conscious intent in advertising and other specific contexts—that they are not necessarily sexually suggestive when one exposes them casually and without any conscious or overt intent to be sexually suggestive. This argument assumes that the sexual energy of intimate body parts has an “on/off switch” that is activated only upon the

exposer's subjective conscious intent. In other words, the assumption here is that the intent of the wearer suffices as the social membrane through which sexual suggestiveness is interpreted or not by others.

Though it is true that context can affect how a body/body part is interpreted, the mere intent of the wearer of provocative clothing does not provide a sustainable social sexual membrane to facilitate any sense of modesty in public space. First, the very act of being partly naked without regard to boundary has a sexual energy to it, irrespective of the conscious intent of the wearer. Second, the intent of the wearer can change "at the drop of a hat" when she senses that she is, in some moment, the object of voyeurism. Third, the wearer may have many sublimated layers of intent underneath the conscious intent. Fourth, when the energy contained within the previous three factors is presented without regard to boundary under the idea that it is banal/normal, there is provocative sexual energy in the very ambiguity as to whether the partial nakedness it is or isn't intended to be interpreted sexually.

In regard to sublimated intent, I take it as a given that many layers of intent can operate on a subconscious or conscious level within a person. I also take it as a given that one can be very easily influenced by one's social environment and will absorb "group-think" by osmosis if one is not actively questioning it. I outline this as follows:

- If
- a) group A is behaving in a particular way
 - b) group B, who intermingles with group A, behaves in that same way with a known, particular intent, and
 - c) group A does not admit that they have the same intent as group B but does not then explain why they have a clear alternative intent which can be made clearly distinct from the intent of those in group B;

then, as a general rule,

it is reasonable to conclude that group A, on some level, harbors the same or similar intent as those in group B.

This intent can either be conscious, in which case the members of group A are out-and-out lying, or, more commonly, the intent can be sub-conscious, in which case the members of group A are not out-and-out lying but are nevertheless being intellectually dishonest.

Regarding possible exceptions--

It is theoretically possible that group A has an intent that is thoroughly distinct from group B that group A is not able to put into words. It is possible that group A is borrowing from group B's behavior and re-interpreting it into their own completely distinct meaning. As is often the case in the real world of fashion, the intent of group A is most likely at least in the same "family" of intent as group B, operating as a related, tandem intent.

As an example of this, it is possible that kids who borrow from gangster fashion are not gangsters. However, they are fellow travelers with the gangsters in the sense of identifying with the desire that gangsters have to assert an identity that challenges formal authority. As such the intent of a non-gangster kid who wears gangster clothing is an intent that runs tandem to that of the gangster. The gangster, in addition to having the vague goal of challenging formal authority, also has the specific goal of identifying his gang membership. In this way, the non-gangster kid and the gangster do not have the exact same intent, but the intents of each fall within the same "family" of intent.

Applying this general principle to the fashion of partially exposed intimate body parts, it is my assertion that a group A-- group B relationship exists, respectively, between women who expose intimate parts and the distraction industry, in which the use of intimate body parts is employed for its calculated effect to distract. It is for this reason that I am convinced that the intent of women, whether conscious or unconscious, is in the same "family" of intent as the distraction industry, even if it is not exactly the same intent.

Most individual women do not wear distracting clothing to "sell", in the explicit market sense. However, they are participating in the same exhibitionist behavior for personal payoffs that they feel that they gain by being sexually distracting to men. In this light, individual women may not be operating under the idea that "titillation sells" as an economic currency, but they are operating under the idea that "titillation sells" as a social currency.

As street postmodernism has elevated id-based freedom, street postmodernism has elevated the ethical value of using one's own feelings as the basis for making decisions. As long as the feelings are directed toward expressing something that has been ratified by the times, street

postmodernists say, “I feel like it”, as an axiomatic justification for their actions. In other words, speaking as the street postmodernist, “I feel like it because I feel like it. End of discussion”. The problem is that what an unexamined person “feels like” in regard to doing something will be a jumble of their conscious and unconscious motives. A major thread in this tangle of motives is the motive to feel like fitting in.

In regard to the idea of “tandem intent”, women who say “I feel like it” to justify their clothing are not indicating an intent that is sufficiently severed from the intent of those who use intimate body parts with the express intent of being sexually suggestive. It is for this reason that women’s behavior of partially exposing intimate body parts is a manifestation of this: that they are being influenced by the distraction industry and are fellow travelers with the distraction industry. It is in this context that they are being influenced by each other and are fellow travelers with and participators in the raunch feminist culture at large, whether they consciously intend to or not.

“But you’re trying to inhibit my freedom”

This objection is based on the modern notion of freedom that has abandoned the classical notions of license and liberty. License in the classical sense, is the sheer freedom/ability to do something. Liberty, in the classical sense, is the practice of using one’s license to do something in conjunction with all of the responsibilities that go with it. It is this idea of liberty that makes a distinction between one’s personal interests and the common good.

As our society has become more and more street postmodernist, our society has defined human freedom as people being able to express their desires in an uninhibited way as their desires are no longer “repressed” by inhibitions. The only responsibility that is factored into street postmodernism is the ethic of not imposing one’s personal views on others. In this way, street postmodernism has made personal license the greatest good, and has thereby jettisoned the need to define a distinction between license and liberty. For a street postmodernist, license *is* liberty.

It is my assertion that the practice of partially exposed body parts is detrimental the boundaries required for a Christian practice of modesty is a practice at odds with the common spiritual good of the body of believers, and by extension, is at odds with the common good in the world at large. It is a practice that is inconsistent with holiness and is justified on the basis on

worldly self interest and not on the basis of taking one's thoughts captive to Christ. In this way, the practice of partially exposing intimate parts is an exercise of worldly license, not Christian liberty.

A CALL TO MODESTY

For us, as Christians, Scripture makes claims on how we relate to the culture around us and how we use our hearts and minds for that task. Flexibility is built into the gospel so that we can employ our hearts and minds to follow the executive leading of Jesus to bring the whole of God's truth strategically into different times and situations. This is the flexibility of a joint, not a jellyfish. Adopting practices that are unbiblical in an effort to fit into the culture to be accepted by the culture in order to advance the gospel only advances a compromised gospel.

The call to dress modestly and the practice of sexual holiness by abstaining from infidelity of the heart and eyes are important parts of the whole of Scripture and are aspects of our discipleship not to be neglected. The flexibility of the Gospel in regard to modesty allows us to be strategic as to *when* and *how* we raise the topic among those we minister. The Gospel, taken as the whole of God's truth, does not give us flexibility about *whether* to raise the topic. In regard to modesty, the flexibility of the Gospel allows us to take into account what is normal around us as we take every thought and trend captive.

This act of taking thoughts and trends captive is not a casual process and does not mean that we unquestioningly defer to what is normal in the wider society as the basis of our decisions. To the extent that the church has unquestioningly deferred to what is normal to decide what is appropriate clothing, the church has borrowed from the lens on reality that the street postmodernist culture at large uses. It is this lens — using normal to decide what is right — that the church is using to interpret the culture for the purpose of making decisions in regard to modesty. This writing is an attempt to offer a different approach. In the context of a sincere attempt to take the street postmodernist culture captive, I am asserting that the criteria listed below are valid criteria for determining what is sexually suggestive in a cosmopolitan society such as ours:

- a) Exposure of the body that is employed for its titillating power by the distraction industry

- b) Exposure of the body that traffics in the whole or partial display of body parts that are understood as being intimate parts according to law and human physiology
- c) Exposure of body parts that would never be appropriate to point out on the body of another in casual conversation (as in, “You got a nice suntan on your _____”)

These criteria represent an assertion that there exists a yardstick for measuring what is sexually suggestive that is tangible, definable and knowable for those serious about taking the culture captive. It is this assertion that rejects the truth-is-too-ambiguous-to-be-known-so-let’s-let-the-trends-sort-it-all-out attitude of street postmodernism.

What is a valid prescription for Christian modesty that is based on a Christian sense of liberty, liberty that reconciles license with responsibility? What is a prescription for Christian modesty that is a counterpoint to the use of intimate parts for titillation without regard to boundary? The prescription for modesty should incorporate flexibility as something that is built around the tasks that are available for one to enjoy in a modern, urban society. It should not be built around the flexibility of the “times”, especially if the “times” are graduating the expression of sexual id into public space.

A Christian idea of liberty in regard to clothing that reconciles the need for modesty and flexibility should allow enough exposure of the body to be appropriate to the task or activity and no more. It should allow for clothing that is reasonably comfortable and attractive without being overly distracting to others. It should have the constraint of not exposing intimate parts.

It is an attempt to clarify a Christian sense of modesty and liberty that I assert that:

- Intimate parts should be displayed exclusively in places of intimacy.
- Upper thighs and midriffs, areas in immediate proximity to intimate body parts, can be understood as “sexually negotiable”, since they have sexual energy but are not intimate in quite the same way as “intimate parts”. Upper thighs and midriffs can be exposed when they need to be exposed for the utility of performing certain activities. Upper thighs and midriffs do not belong as exposed, partially exposed or teased in places of serious endeavor.

Particularly in areas of serious endeavor and in any space where people do not have the room to choose whether or not to see you, a Christian modesty involves taking into account what an article of clothing exposes/teases in the full range of motion of a normal person moving about, not merely standing ramrod straight. Herein lays the problem with low necklines that lie just above the breasts when a woman is standing straight. Low necklines readily expose parts of intimate body parts when a woman bends over (and often shift downward in the course of moving around). The same is true of low-waist jeans and mini-skirts that expose parts of intimate parts when seen from the various angles that one can expect to be seen from in the course of a day. In the same vein, shirts that don't cover the midriff in the full range of bending the torso don't belong in places of serious endeavor.

In regard to tight clothing, the context is a clue to the intent of the wearer. Some clothing will be unavoidably tight on heavy people, while some tasks, like athletic activities require tight clothing. Most tight clothing, though, is tight because it is intended to accentuate what lies underneath. The same can be said of *all* sheer clothing.

One could try to argue that the upper arm, shoulder, and armpits could be sexually suggestive and that a short sleeve shirt creates a "tease" for what lies above it. However, touching part of a shoulder or upper arm is not the same as touching a midriff or upper thigh, and doesn't have the same measurable visual power in the marketplace.

One could try to argue that the idea of "task" is a flexible idea. For example, a "task" could include the task of keeping cool in the summer. Here, it is possible to exploit the flexibility in the idea of a "task" to create a pretext for being exhibitionist. In regard to the heat of summer, it is possible for one to function comfortably in the summertime without exposing or partially exposing intimate parts, if one has the value for not exposing them. I have observed that many of the same women who expose parts of intimate parts in the heat of summer also do so in the bitter cold of winter. This behavior belies a deeper agenda to make partially exposed body parts seem so normal that is isn't shocking.

One could try to argue that hair, faces and bikinis are all employed in the distraction industry and that my use of the distraction industry as a counterpoint to modesty would lead to imposing burqas. To answer this objection, it is true that any part of the body has some sexual energy, but not

all body parts have the same energy. Most of the advertising that strives to be titillating employs more than hair and faces. Here, the use of the task provides a stable and sensible social sexual membrane, allowing for the expression of the inevitable sexual power that the whole body has, while inhibiting the parts that are explicitly sexual. People need their faces to breathe comfortably; people need their hair un-encumbered to drive and to engage comfortably in athletic activity, etc...

In specific regard to bikinis, when attempting to clarify a boundary in regard to clothing in a cosmopolitan society, it is impossible to completely avoid proximity to slippery slopes and the “doppelganger phenomenon”. The “doppelganger phenomenon” is my term to describe what happens when the sexual energy that operates in muted form within one social boundary is expressed in more overtly prurient ways beyond that boundary. As it applies to those who push the envelope in media and fashion, the “doppelganger phenomenon” is the phenomenon of people taking the license that a culture offers to wear certain clothing within a certain social-sexual boundary and exploiting that license to wear that clothing outside of that social-sexual boundary for explicitly prurient interests.

In a similar manner that public nudity in Europe is connected to a larger cultural trend that is eroding boundaries of sacred and non-sacred, bikinis at the beach and at poolsides in America are connected to the ways that bikinis are being used in American society for more prurient interests. While our culture has recognized that the beach and the poolside are a legitimate places for women to wear bikinis, in our society that is always on the frontier, the legitimacy of bikinis in these settings has served to facilitate bikinis being used beyond the boundaries of beach and poolside. Beyond the boundaries of beach and poolside, any pretense to a bikini being a swimsuit or sun-bathing suit is gone, and it is nothing more than a “look at my body” suit. As such, bikinis that are worn by women on the cover of “lad” magazines, etc are the “doppelganger” to bikinis worn on the beach and the poolside. As an article of skimpy clothing, the bikini has long been kin to the skin-baring clothing of women in strip joints, follies and other venues of titillation.

One could try to argue that I am offering a prescription for modesty and liberty that allows for bikinis while criticizing nudity in Europe –while at the same time having establishing that both are being used to advance prurience into public space. Despite the reality that both bikinis and European public

nudity are facilitating prurient interests across society, there is still a big difference between where we're at now in the U.S. and in European style public nudity, and where we would be in America if we adopted overt European standards without their accompanying (if fragile) nude etiquette. That bikinis at least cover, if barely, intimate parts, is still an important boundary that keeps what is sacred private. This distinction between what is sexually sacred and less sacred is a distinction that is more thoroughly discarded in a cosmopolitan society that has allowed public nudity under that idea that it's all "natural".

I raised the issue of nudity in Europe to confront the reality of the sexual energy of intimate body parts as a social phenomenon that is facilitating a slippery slope that is graduating more and more licentiousness into public space. Public nakedness is a terminal point for social-sexual boundaries that are sliding down a slippery slope—a terminal point that I worked backward from to explain the sexual energy of partially exposed intimate parts – sexual energy that our culture is now trafficking in on the slippery slope that we are now on. In Europe, at least, there is still a greater ability to impose social boundaries on that public nakedness, even as that nakedness is playing a role in the society becoming ever more saturated with prurience and licentiousness.

Athletic clothing also has its "doppelganger phenomenon" that operates on a slippery slope in our culture, through skimpy athletic clothing that one fails to change out of and thus becomes street-wear and athletic clothing that exposes intimate parts in a way that is not necessary for the task. Athletic clothing and athletics in general have long been pretenses to show "cheesecake" and "beefcake" in fitness magazines and elsewhere.

Despite these "doppelganger phenomena" and proximity to slippery slopes, it is possible to clarify a social-sexual boundary for Christians in regard to clothing that balances the license to wear clothing that is appropriate for the task and the responsibility to have regard for others' need for visual sexual holiness. It is in this context that good sense must be defined as a ridge that lies at the top of two slippery slopes. One approach would be to ban bikinis and athletic clothing altogether, which would greatly inhibit the ability to enjoy athletics and sunbathing anywhere. The logic of this approach – of banning any display anywhere that could be interpreted sexually--leads down the path to imposing burqas.

The other approach is to slide down the slippery slope toward ever more public nakedness and prurience. This is the slope that we are now on as a culture, not openly acknowledging any boundary other than what is determined by the “times”, thereby tacitly graduating nakedness and licentiousness into public space via the collective id. Here, social-sexual boundaries are continually being blurred to accommodate more and more of the collective id. In specific regard to fashion, fashion trends are continually blurring the line between bathing suit, street suit, athletic suit and underwear¹⁴. Here, old needs to be old so that new can be new. Contrary to the attitude of street postmodernists, this phenomenon is not “just fashion”. Rather, it is a manifestation of social sexual boundaries that are being re-negotiated in the “times” to facilitate more and more of the collective id that wants to service its desire for voyeurism in public space.

The sensible, middle way between a) completely banning any clothing that has any prurient uses when taken across certain boundaries of time and place and b) allowing the “times” to tacitly dictate the ever-changing boundaries is this: to define a social-sexual boundary of clothing according to the parameters of task and the constraints of avoiding the display intimate parts. It is this approach that provides the Christian community the space, structure and vocabulary to confront skimpiness when the skimpiness is taken beyond its utility for the task and brought into the realm of unbounded public space. It is this approach that allows for the liberty that unites a) the license to wear clothing that is appropriate for the task with b) the Christian responsibility to facilitate an environment friendly the practice of self-control. It is this approach that creates a social-sexual membrane wherein a) Christians have a responsibility to deal with their voyeurism issues without imposing undue limits on other’s mobility and freedom and b) Christians also have a responsibility not to be unnecessarily sexually distracting to others. It is this social-sexual boundary that is oriented around the task and is oriented around avoiding the unnecessary display of skin that is the best calculus for Christian liberty in regard to the issue of Christian modesty.

And so it is in clarifying a ridge that lies at the top of two slippery slopes that I am asserting that:

- a) Exposed faces and hair are OK.
- b) Exposed shoulders and armpits are OK.

¹⁴ Horowitz, Bruce. “Swimsuit buyers leap for high-tech versatile styles” *USA Today* (28 May 2004). pp. 1A, 2A.

- c) Bikinis should be limited to places designated for swimming and/or sunbathing.
- d) Athletic clothing should be limited to places of athletic activity.
- e) Neither a), b), c), nor d) require the exposure of intimate body parts, partial or whole.
- f) Partially exposed/teased intimate parts and sheer clothing should be limited to places of intimacy with another.
- g) Tight clothing and the exposure of midriffs and upper thighs should be limited to tasks that require them.

***“But my Christian modesty is a personal decision,
not to handed to me as some law from someone else”***

It is true that for that anything that I have said thus far to be considered as truth in any person’s heart, the Holy Spirit would need to be the writing it in on his/her heart. However, this objection has conflated the New Testament sanctioned of act of spurring fellow Christians on to love and good deeds with the act of forcing people to follow arbitrary laws. In attempting to avoid considering my prescription for modesty, this objection conflates the flexibility of the Gospel with a license to avoid facing the reasoning that I have laid out for my prescription. In avoiding my reasoning, one is assuming that one can make assessments of reality subjectively in a vacuum without openly discussing it, that one’s thoughts on the matter do not need to be informed by the serious thoughts of others. This objection emanates from street postmodernism, as it is street postmodernism, not Christianity, that makes the act of claiming truth to be the opposite of love.

“It doesn’t matter what I wear it, it only matters what’s in my heart”

The Gospel calls each Christian to practice discernment by using both the heart and the head. One’s heart does not exist in a vacuum from one’s judgments and one’s judgments cannot operate in a vacuum that excludes dealing with the world at large. Rather, the effect that one’s actions have on others must be part of a calculation of one’s judgment. It is the fruit of one’s judgment in the church and in the world that will eventually be tested by God in fire.

“This writing of yours seems harsh and not very loving”

I am a believer in being sensitive to the intellectual demands of people who are truly seeking and thinking. I have attempted to be sensitive to an audience of serious people by presenting observations and conclusions in a manner that is as thorough, reasonable and well argued as possible. To be sensitive by any other criterion would require me to dull the substance of my observations and conclusions.

In a one-to-one relationship with a person, I could custom-tailor the presentation of these observations and conclusions in bite size chunks to fit the precise ability of the other person to comprehend along their journey of discipleship. In this writing, I am laying out an argument all at once in a more thoroughly realized form. The very length and comprehensiveness of this essay compresses a large number of directly-expressed observations and conclusions into one place. This is bound to be overwhelming to some people, and the presentation of the difficult material in this essay will undoubtedly outpace some people's ability to peaceably absorb it.

I am also convinced that the current premium on sensitivity owes itself to street postmodernism more than to the type of sensitivity that Jesus presents in his ministry of the Gospel to the people he encountered. As I discussed earlier, as people have brought street postmodernism into the church, they have brought in an idea of sensitivity that is organized around prohibiting the verbal acknowledgement of certain difficult truths in public space. This has had a chilling effect on frank discussion on this very topic of modesty and has led to the phenomenon of immodesty in the church operating unchecked, like an "elephant in the room".

What about men who dress to seduce women?

Wearing tight and/or revealing clothing that is not necessary for the task has a sexual edge no matter who is wearing it. As such, it is immodest for men to wear tight, revealing clothing that is not necessary for the task, especially in places of serious endeavor.

Here, though, it is important to assert the generality in the face of exceptions. As a generality, exposed skin and tight clothing is a woman's behavior issue (and a gay man's issue, but that's for another day). Here, the gender differences assert themselves in that tight, revealing clothing on women appeals to men far more than vice versa. Most women have other things beyond mere physicality that strike them as sexually appealing in

men. The sex appeal, if any, that men's clothing has for women usually stems from it being a symbolic display of a man's power and status.

In regard to this, in 2 Timothy 2:8, Paul directly confronts wearing clothing in worship that is flashy and ostentatious as a sign of one's status and power. Though he was referring specifically to a woman's behavior issue in that passage, this principle of being modest about temporal wealth and power in worship applies equally to men and women. Beyond the boundaries of worship, Scripture is silent on wearing clothing that is a display of wealth and power that is not also teasing or revealing parts of intimate body parts. There may be times and places where this type of clothing is appropriate for a task. Beyond that, it is probably an indication of other motives.

“But it's my body”

Others have a claim to the public space that your body is in and to the social-sexual environment that your body contributes to.

“What can you do about it all anyway?”

Of course this is not a substantive objection of what I have outlined in this writing, but it is nevertheless frequently offered as a rhetorical question to put a damper on this topic of modesty and decency. The rhetorical question, “What can you do?” implies the answer, “Nothing”. As such it is a statement of one who has acquiesced to the diffuse regime of ubiquitous exposed intimate body parts and has been intimidated out of having any will to try to confront it.

“But modest clothing is getting hard to find”

Dressing modestly, as modesty is defined in this writing, often requires extra effort because the fashion industry often does not make it easy, especially in L.A. The fashion industry is continually on the cutting edge of servicing the collective id and advancing the collective id. In this context, while the fashion industry claims to be the champion of free expression, the fashion industry is beholden to its need to stay in business in a street postmodernist society and does not offer very much real-world freedom to those who question street postmodernism. It is important for Christians and for those who care about modesty to assert their values in the face of the real-world

regime that is created when the fashion industry operates as a “super-peer”¹⁵ to women. Fashion – understood as both the industry and the collective of day-to-day women who acquiesce to the industry’s street postmodernist values – operates as a coercive environment that shapes women’s values and by shaping the very values that women express through their clothing. To the extent that finding modest clothing is hard to find, it is in the name of having true freedom and awareness that this “diffuse regime” needs to be confronted as women go out of their way to find appropriately modest clothing.

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¹⁵ “Superpeer” is a term that was first coined in “Sexy Media Matter: Exposure to Sexual Content in Music, Movies, Television, and Magazines Predicts Black and White Adolescents’ Sexual Behavior” by Jane D. Brown et. al., *Pediatrics* (4 April 2006) and was featured in Editors et al. “The (Sexual) Revolution will be televised.” *Atlantic Monthly* (September 2006). p. 48.

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