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Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Issues, and Worldview

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Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) issues are one of the most important and contentious social issues in the world today. Beginning in the 1970s, gay activists in the United States have fought against rigid cultural norms and limitations to promote tolerance and acceptance of non-traditional sexual lifestyles and identities. Their ultimate victory was in the landmark Obergefell v. Hodges Supreme Court case in 2015, which guaranteed the constitutional right for same-sex couples to be married in the United States of America.

For most of western history, it has been assumed that there are two genders – men and women – and that the only natural sexual orientation is to be heterosexual, so sexual relations were only socially acceptable between a man and a woman. Anyone who's lifestyle didn't conform to those standards was viewed as dysfunctional. These values were informed primarily by Christianity and the Judeo-Christian worldview that was prevalent in the western world. The rise of the LGBT movement coincided with and contributed to many changes in American culture, and was bolstered by the prevalence of new worldviews, notably materialist worldviews like secular humanism and Marxism, as well as postmodernism. The turbulence of today's America can be traced to the conflict between these different worldviews and the Judeo-Christian worldview. SOGI issues are one of the most important frontiers of this conflict of worldviews.

Different Worldviews

One reason that SOGI issues are so contentious is that they deal with an essential aspect through which people understand and identify themselves, and are thus very personal. Dialogue and debate about SOGI can be taken as personal attacks and intentional efforts to delegitimize LGBT people's experiences and identity. Any conversation on this topic must be approached with sensitivity and compassion. Worldview can be a powerful lens through which to approach this topic because it encourages us to step back from our deeply held convictions and to examine the assumptions that inform those views. Examining worldview invites healthy reflection and discourse, and hopefully avoids differences of opinions being taken as personal attacks.

The LGBT and Judeo-Christian worldviews are based on assumptions and moral values that differ greatly from each other. The Judeo-Christian worldview believes that there is a God with a divine will and purpose for humanity. That purpose can be understood through knowledge of scripture and through understanding natural law, which is the observable laws of the natural (created) world. Both of these point towards heterosexuality: The Bible teaches that God created humanity as male and female in God's own image, and reproduction of the human race only occurs through the union of man and woman. Virtue is attributed to that which is within God's divine purpose; therefore, marriage between man and woman is affirmed, and any other expression of sexual orientation or identity – including adultery, homosexuality, and transgenderism – is viewed as sinful and contrary to God's purpose.

The LGBT worldview is based upon a materialist and morally relative perspective. It is influenced by postmodern thinkers like Derrida and Foucault towards an orientation that casts serious doubts on claims to absolute truth. Rather, it affirms every person's unique experience and right to define truth according to their personal experience. Each individual is the expert of their own experience and should have the freedom to live their life according to their judgments of truth, as long as it doesn't harm others. This includes the right to live as a non-traditional sexual or gender identity. Purpose is not inherent in existence, but each person can define their own purpose for themselves. It views power as being exercised through the domination of language and cultural discourse. Thus, it sees Judeo-Christianity as having maintained a cultural hegemony that reinforces heterosexism, because Judeo-Christianity has set the cultural framework through which discourse and judgments about sex and gender have been made.

Most people of both Judeo-Christian and LGBT worldviews would agree that there are certain undeniable, scientific facts. There is a material reality which can be observed and measured, and about which we can make reasonable assumptions, truth claims, and generalizations. For example, we can say that human beings have two eyes, one nose, and one mouth, even though there are some people who don't necessarily have all of those features. We can also say that new human beings come into existence through the fertilization of an egg cell by a sperm cell. Scientific facts are value-free. They don't contain any moral or ethical judgments within themselves, but merely report about what can be observed through the scientific method.

Worldviews are the lenses through which we make judgments about the scientific facts presented to us. A person's worldview might say that life is meant to be lived joyously by experiencing as much as we can through our five senses. When presented with the scientific reality of a person who is blind, they might see his situation as suboptimal because he cannot experience all that the world has to offer visually, and might think it valuable to conduct scientific research to heal and/or prevent blindness in humans. Another person might have a worldview that uplifts the worth of every person and accepts differences without seeing things as better than or less than. They might emphasize acceptance of people and making society more welcoming of blind people without seeing the need to cure blindness. A third person might have a worldview that sees individuals pitted against each other for survival and might view blind people as weak and as targets to be taken advantage of. All three of them are presented with the same scientific reality, but are led to very different conclusions and actions by their worldview.

The scientific fact related to SOGI issues is that while the majority of human beings fit comfortably within the traditional definitions of heterosexual man and woman, there are people who do not. In the case of gay, lesbian, and bisexual people, they experience sexual attraction to people of the same sex. These are differences of sexual orientation that fall out of the heterosexual norm. Most other identities (the "TQ+" of LGBTQ+) represent variations of gender identity, where people experience their gender identity to be different than the sex that they were assigned at birth. Transgender and transsexual people experience their gender or sex as different than the sex designated by the doctor at their birth. For example, a trans man would have been born with anatomical features of a woman, but at some point in her life felt that she is actually a man. He may now use masculine instead of feminine pronouns, and he may undergo sexual reassignment therapy to change his body to present as a male. Intersex people also fit into those that deal with gender identity issues. Some intersex people were born with ambiguous genitalia that look like something in between male and female genitalia, while others have a different abnormality that produces an ambiguous gender, like a chromosomal or hormonal variation.

It is a scientific reality that there are people who experience the SOGI variations described above, and while they may be a small percentage of the overall US population, they number in the millions. It is a worthwhile endeavor to continue to seek scientific understanding of the cause and nature of these SOGI variations. Because this topic is very politically charged, research may become agenda-driven instead of being impartial and open to unexpected conclusions. As much as possible, such inquiry should be made from a value-neutral perspective. Once the scientific facts are clarified, they are interpreted according to one's worldview.

Different Responses Based on Worldview

The Christian world and the LGBT world have had very different responses to these SOGI variations. The response of the Judeo-Christian world has often been to reject and persecute LGBT people. Because marriage and sexuality has always been seen as rightfully between a man and a woman, anyone who lived a lifestyle contrary to that was persecuted and judged. Homosexuals had to gather in communities that were secretive and always faced the threat of violence. It was frustration towards this violence that caused the Stonewall Riots in Greenwich Village which sparked the gay rights movement of the 20th century. The Christian response towards the challenges and confusion experienced by LGBT people has been severely inadequate and too often has lacked a demonstration of true brotherly, Christian love.

However, there has been a second narrative that has been growing increasingly,^[1] which emphasizes having greater empathy and understanding for the situation of LGBT people. They stress the importance of demonstrating compassion for those not living a heterosexual lifestyle. Many denominations (i.e., the United Methodist Church) are facing crises about how to reconcile opposing views about LGBT people, where some say that those lifestyles shouldn't be condoned by the church and some say that they should be accepted and embraced by the church. Some advocate for the acceptance of LGBT priests, saying that there is much that Christianity can learn from those who practice a queer lifestyle.^[2] This response has a different risk than the first: the risk of compromising the most basic tenets of the Judeo-Christian worldview. Christianity believes in a divine Creator who made humankind according to a divine plan, which is revealed specially through scripture. Faith in God and in the Word of God as revealed in the Bible is fundamental to the Christian faith. The Bible has passages that explicitly denounce the practice of homosexuality. Thus, it seems that the answer to the problem of Christian persecution of LGBT people isn't acceptance and endorsement of LGBT lifestyles.

There are certain assumptions about sexual orientation and gender identity that the LGBT worldview makes in order to support the opinion that variations of SOGIs are equally valid and legitimate lifestyles. One assumption is the belief that the existence of homosexual thoughts and desires, or of gender dysphoric thoughts or feelings, is proof that differences of sexual orientation and gender identity are inherent markers of a person's identity equivalent to race and other markers of identity. There are many different psychological traits experienced by millions of people but which are outside the norm, many of which can be linked even more strongly to genetic and inherited factors than SOGI variations. Yet, we don't claim that those traits signify a person's fundamental identity.

For example, there is a strong genetic link to depression and addiction. Yet, no one would claim either of those two traits as a person's fundamental identity even though they were born that way. Instead, we advocate for treatment and support so that a person can counter their inherited tendencies.^[3] And many people are able to overcome depression and addiction, despite having a genetic predisposition towards them. One reason for this is that depression and addiction detract from a person's ability to function optimally. A rough comparison can be made between this and SOGI variations.

Evidence of a genetic link does not logically signify a marker of one's identity. If that were the case, even in terms of sexual orientation, then we would be left to conclude that pedophilia is an equivalent identity marker

as homosexuality, and that we should accept those who feel sexual attraction towards children as they are, without helping them to overcome those feelings of attraction.

Another assumption of the LGBT worldview is that it is impossible to change a person's sexual orientation or gender identity if they are any of the LGBTQ+ identities. There has been a crusade to ban any forms of therapy, called conversion therapy, that would help a person to get rid of homosexual attractions and live an exclusively heterosexual lifestyle. It is true that there have been great abuses of individuals through types of conversion therapy, whether through electric shock therapy, aversion therapy in which homoerotic imagery is paired with repulsive sensations, or abusive counselors who denigrate the value of their client because of their homosexual feelings or actions. We need to take a stand against abusive forms of therapy and counselors.

However, the fact that certain forms of conversion therapy are unethical doesn't mean that the theory behind conversion therapy itself is unethical. In fact, there is evidence that properly conducted conversion therapy (sometimes called reparative therapy) which is grounded in sound psychological theory, can be beneficial to people who desire to eradicate homosexual desires and live as an exclusively heterosexual individual.^[4] The existence of such evidence should be reason enough to at least advocate further research and exploration of the possible benefits and risks of such therapy, rather than shutting it down because of individual cases of unethical treatment. But instead of providing clients various options of therapy to choose from that may match their values, they are pushed to accept gay-affirming therapy as the only option.

Also, a person may experience homosexual desires for a number of years of their lives, and then it may go away later in their life. But at the time in their life when they experienced those desires, they would have been told that they are gay, and that it can't be changed. But the reality is that it wasn't a fundamental part of their identity. Research is needed to understand why people experience SOGI variations and why they sometimes revert back to a heterosexual orientation and/or a cisgender identity.

Another assumption of the LGBT worldview is that it is possible and fairly easy to tell with absolute certainty when a person has a variant SOGI. Gay affirming counselors and counseling programs teach people that having any homosexual feelings is evidence of being gay, and then guide those people to accept a gay identity, claiming that if they're not comfortable with that, it is because systemic and internalized homophobia and heterosexism has trained them to revile homosexuality. The reality is that it is not easy to define a person's sexual orientation.^[5]

The first effort to do was the Kinsey scale, whereby a person would be rated on a scale of 0 to 6, 0 meaning exclusively heterosexual and 6 meaning exclusively homosexual. But even with the scale, it's not clear at which number a person is considered not heterosexual, but having a homosexual or bisexual identity. Is it at 1, when they have incidental homosexual tendencies? At 3, when they have equal homosexual and heterosexual tendencies? Homosexual tendencies can also be measured in very different ways. It could be measured as homosexual thoughts, feelings, fantasies, or actions.

Understanding a person's sexual orientation or gender identity relies on their own self-report. Unlike other identity markers like race or biological sex, a person's sexual orientation or gender identity may not be easy to discern upon observation. Also, as mentioned above, SOGI can change over time. It is even more difficult to define a person by any characteristic if it changes over time.

The category of SOGI persons that might be observable is intersex, where a person is born with ambiguous genitalia or has a kind of abnormality, like chromosomal or hormonal, that causes them to have traits that don't match expectations of the gender binary. However, the existence of intersex people doesn't mean that the entire system of defining sex and gender as a binary between male and female should be thrown out. There are people born with other physical abnormalities. For example, a person could be born with six fingers. They could live their whole lives with six fingers and function normally and in complete health. However, because the vast majority of people have five fingers, our society is designed for five-fingered people. It would be hard for a six-fingered person to find a glove that fits their hand.

Having an extra finger is not a moral failing, but is a biological condition that they were born with. But still, one might say that it's best to find a way for people to be born with five fingers instead of six, and/or to find a way to harmlessly remove the extra finger. The same might be said about intersex people. Being intersex isn't a moral failing. But it could be reasonably said that it is more optimal for people to be born and live with a clear gender and sex. It is true that great harm has been done to intersex people in the past, whether due to discrimination or harmful surgical procedures meant to remove ambiguity about a person's sex. But just as was mentioned before, the existence of unethical practices doesn't mean the purpose that was meant to be accomplished through that practice is also unethical.

One of the challenges of both the Judeo-Christian and LGBT world-views is that they lack clarity about the purpose for the gender binary between male and female. The Judeo-Christian perspective acknowledges that it was within God's design for humankind to be man and woman, that this is the way that we can reflect God's image. It emphasizes the idea that "form follows function,"^[6] meaning that the form of male and female is necessary for the function of reproduction. It seems to imply that deviation from that design is due to the individual's moral failure. Meanwhile, the LGBT worldview doesn't believe that there is any purpose to the gender binary, even for reproductive purposes. They propose various, highly intellectual theories to demonstrate that gender is not inherent but is socially instructed.^[7] But even feminist theorists criticize those theories of being inadequate to avoid ultimately relying on the division between reproductive roles of the genders.^[8]

The LGBT worldview can be interpreted as a reaction to the injustice that people with SOGI variations have experienced historically. It doesn't strive to find a unifying understanding of truth and reality, but pokes holes in the dominant Judeo-Christian discourse, while trying to affirm the validity of the individual experiences of LGBT people. This comes at the cost of maintaining a rational, coherent, scientific view of reality, as it is not

scientific to adjust definitions and procedures that apply to the vast majority of people in order to compensate for outliers at the cost of the majority.

Unification Worldview Towards SOGI Variation

The Unification Worldview provides a clear and more detailed explanation than Christianity for the purpose of gender being binary. First of all, it offers more insights into the scripture that says that man was created male and female in God's image. It explains that the metaphysics of the universe reflect God's nature of harmonious interaction between the complementary parts of yang and yin (i.e. masculinity and femininity). Not only is this true in the animal kingdom, but even the molecular harmony between cation and anion and the atomic harmony between proton and electron reflect this dynamic. The conjugal union between man and woman is the pinnacle of this dynamic in the created world.

Secondly, the Unification Worldview highlights the importance of lineage. It explains that the most important thing in life is not money, knowledge, or power, nor is it even to have love or life. The most important thing is lineage. Lineage is the process by which love is multiplied and passed down through the generations. Offspring created through intercourse is the very way by which God is able to multiply His children and Himself. This directly counters the LGBT emphasis that places greatest value on personal satisfaction. According to the Unification Worldview, joy and purpose are greatest not when we live for our own self-centered pleasure, but when we live for a greater purpose like for our spouse, children, and descendants.

Thirdly, the Unification Worldview provides an explanation for the societal, systemic, inherited nature of sin and suffering. The Christian worldview tends to place the fault on individuals who don't live as monogamous, heterosexual couples for choosing to live sexually deviant lives. It denies the systemic prejudice experienced by those who struggle to live that lifestyle, and it negates the personal experience of individuals who truly feel that they are not heterosexual and/or cisgender. The Unification Worldview explains that our current reality does not reflect the original ideal that God intended for His creation, but rather that sin has corrupted human nature and the natural world. Our personal struggles are not only our shortcomings, but are results of the shortcomings that we have inherited from our ancestors and from the original human ancestors.

Not only that, but the Unification Worldview believes in a spiritual world that can influence the material world. Thus, the spirits of people who have lived in the generations before may be acting out their unresolved issues by trying to influence us living in the physical world currently. Because science has struggled to produce an adequate explanation for the cause of SOGI issues, many Unificationists believe that it could be explained at least in part as the result of the influence of the spirit world. This perspective shifts the blame away from the moral failings of individual people, yet upholds their ability to exercise their free will in their situation.

No matter what perspective or worldview that a person has, when it comes to the issues that human beings face it is important to maintain an attitude of compassion and love. Worldviews have an important role in guiding how we as a society view and deal with issues that we face as a whole; however, too often we lose touch with human compassion in the attempt to convince others of our worldview. The greatest struggles that LGBT people have faced is the treatment that they have experienced from other people. In order to provide them with the best care, we must start by upholding the value and dignity of every human life, regardless of how a person may choose to live their lives. We must start from finding the place in our worldview that acknowledges that basic human value.

Notes

[1] Joseph Yi, Gwoon Jung, and Joe Phillips. "Evangelical Christian Discourse in South Korea on the LGBT: The Politics of Cross-Border Learning." *Society* 54, no. 1 (March 2017): 32.

[2] Edman, Elizabeth M. *Queer Virtue: What LGBTQ People Know about Life and Love and How It Can Revitalize Christianity*. Boston: Beacon, 2017.

[3] Ward, Thomas. "Unification Worldview: Formulating a Response to LGBTQ." Lecture presented for the Unification Worldview class at the Unification Theological Seminary, New York, NY, January 2020a.

[4] Throckmorton, Warren. "Efforts to Modify Sexual Orientation: A Review of Outcome Literature and Ethical Issues." *Journal of Mental Health Counseling* 20, no. 4 (October 1998): 283.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Nicoll, Regis. "Don't Make a Right." *Salvo Magazine*, 2014. salvomag.com/article/salvo28/dont-make-a-right.

[7] Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 2015.

[8] Hawkesworth, Mary. "Confounding Gender." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 22, no. 3 (1997): 649–85.