



Trend Alert!

THE SEX-POSITIVE MOVEMENT

By Walt Mueller

Almost thirty years have passed since an interviewer asked Madonna if she saw herself as “a kind of a sexual missionary.” This was her response: “I suppose that’s one way to look at it. . . Sex is the metaphor that I use, but for me really, it’s about love. It’s about tolerance, acceptance, and saying, ‘Look, everybody has different needs and wants and preferences and desires and fantasies.’”

If you spent any time at all listening to Madonna in order to discern her worldview, it was abundantly clear that she was living, singing, and promoting what philosopher Charles Taylor has called *expressive individualism*. Increasingly an element of the dominant worldview in our culture, expressive individualism holds “authenticity” as a high value. In other words, it is believed that to be truly happy and free, one must be authentic to one’s personal wishes, feelings, and desires. Taylor says it is the belief that “each one of us have his/her own way of realizing our humanity, and that it is important to find and live out one’s own, as against surrendering to conformity with a model imposed on us from outside, by society, or the previous generation, or religious or political authority.”¹

Our kids may have no conscious clue about their expressive individualism, but they are being encouraged to live it out in every area of their lives. We hear it in phrases like “You be you”, “Just follow your heart!”, “Be true to who you are”, and “Find yourself.” Perhaps the most obvious place where we encounter these beliefs and behaviors in today’s world is in the realm of sex, marriage, and gender.

The worldview Madonna embraced and propagated through her music and presence are no longer fringe notions held by a small-yet-vocal minority. Instead, this worldview which is built on the foundation blocks of relativism and self-rule is not only majority opinion, but the prevailing set of assumed cultural beliefs that are guiding the behaviors of young and old alike.

Media Influence

Still not convinced? Just look around at film, music, books, television, and the content that’s so prevalent online. One recent and sobering example is pop star Cardi B’s hit song, “WAP”, which was released just a little over a month ago on August 7, 2020.



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It starts with the song's title, which is an acronym for a vile term for female genitalia that I can't even bring myself to spell out here. The song's title relates clearly to the lyrical and visual themes of the song. The video celebrates and promotes a version of female sexuality that is raw, expressive, table-turning dominant, and as one *affirming* critic has said, "Class-A filth, a torrent of horny one-liners. . ."ⁱⁱⁱ It's a sign of the times that music critics are loving it, and the music-consuming population loves it as well. Music listeners haven't flinched. Instead, they've applauded. "WAP" has topped the global Spotify chart, debuted at #1 on The Apple Music songs chart (highest debut ever by a female artist), and debuted at #1 on the *Billboard* Hot 100 chart. The video garnered well over 26 million views during its first 24-hours.

You might ask, why has there been little or no mainstream pushback on a song that *New York Times'* music critic Ben Sisario says is "perhaps the raunchiest No. 1 single in history."ⁱⁱⁱ? It's because the mainstream is celebrating a message that's already deeply entrenched in our culture's collective beliefs and behaviors. Cardi B is not offering up ideas about sex and sexuality that are something new. Rather, she's telling us who we already are. . . and that fact means we need to wake up and respond.

Sex-Positive Movement

What Cardi B and the culture-at-large is now propagating are the core beliefs of what is known as the sex-positive movement, which has succeeded over the course of its relatively young and loosely-organized life to bring about a change in how individuals think about and practice sex and gender. In a recent article in *Oprah* magazine, the sex-positive movement is said to start "with tossing out the perceptions of what is and is not sexually normal, and begins with a non-judgmental receptivity of the sexual styles and interpretations (or lack thereof) that feel genuine to each individual."^{iv} Sex is seen as a part of the human experience that should be void

of any externally-imposed borders or boundaries. Each person is given free reign to exercise personal sovereignty based on their own feelings, inclinations, and desires. The sex-positive movement holds personal pleasure and the right to that pleasure in the highest value. Morals and ethics are absent with the exception of "mutual consent." All choices are a matter of individual personal preference.

The non-profit organization Sex Positive World has posted a "Guiding Principles" document^v which states the sex-positive vision as creating "a world where all expressions of sexuality are respected and protected, and consensual sexuality and pleasure are seen as natural, healthy, and connecting." In an effort to neither deny or repress sexual desire, the sex-positive movement allows and encourages anything and everything as long as it is consensual, including but not limited to open sex in and outside of marriage, erotic fantasies, pornography use, polyamory, non-binary-gender expression, BDSM^{vi}, swinging, and any other personal sexual/gender expression/preference that is free to change at anytime depending on one's personal whims and wishes.

Psychologist David Yarian, a proponent of the sex-positive movement, says, "Fundamentally, I think sex positivity is about looking at sex through the lens of natural playfulness and curiosity that has no strict agenda, judgment, or pressure."^{vii} Another proponent, sex therapist Vanessa Marin, says, "Being sex-positive means you get to declare, 'This is my body. This is my life. These are my desires.'"

With sex-positivity being taught both implicitly and explicitly as foundational in today's school-based comprehensive sex education, the beliefs our kids hold are being shaped in ways that will yield behavioral evidence, now and for the rest of their lives, that they personally choose sex-positive. And with pop culture reinforcing the sex-positive message, along with

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elevating the self to a position of final authority on all matters of life, the message is convincing and clear.

Sadly, the sex-positive movement sees traditional biblical sexuality as sex-negative. The movement holds that "sex-negativity has been a yoke upon civilization for nearly ten thousand years, hoisted upon us by dominator/patriarchal culture as a system of control and exploitation."^{viii} But nothing could be further from the truth. The Christian knows that true human freedom and flourishing come when we live into and under the authority of God, choosing to see sex and gender as good gifts from a God who offers a resounding and celebratory "YES!" to sex and gender as He established them at creation. The reality is that God is completely "sex-positive"!

Biblical Sexuality

So, what does the Bible teach about sexuality, sex, gender, and marriage? Because of all the cultural confusion regarding these realities, we have endeavored to summarize what it means to live out sex and gender within God's life-giving borders and boundaries. We believe these have been given to humankind by God as an expression of His love for creation in order to protect us from harm and to provide for our well-being.

As you ponder God's design for sex and gender, never forget this truth: *whoever speaks first to our kids about sex and gender will set the bar for truth and "own" the conversation.* And with the culture speaking 24/7 to even the youngest of our kids, our responsibility to know and speak the truth is clear. What should our

guiding principles be? What can we teach so that we can own and shape the sex and gender conversation with the kids we know and love with a balance of truth and grace?

We must be committed to following the way and will of God as contained in the Bible, which is the Word of God revealed and written as God's authoritative rule for all matters of faith and practice. Our calling is to do ministry, to parent, and to live lives that are firmly rooted in biblical truth.

We must recognize that God's order and design for human sexuality, gender, and marriage is clearly stated in the Creation narrative (Genesis 1 and 2), reflected in the teachings of Jesus Christ himself, and is maintained consistently throughout Scripture. Christian identity is rooted in Jesus Christ and not in one's sexuality.

God, in His goodness and grace, creates human beings in His image, either male or female, which are distinct, complementary genders. Therefore, rejection of one's biological sex is a rejection of the image of God within that person, which undermines one's humanity and diminishes one's flourishing.

We must understand that God has established marriage to be a covenantal, lifelong, monogamous, one flesh, heterosexual union between one man and one woman. And, that God has given humanity the good and beautiful gift of sex to be indulged and experienced only within the context of marriage between one man and one woman, for the purposes of consummating the marital relationship, fostering

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mutual intimacy, enabling mutual pleasure, and facilitating procreation.

We must never fail to recognize that due to sin and brokenness in the world, all humanity struggles personally with sexual brokenness and is tempted to wander from God's will and way sexually. . . every single one of us. With Scripture, we must believe that any form of sexual immorality (including but not limited to adultery, fornication, LGBTQ+ behavior, bestiality, incest, sexual abuse, sexual harassment, sexting, sex trafficking, objectification, and the use of pornography) is sinful and offensive to God, and harmful to one's self and others.

We must recognize that our experience of sex and gender is not always that which God the Creator originally designed. All humans live with broken and misplaced desires as they relate to sex and gender. Yet, we are to endeavor to glorify God and experience the fullness of our humanity by living out biblical faithfulness in all areas of life, including sex and gender.

And, we must recognize that God in His grace offers redemption and restoration to all those who confess and turn from their sexual sin, seeking His mercy and forgiveness through Jesus Christ. We recognize that living the life of Christian discipleship in this still-sin-marred now-but-not-yet-fully-realized Kingdom of God is always difficult, requires sacrifice, and involves some level of continued struggle for all, as all disciples expectantly await that final full rescue and restoration from whatever unique forms of sexual brokenness they experience.

Don't believe the sex-positive movement hype. It is God, the Creator of sex, who is truly sex-positive! And when we live into God's design, we experience the freedom and flourishing for which we were made. As Os Guinness has said, "Freedom is not the permission to do what we like but the power to do what we should. . . The idea that freedom means we can do what we like, so long as we do not hurt anyone else, is a dangerous modern lie."^{ix}

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ⁱ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, p. 475.

ⁱⁱ <https://www.vulture.com/2020/08/cardi-b-megan-thee-stallion-wap-song-review.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://flipboard.com/topic/taylorswift/cardi-b-and-megan-thee-stallion-s-raunchy-wap-rockets-to-no-1/a-QITSREKMSHycebMhMFvWPg%3Aa%3A3195393-0a4f1162b1%62Fnytimes.com>

^{iv} <https://www.oprahmag.com/life/relationships-love/a30028506/sex-positive-meaning/>

^v <https://www.sexpositiveworld.com/our-guiding-principles>

^{vi} Bondage, discipline, dominance, submission, sadomasochism, etc.

^{vii} <https://www.oprahmag.com/life/relationships-love/a30028506/sex-positive-meaning/>

^{viii} <https://www.sexpositiveworld.com/our-guiding-principles>

^{ix} Os Guinness, *A Free People's Suicide*, p. 152-3.



**SEXUAL INTEGRITY
INITIATIVE**
A resource of CPYU and Project Six19

To learn more about biblical sexuality and to access resources for talking about sex and gender with your kids, visit CPYU's Sexual Integrity Initiative at sexualintegrityinitiative.com.



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For more information on today's youth culture, visit the website of the Center for Parent/Youth Understanding at www.cpyu.org.

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