

Introduction

IN THIS BOOK WE focus on one of Sigmund Freud's ideas—the idea of *sublimation*. We believe that this was one of his most important ideas, but it is rarely referred to in the books on psychoanalysis written for seminary students, pastors, pastoral counselors, or chaplains. As we will see in chapter 1, it was an idea that caught the attention of members of the audience who came to hear Freud lecture at Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts, in 1909. In fact, some of them embraced psychoanalytic ways of thinking largely because of this idea.

In his own writings, Freud gave a great deal of attention to the role that sublimation plays in the work of artists.¹ Our emphasis here is on the role of sublimation in the lives of men, especially in their relationships with other men, but also with women. This means, as the subtitle indicates, that this book is a study of masculinity—specifically, a study of multiple masculinities. Masculinity studies, as a cognate of women's studies, can be seen as a subfield of gender studies. Our use of the term “multiple masculinities” implies that there is no single masculinity that is normative, and that conceptions of masculinity are not uniform across time periods or cultures, or even within a given society.² In this book, we assume such a point-of-view because it is descriptively accurate and we support its moral implications. However, we need to point out that this

1. For example, Freud, *Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood*; and Freud, “Moses of Michelangelo.”

2. See Connell, *Masculinities*.

book is not an exhaustive or representative study of all the possible varieties of masculinities, as if such a task could be accomplished in a single book. We do not explore, for example, race, ethnicity, or economic class in relation to masculinity. The material included in this book has been influenced by two factors: (1) the debates surrounding homosexuality in Christian churches over the past several decades (debates concerning the morality of homosexual acts, for example, and debates regarding homosexuality and interpreting the Bible); and (2) issues relating to gender, especially the fact that women live longer than men do, and the religious significance of this fact. We believe that this gender difference has not received the attention it deserves in gender studies and in religious studies.

Over the past decade, we have coauthored three books and twelve articles, and it has seemed almost effortless.³ We like to tell ourselves that this is because we, in our writing together, regress to what Erik H. Erikson has called “the play age,” or roughly the age of three to five years old.⁴ When one observes the play of children at this age, one notices that they typically engage in making things and performing scenes (i.e., playacting), and sometimes they work alone and other times they work together. When they do not feel as though they are under the watchful and critical eye of the teacher or another classmate, there is an air of contentment among them, and a quiet sense of intimacy pervades the classroom. This is the feeling that we have experienced in our writing together.

We noted above that religious sublimation is the psychoanalytic concept that has had a major part to play in our exploration of both the relationship between religion and sexuality and the relationship between religion and gender. Sublimation is a psychoanalytic term, and, in this regard, we know that psychoanalysis, the dream child of Freud, raises various red flags for potential readers, especially readers who have been informed that Freud was hostile toward religion. We believe, however, that this book presents a different Freud, and that it does so precisely because it focuses on his concept of sublimation. This concept will be explained and illustrated in much greater detail in the following chapters, but, in essence, it refers to the process of sexual desires considered unacceptable or unworthy becoming redirected toward what are considered acceptable and worthy interests and aspirations.⁵

3. The previous books are Capps and Carlin, *Living in Limbo*; and Carlin and Capps, *100 Years of Happiness*.

4. Erikson, *Toys and Reasons*, 98–103.

5. A significant text in this regard is Gay, *Freud on Sublimation*.

Chapter 1 provides an introduction to the concept of sublimation. It focuses on Freud's own writings on sublimation and places particular emphasis on what he said about sublimation in his lectures at Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts, and on his subsequent correspondence with James Jackson Putnam, a Boston neurologist and therapist who was deeply influenced, both professionally and personally, by Freud's idea of sublimation. We suggest in this chapter that the friendship that developed between the two men was itself an illustration of the gift of sublimation.

Chapter 2 makes use of recent scholarship that has focused on the homosexual tendencies of King James, who commissioned the translation of the King James Bible. We suggest that the related pacifist tendencies of King James provided a scholarly model for male cooperation that was inherently superior to the martial model of male enterprise advocated by his opponents. Thus, we applaud King James for his religious sublimation of male aggression.

Chapter 3 focuses on sublimation and gender by means of the biblical story of Methuselah. On the basis of empirical evidence that women live longer than men because they bear children and engage in maternal activities toward their offspring, we argue that the exaggerated ages of men in the Bible are a case of male envy of women's longevity, and we propose that these feelings of envy may be sublimated through their own assumption of maternal roles toward infants and children. Thus, chapters 1, 2, and 3 make the case for a more *relational* understanding of masculinity than is typically the case in writings and pronouncements on men and manhood. It is noteworthy in this connection that the dictionary defines *masculine* as "having qualities regarded as characteristic of men and boys, such as strength, vigor, boldness, etc.; manly; virile."⁶

Chapters 4 and 5 focus on aspects of the sexual revolution of the 1960s and subsequent decades that have particular relevance to American religious culture, to which we and (we assume) the majority of our readers belong. Chapter 4 focuses on religious and philosophical expressions of the moral disapproval of masturbation, a disapproval that was supported in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by the medical community, which attributed many physical, emotional, and mental problems to masturbation. We suggest that the decline in moral disapproval of masturbation in the 1960s has been redirected toward homosexuality and, as

6. Agnes, *Webster's New World College Dictionary*, 883.

a result, homosexuality has been subjected to greater moral disapproval over the past several decades than in earlier decades.

This chapter sets the stage for chapter 5, which centers on the efforts of a church community to covert men with a homosexual orientation to a heterosexual orientation. We conclude that the sublimation of sexual desires that some of the men experienced as a result of these efforts is a case of *unexceptional* sublimation, which is to say that their adoption of a heterosexual masculinity—however significant it may have been for them personally—is not the major achievement that its promoters have made it out to be.

Chapter 6 proposes the way forward and takes into account the fact that the authors identify themselves as pastoral psychologists (more on this below). Thus, it playfully—and seriously—deals with contemporary discussions of religion, gender, and sexuality by suggesting that the God of the Bible is gender confused and has made some rather poor decisions in the midst of this confusion. If God were able to accept a wider range of masculinities and sexualities, he/she would be much better off, and so would the Christian men who relate to the Bible and its portrayal of the divine Being. We have every reason to believe that God has, in fact, accepted a wider range of masculinities and sexualities. As was said of the most godly man in human history, “he [has gone] ahead of [us] into Galilee” (Matt 28:7–10).⁷

As our title and subtitle indicate, this book is a psychoanalytic exploration because of its emphasis on sublimation. But the book also reflects the fact that we, as we noted, consider ourselves to be pastoral psychologists. We think of pastoral psychology as being similar to psychology of religion in that both typically ask the same questions and use similar methods of inquiry, but pastoral psychology implies an element of faith or belief and thus an affirmative though not uncritical stance toward religion. The qualifying word *pastoral* also implies that the ultimate objective of pastoral psychology is to be genuinely helpful to those who read and reflect on what it has to say. For example, in an article on male body image and intimacy, Nathan Carlin discusses the fact that friendship tends to be a part of homosexual identity in a way that is usually not the case for most heterosexual men.⁸ He cites Andrew Sullivan’s suggestion that heterosexual men’s fear of intimacy is intrinsically connected to

7. See Capps and Carlin, *Living in Limbo*, 40–42.

8. Carlin, “From *Grace Alone* to *Grace Alone*.”

a fear of homosexuality, and that this fear has “too often denied straight men the bonds they need to sustain themselves through life’s difficulties,” meaning that “when they socialize, they too often demand the chaperone of sports or work to avoid the appearance of being gay. Or they need to congregate in groups that tend to diminish the quiet intimacy that all of us need.”⁹ We would simply want to add that, in addition to the need for quiet intimacy, men—gay, straight, or otherwise—also have a need for thoughtful community, and both needs take us back to the play age and to the scene of small boys playing together in a nonthreatening environment. This was the spirit in which we wrote the chapters of this book; it also is the spirit in which we hope our readers will engage what we have written here.

SAMPLE

9. Sullivan, *Love Undetectable*, 234–35.