

Redeeming Paul? Disruptive Masculinity, Sexual Autonomy, and Sexual Freedom in 1 Corinthians 7

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¹SHORT BIO

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ABSTRACT

Sex and gender ethical norms, especially those found in Pauline texts, continue to inform sexual and reproductive choices of contemporary Christians because Christians understand Scripture to be regulative for their day-to-day living in the present-day society, despite the temporal and cultural separation of our world from the world of the New Testament. To avoid the impasse created by the temporal and cultural separation, people often resort to "but it was a different time and context" argument. However, what if Paul was actually being counter-cultural and counter-temporal, offering more radical perspectives than those that have been promoted as the norm through simple and face-value interpretations. This essay suggests precisely that – that a deeper investigation of the rhetorical performance of Paul's instructions to, and his relationship with the Corinthians, could produce transgressive and possibly transforming interpretations. What seems on the surface to be Paul's views on sexual autonomy (via singleness), sexual purity (via marriage), and gender hierarchy (through reinscribing masculine roles) can all actually be regarded as subverted in 1 Corinthians 7. Drawing on a sociohistorical gendered analytic to read these texts, I will demonstrate that Paul's views on sex reflect an implicit gendered argument that plays a role in constructing and representing (un)masculinity, sexual autonomy, and perhaps even sexual freedom. This reading certainly offers a departure from traditional Pauline readings and calls for a discernment regarding who the real Paul may have actually been – perhaps even calling "for the real Paul to 'please, stand up!'"

KEYWORDS

1 Corinthians 7; masculinity; sociohistorical interpretation (SRI); gender-critical; transgressive

Introduction¹

Scholars have demonstrated the importance of rhetorical performance to understand Paul's instructions to, and his relationship with the Corinthians. His rhetorical performance, however, is also a performance of gender,² and in this essay, I argue that it opens up the possibility for a transgressive re-imagining of a hegemonic masculinity. In 1 Corinthians

¹ This article was partially supported by the research thematic focus area, "Religion and Gender" within the Desmond Tutu SARChI Chair in Religion and Social Justice, under Grant Number 118854 from the National Research Foundation.

² Jennifer Larson ("Paul's masculinity," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 123, no.1 [2004]: 85-97) was among the first to venture into Pauline masculinity issues and poses the possibility that the construction of Paul's physique might have launched criticism on him. It could, however, also be precisely that this construction of Paul might have been at odds with the phallogocentrically engendered *habitus* of the Roman Empire.

7:1-5, Paul's views on sex reflect an implicit gendered argument that plays a role in constructing and representing (un)masculinity. In 1 Corinthians 7:7, Paul wants people to be like him, to imitate him, by not having a spouse. He describes his own version of virtuous masculinity as a gift from God. Then in 1 Corinthians 7:25-28, he emphasises the value of remaining single, both for those who have never been married (1 Cor 7:25-28) and for those who have been widowed (1 Cor 7:38-40). These texts, given the gendered logic of the ancient context that it stems from, would certainly have raised a few perplexed eyebrows. In fact, Paul's instruction to remain single in the light of these cultural standards does seem somewhat problematic and ambiguous by hegemonic ancient cues. Following a reading for gender approach, informed by a cultural intertextual optic, this essay offers a transgressive approach to a key Pauline text and opens up further possibilities to re-imagine more transforming constructions and representations of masculinity.

Text in Context

Before further analysis, it would be useful to first place this text within its broader context. Faced with a situation of factionalism within the Christian community at Corinth (1 Cor 1:11-13), Paul appeals for unity through concord among the Corinthian Christians. The language that Paul uses, not only in 1 Corinthians 1:10, but throughout 1 Corinthians 1:10-4:21, exhibits a familiar correlation with the well-known *topos* of political accord in antiquity.³ In 1 Corinthians 1:11, Paul mentions that he had received a report from Chloe's people about "contentions" (ἐριδεις) that had arisen in the community, leading to divisions within it. Apparently, Paul credited the problem of factionalism and the concomitant disputes over his own authority to various groups who were holding loyalty to external leaders such as himself, Apollos, and Peter.⁴

³ Laurence Welborn, "On the Discord in Corinth: 1 Corinthians 1-4 and Ancient Politics," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 106, no.1 (1987): 85-111; Margaret M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians* (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1993), 68-111; Holly E. Hearon ("1 and 2 Corinthians," in *The Queer Bible Commentary*, eds. Deryn Guest, Robert E. Goss, Mona West, and Thomas Bohache [London: SCM Press, 2006], 607), commenting on 1 Corinthians 1:10, notes that many members of the LGBTI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, intersexed) "communities will recognize this rhetorical strategy as a ploy to silence opposition by the suppression of differences for the sake of unity."

⁴ Cornelia C. Crocker, *Reading 1 Corinthians in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 26-7; Charles A. Wanamaker, "The Power of the Absent Father: A Socio-Rhetorical Analysis of 1 Corinthians 4:14-5:13," in *The New Testament Inter-*

Even a casual reading of the text reveals that Paul is dealing with a sequence of problems that are pragmatic symptoms of the factionalism and divisiveness within the community at Corinth, and thus the rhetorical move in the letter proceeds from a seemingly general appeal for unity and concord in 1 Corinthians 1:10-4:21, to an attempt to resolve specific instances that have caused conflict within the church. In fact, it turns out to be a strategic, persuasive move on the part of Paul, as 1 Corinthians 3:1-4:21 is primarily about Paul's position of pre-eminence in the community. The unifying factor for Paul, therefore, as he presents it, is his own authority as the founder of the community – a position that gives him a unique status with the Corinthians that cannot be usurped by other leaders and external figures.⁵

Wanamaker has demonstrated that the overall rhetographic image that was created by 1 Corinthians 7, concerns a dialogical communication process between Paul and the Corinthians around topics well known to both parties.⁶ His emphasis on his own self-authenticating opinions (1 Cor 7:6, 12, 17, 25, 40) indicates that the intercommunication is not between equals, but reflects a hierarchy of power and authority in which Paul's views should direct the actions of the community. In a similar vein, the gendered views that Paul expresses, come from a comparable ideological vantage point, in that Paul presents his views as authoritative for the community. Furthermore, his construction and representation of

preted: Essays in Honour of Bernard C. Lategan, eds. Cilliers Breytenbach, Johan C. Thom, and Jeremy Punt (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 341. Also see Antoinette C. Wire, *The Corinthian Women Prophets: A Reconstruction of Paul's Rhetoric* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 43; Hearon, "1 and 2 Corinthians," 608. Bruce J. Malina and John J. Pilch (*Social Science Commentary on the Letters of Paul* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006], 59) have demonstrated that there was an initial letter (cf. 1 Cor 5:9) to which the Corinthians reacted as reported by Timothy in the light of his visit there (1 Cor 4:17). That report demonstrated the seeming arrogance of some in the Corinthian Jesus community. Consequently, Chloe's people (perhaps slaves – 1 Cor 1:11) came to Paul with more news about the burgeoning reactions to the message he had communicated, and this information flow was rounded off by a letter, sent by some at Corinth (1 Cor 7:1). 1 Corinthians is Paul's reply to all the information he had received through the various channels (Malina and Pilch, *Social Science Commentary*, 59).

⁵ Wanamaker, "The Power of the Absent Father," 339-64.

⁶ Charles A. Wannamaker, "Connubial Sex and the Avoidance of πορνεία: Paul's Rhetorical Argument in 1 Corinthians 7:1-5," *Scriptura* 90 (2005): 849. According to Vernon K. Robbins (*The Invention of Christian Discourse*, Rhetoric of Religious Antiquity Series, Blandford Forum: Deo [2009], 6), rhetography refers to the visual imagery or a pictorial narrative and scene construction being contained in a rhetorical depiction.

gender in the text, constructed mainly in terms of the hegemonic gender normativities of the ancient Mediterranean, script the actions of the community and creates replicated gendered structurings in contemporary contexts.

Sexual Congress and the Construction and Representation of Masculinity in 1 Corinthians

In what follows in this section, I want to explore how Paul's views on marital sex in 1 Corinthians 7:1-5 reflect an implicit gendered argument that plays a role in constructing and representing masculinity in the discourse of this book. Wanamaker, in his investigation of 1 Corinthians 7:1-5, has demonstrated the complexity of the text's argumentative structure.⁷ In his discussion, he argues that the rule regarding marital coitus in this chapter is that the Corinthian auditors are first, not to deprive one another (1 Cor 7:5a). However, contrary to the rule, partners may deprive one another sexually if two conditions are met: 1) abstinence must be mutually agreed upon; and 2) it must be for a limited (though unspecified by Paul) period of time (1 Cor 7:5b). The rationale for this exception was to facilitate personal congress with God (1 Cor 7:5c). Implicit in this rationale is that this congress with God is facilitated in some way by sexual abstinence, either for reasons of purity or for reasons of religious devotion and commitment. However, once the period is completed, the marriage partners must "come together again in the marriage bed" (καὶ πάλιν ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ ἦτε). This phrase suggests that the partners will be physically separated from one another during the period of prayer, and this leads Paul to the rationale for their coming together again, namely in order to prevent the devil from tempting them during their period of agreed abstinence through their lack of sexual self-control (1 Cor 7:5d).⁸

In 1 Corinthians 7:7, Paul wants people to be like him, imitate him, with regard to not having a spouse. He describes his own version of maleness as a gift from God. Then in 1 Corinthians 7:25-28, he

⁷ Wanamaker, "Connubial Sex," 849. Also see Will Deming (*Paul on Marriage and Celibacy: The Hellenistic Background of 1 Corinthians 7* [Grand Rapids: William Eerdmans, 2004]) for a helpful review of scholarly discussions on 1 Corinthians 7. Deming (*Paul on Marriage*, 43-4) argues that Paul's assertions on marriage and celibacy in 1 Corinthians 7 are best comprehended within the frameworks of Stoic and Cynic discourses and the Stoic-Cynic debate about the advantages and disadvantages of marriage.

⁸ Wanamaker, "Connubial Sex."

emphasises the value of remaining single, both for those who have never been married (1 Cor 7:25-28) and for those who have been widowed (1 Cor 7:38-40). These texts, given the gender logic of the ancient Mediterranean world, would certainly have seemed out of place, even in transgression of some juridical laws. First, the egalitarian two-part rule inferred from Wanamaker's analysis of the text above, seems perplexing if one considers the normative Graeco-Roman gender system. As Vorster asserts,⁹ "[t]here is no way that we can speak of an equality of sexes in the first few centuries of early Christianity; to do that would be to deny the continued suffering of females and again render them powerless."¹⁰ According to this "hyperheteronormative" system,¹¹ sex was a mechanism that produced and maintained gender hierarchy and did not have much regard for the wishes of the penetrated. The active/male and passive/female antithesis is one that was common in the dominant gendered logic of the time.

Brooten has mentioned that "the Greek term for 'intercourse,' *chrēsis* [χρησις], literally means 'use.'"¹² In this regard the "Greek authors from the classical period through late antiquity use both the noun *chrēsis* [χρησις] and the verb *chraomai* [χράομαι] ('to use') in a sexual sense. A man 'uses' or 'makes use of' a woman or a boy."¹³ Moore mentions

⁹ Johannes N. Vorster, "The Blood of the Female Martyrs as the Sperm of the Early Church," *Religion and Theology* 10, no.1 (2003): 93-4.

¹⁰ For further discussion, see Stephen D. Moore and Janice C. Anderson, "Taking it like a man: Masculinity in 4 Maccabees," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 117, no.2 (1998): 249-73; Willi Braun, "Body, Character and the Problem of Femaleness in Early Christian Discourse," *Religion and Theology* 9, no.1-2 (2002): 108, 110, 112, 115, 116. Also see Vorster ("The Blood of the Female Martyrs," 66-94) and his articulation of early Christian martyr stories. In his analysis, a narrative that at first glance seems to empower women, serves in actuality only to reinscribe a masculine hegemony and subordinate women, thereby replicating and supplementing the primacy and agency of men (Vorster, "The Blood of the Female Martyrs," 69, 80, 81).

¹¹ Stephen D. Moore, *God's Beauty Parlor and Other Queer Spaces in and around the Bible* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 170-1. Moore (*God's Beauty Parlor*, 170) asserts that because Graeco-Roman discourses on sex comprise a "sex-gender system in which every sexual act must involve a masculine and a feminine partner – to the extent that when an anatomically female partner is lacking, an anatomically male partner must be conscripted to play the woman. Within the terms of this system, therefore, sex can only ever be heterosex." And due to this fact, Graeco-Roman discourses on sex thus enshrine "hyperheteronormativity."

¹² Bernadette J. Brooten, *Love Between Women: Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1996), 245.

¹³ Brooten, *Love Between Women*, 245.

further that a man uses women for “sexual pleasure, sexual release.¹⁴ However, he also uses them to display his social status [which was aimed at demonstrating] his ‘superiority’ in relation to their ‘inferiority.’”¹⁵

Sex in the Graeco-Roman society was hierarchical and polarising, and sexual acts were in most cases defined along the lines of the superiority of the penetrator to the penetrated.¹⁶ The sexual penetration of the body of one person by the body (and, specifically, by the phallus) of another, was not regarded as an egalitarian process of reciprocity, but as an act of power and domination that was performed by one superior person upon another inferior person.¹⁷ Sex, therefore, was hierarchical, polarising, and phallicentric.¹⁸ The insertive partner was construed as a sexual agent, whose phallic penetration of another person’s body expressed sexual activity and domination, whereas the receptive partner was construed as a sexual object, whose submission to phallic penetration displayed sexual passivity and inferiority. Sexual activity was linked to social status and superiority, while sexual passivity was linked to an inferior social status. In tandem with the hegemonic notions of sex and gender, penetration/activity/dominance was regarded as typical of an ideal masculinity, whereas being-penetrated/passivity/submission was typified as ideal femininity.¹⁹

¹⁴ Moore, *God’s Beauty Parlor*, 166.

¹⁵ Moore, *God’s Beauty Parlor*, 166. Also see John J. Winkler, *The Constraints of Desire: The Anthropology of Sex and Gender in Ancient Greece* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 39. Winkler (*The Constraints of Desire*, 39) mentions in relation to the attitudes and assumptions of the Graeco-Roman world that what is significant in sexual activity are “(i) men, (ii) penises that penetrate, and (iii) the articulation thereby of relative statuses through relations of dominance.”

¹⁶ Michael L. Satlow, “‘They Abused Him like a Woman’: Homoeroticism, Gender Blurring, and the Rabbis in Late Antiquity,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 5, no.1 (1994): 2; Dale B. Martin, *Sex and the Single Savior: Gender and Sexuality in Biblical Interpretation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 58. Also see P.-Michel D. Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality*, Vol. 2 (New York: Vintage Books, 1985), 53, 92-3, 114, 136, 187.

¹⁷ Jonathan Walters, “Invading the Roman Body: Manliness and Impenetrability in Roman Thought,” in *Roman Sexualities*, eds. Judith P. Hallet and Marilyn B. Skinner (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 31; Marilyn B. Skinner, “Quod Multo Fit Aliter in Graecia,” in *Roman Sexualities*, eds. Judith P. Hallet and Marilyn B. Skinner (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 14.

¹⁸ Moore, *God’s Beauty Parlor*, 142-6.

¹⁹ David M. Halperin, “Why is Diotama a Woman? Platonic Eros and the Figuration of Gender,” in *Before Sexuality: The Construction of Erotic Experience in the Ancient Greek World*, eds. David M. Halperin, John J. Winkler, and Froma I. Zeitlin (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 266-7; Walters, “Invading the Roman Body,” 30;

According to normative and normalising standards of sex and gendered relations from the ancient world then, sex was not about mutual consideration and reciprocity, but it rather was all about the penis, the dominance, and the social hierarchy that it implied.²⁰ Artemidoros' dream book reflects the commonly held sexual attitudes and assumptions of the ancient Mediterranean, and serves to illustrate the dominance of the penis in social thought:

The penis is like a man's parents since it contains the generative code [*spermatikos logos*], but it is also like his children since it is their cause. It is like his wife and girlfriend since it is useful for sex. It is like his brothers and all blood relations since the meaning of the entire household depends on the penis. It signifies strength and the body's manhood, since it actually causes these: for this reason some people call it their "manhood" [*andreia*]. It resembles reason and education since, like reason [*logos*], it is the most generative thing of all...It is like the respect of being held in honor, since it is called "reverence" and "respect."²¹

The reciprocal notion implied in 1 Corinthians 7:1-5, given what has just been discussed, would seem rather astonishing for the normative "male engendered patriarchy"²² of the ancient Mediterranean and would serve to problematise normative household responsibilities.²³ As Vorster argues, the "disregard of household structure would not only be the threat to social order, but also an insult to the stability enforced by the supreme *paterfamilias*."²⁴ Similarly out of tune is Paul's assertion in 1 Corinthians 7:25-40 where he claims that it is better to remain single, given the apocalyptic climate that he envisages. In the light of the

Martin, *Sex and the Single Savior*, 58. Also see Holt N. Parker, "The Teratogenic Grid," in *Roman Sexualities*, eds. Judith P. Hallet, and Marilyn B. Skinner (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 53.

²⁰ See Moore, *God's Beauty Parlor*, 144. Highlighting the importance of the penis to the ancient Mediterranean sex system, Moore (*God's Beauty Parlor*, 165, 170) has coined the terms "phallobesive" and "phallofixated" to emphasise this fixation with the penis and the act of penetration.

²¹ Winkler, *The Constraints of Desire*, 42.

²² Vorster, "The Blood of Female Martyrs," 87.

²³ Also see Vorster ("The Blood of Female Martyrs," 87), on his discussion of early Christian female martyrs and how their rejection of normative marital relations (marriage, childbearing, and rearing) was regarded as a "problematization of ancient social household obligations."

²⁴ Vorster, "The Blood of Female Martyrs," 72.

ancient sex and gender system and the gendered logic of the dominant Graeco-Roman and Jewish moral philosophy, this is a highly unusual perspective. In fact, within Graeco-Roman and Jewish contexts, the assumption was “that people would marry and produce children and remarry fairly quickly after being widowed or divorced.”²⁵ Toward the end of the Republic and the beginning of the Empire, the Roman emperor Augustus even promulgated special laws to encourage citizens to marry.²⁶

Paul’s instruction to remain single in the light of these cultural standards and prescriptive laws does seem somewhat problematic and ambiguous by normative ancient Mediterranean standards. The possibility to interpret the encouragement to stay single as a growing development towards a radicalisation of masculinity, also seems tenable. In this manner, the call to stay single could be viewed as a type of heightened, pseudo-ascetic masculinisation that aspires to perfected self-control. If this interpretive possibility is accepted, then hegemonic notions of masculinity are once again re-inscribed and perpetuated, while this trajectory opens up the pathway to interpret Paul’s instructions to remain single as a performance of transgressive hypermasculinity.

Furthermore, given the hegemonic ancient Mediterranean gender system, marriage was regarded as the “public marker that the male citizen has adopted his civic responsibilities as husband, father and citizen, for by it he establishes a household.”²⁷ That Paul has such a negative view on marriage in 1 Corinthians 7:1-5, implies or creates a negative notion of masculinity or rather a negative or deficient masculinity or (un)masculinity in this text. Given the dominant gendered normativities and social obligations of the ancient Mediterranean, the unmarried (or single male) man would not be regarded as fully masculine as, according to the dominant performances of masculinity, he had not

²⁵ Crocker, *Reading 1 Corinthians*, 150.

²⁶ Sarah B. Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* (New York: Schocken Books, 2011), 166; Bruce W. Winter, *Roman Wives, Roman Widows: The Appearance of New Women and the Pauline Communities* (Grand Rapids: William Eerdmans, 2003), 53; Alistair S. May, “*The Body for the Lord: Sex and Identity in 1 Corinthians 5-7*” (New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 181.

²⁷ May, “*The Body for the Lord*,” 181.

fulfilled the duties of a truly masculine man which included fulfilling the roles of being a husband, citizen, and *paterfamilias*.²⁸

Given the gendered norms of the time, Paul's masculine status would definitely be in jeopardy as he was unmarried and had no record of any known biological children. Could his adoption of the Corinthian congregation be regarded as an attempt to rectify his *deficient* masculinity?²⁹ Does Paul's description of an egalitarian sexual lifestyle, where the husband and the wife are mutually responsible for one another, are not to deprive one another unless the abstinence is mutually agreed upon, and this for a limited period of time (1 Cor 7:5b) to facilitate personal congress with God (1 Cor 7:5c), constitute a rejection of certain traditional standards of masculinity? Given the hegemonic gender system of the ancient Mediterranean, it seems that some of Paul's assertions in 1 Corinthians already create a somewhat complex and even ambivalent picture of masculinity.³⁰

Disrupting Masculinity?

That Paul's masculinity was sometimes regarded as ambivalent, may be seen in the second-century Acts of Paul and Thecla. In commenting on the Acts of Paul and Thecla, Burrus notes that Paul's masculinity was a "markedly ambivalent" masculinity.³¹ Similarly, and in the light of the same text, Penner and Van der Stichele assert that "Paul, a notable

²⁸ See Dorcas J. Gordon (*Sister or Wife? 1 Corinthians 7 and Cultural Anthropology* [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997], 70-1) for a discussion of the *paterfamilias* and the implications that this status had on the construction of masculinity.

²⁹ Moore (*God's Beauty Parlor*, 146) mentions, with reference to Paul's celibacy (1 Cor 7:7-8; 9:15, 15) that "he did not use his penis to affirm his social status."

³⁰ Other scholars have also noted the complexities of masculinity in their investigations of certain New Testament texts, e.g., Melanie Johnson-DeBaufre and Laura S. Nasrallah, "Beyond the Heroic Paul: Toward a Feminist and Decolonizing Approach to the Letters of Paul," in *The Colonized Apostle: Paul Through Postcolonial Eyes*, ed. Christopher D. Stanley (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 166. Also see Eric Thurman ("Novel Men: Masculinity and Empire in Mark's Gospel and Xenophon's an Ephesian Tale," in *Mapping Gender in Ancient Religious Discourses*, edited by Todd Penner, and Caroline van der Stichele [Leiden: Brill, 2007], 185-230) on his investigation of an ambivalent masculinity in Mark's Gospel; Colleen M. Conway (*Behold the Man: Jesus and Greco-Roman Masculinity* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008], 124) on her articulation of the complexity and "multifaceted picture" regarding masculine ideology and the Matthean Jesus; Conway (*Behold the Man*, 175-84) for her discussion of "multiple masculinities of Jesus."

³¹ Virginia Burrus, "Mimicking Virgins: Colonial Ambivalence and the Ancient Romance," *Arethusa* 38, no.1 (2005): 64.

apostolic figure, has a contested masculinity in the text.”³² Burrus suggests that Paul “has become a pseudo-man” and seemingly “a mimic-woman.”³³ Could a similar assertion be made of Paul in 1 Corinthians in the light of certain texts in which his masculinity is constructed and performed in a manner that would be construed as effeminate in lieu of the dominant articulations of gender and sexuality from the ancient world in which he lived? According to Burrus and her investigation of Thecla, she argues that “the hybridity of Thecla’s chastity story disrupts dominant cultural paradigms, unmasking men and making men out of women.”³⁴

But just how much disruption actually takes place when the gendered bodies are held up against the dominant ideals of masculinity from the hierarchical gendered models of antiquity such as the one-sex model?³⁵ When the dominant gender models are held as the standard for engendering, normative notions of masculinity are merely re-enforced, as women simply slide up the gendered hierarchy and become more masculine. Conway notes that the rejection of normative social strictures is actually a type of asceticism, “and ascetic practice was in itself a means toward ideal masculinity” and may even be classified as a form of hypermasculinity.³⁶ In this way, Paul’s ascetic tendencies could even be regarded as a performance of hypermasculinity, leading yet again to the re-inscription of androcentric and patriarchal gendered structurings as typified in the broader cultural gender setting. Asceticism was, however, not the dominant gendered ideology, and so this interpretation could be seen to carry less weight in the light of the hegemonic gendered constructions and representations of the ancient world.

³² Todd Penner and Caroline van der Stichele, *Contextualizing Gender in Early Christian Discourse: Thinking Beyond Thecla* (New York: T&T Clark, 2009), 143.

³³ Burrus, “Mimicking Virgins,” 64.

³⁴ Burrus, “Mimicking Virgins,” 64.

³⁵ Helen King (*The One-Sex Body on Trial: The Classical and Early Modern Evidence* [London: Routledge, 2016]) problematised the one-sex model notion. Yet, even if the one-sex model were not to perform as the sole or singular informer of gender hierarchy at work in antiquity right up to modernity, it would be quite difficult to deny that there was a constant measuring of a “woman” against a “man,” that a “man’s body” contained the capacity for perfection that was not possible for women, that “man’s body” was indeed the criterion of what a body should be, and that the early Christian writings where a woman’s body turns into that of a man, cannot simply be discarded.

³⁶ Conway, *Behold the Man*, 123.

From the above investigation, 1 Corinthians seems to be more firmly rooted in the dominant cultural gendered paradigms of the ancient Mediterranean and in so doing, conforms to and re-inscribes those hegemonic cultural paradigms. There are, however, transgressive instances, like the one delineated in the above discussion on 1 Corinthians 7:1-5 that does not fit with the “ideal” profile and cultural stereotypes of normative masculinity.³⁷ In fact, the construction of masculinity that it seems to reflect, is more in keeping with the “unman,” the *mollis* or *κίμαιδος*.³⁸

Conclusion

On the surface, Paul’s view on marriage in 1 Corinthians 7:1-5 seems to counter the dominant norms of masculinity which were required for marriage – perhaps some may even argue that his view in this pericope constitutes “(un)masculinity.” In other words, given the dominant gendered normativities of the ancient Mediterranean, the instructions by Paul in this text suggest masculinity/ies which do not abide by the norm and paint a more complex gendered matrix with some room for a seemingly transgressive masculinity.³⁹ There has been a plethora of

³⁷ Conway (*Behold the Man*, 7) argues that the New Testament consists of a range of complexities to the notion of masculinity/ies. Also see Joseph A. Marchal, “Feminine Masculinity in Corinth? Bodily Citations and the Drag of History,” *Neotestamentica* 48, no.1 (2014): 93-113; compare Jennifer A. Glancy (*Corporal Knowledge: Early Christian Bodies* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010], 25-47) on her investigation of 2 Corinthians 11:23-25.

³⁸ Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, 215-25; Winkler, *The Constraints of Desire*, 45-70; Moore, *God’s Beauty Parlor*, 136-43. For further discussions of the *κίμαιδος*, see Maud W. Gleason, “The Semiotics of Gender: Physiognomy and Self-Fashioning in the Second Century C.E.” in *Before Sexuality: The Construction of Erotic Experience in the Ancient Greek World*, eds. David M. Halperin, John J. Winkler, and Froma I. Zeitlin (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 394, 411; Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 53; Amy Richlin, “Not Before Homosexuality: The Materiality of the *Cinaedus* and the Roman Law against Love Between Men,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 3, no.4 (1993): 523-73; Anthony P. Corbeill, “Dining Deviants in Roman Political Invective,” in *Roman Sexualities*, eds. Judith P. Hallet and Marilyn B. Skinner (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1997), 99-128; Parker, “The Teratogenic Grid,” 47-65; Skinner, “Quod Multo Fit Aliter in Graecia,” 17, 21, 135, 136; Larson, “Paul’s Masculinity,” 93; May, “The Body for the Lord,” 38; Diana M. Swancutt, “Still Before Sexuality: ‘Greek’ Androgyny, the Roman Imperial Politics of Masculinity and the Roman Invention of the Tribas,” in *Mapping Gender in Ancient Religious Discourses*, eds. Todd Penner and Caroline van der Stichele (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 11-62.

³⁹ One reviewer of this article has pointed out that, “since the notion of ‘redemption’ [is alluded to in the title of the article], this should perhaps remain a possibility rather than

scholarship which has viewed Paul's views on gender, masculinity, and even femininity in static and monolithic ways. The examination of Paul in this essay offers us possibilities to hear Paul differently. Indeed, a deeper investigation of the rhetorical performance of Paul's instructions to, and his relationship with the Corinthians, produces alternative and possibly transforming interpretations that reveal disruptive masculinities, sexual autonomy, and sexual freedom. I want to be clear: this kind of reading does not "redeem" Paul for all times and in all cases. Rather, the significance of this kind of reading is that it provides possibilities for subverting the homogeneous and uniformly patriarchal Paul, who makes appearances both in conservative as well as liberatory scholarship.

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