

Marriage & Homosexuality

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It is hard to miss a rainbow flag in the local coffee shop, bar, or library. And it is near impossible to read the news and not see a flashing headline regarding the LGBTQ community. For Christians, the discussion of how homosexuality, same sex marriage, and the LGBTQ community fit within the Church is a prominent topic today. It has created a great divide among families and communities. On one side, there are many parents in conservative, Christian bubbles who wish their children had the chance to grow up in the “good days,” meaning, a time in their past where homosexuality was not a relevant topic. At the same time, the growing traction of this topic gives hope to many, including those within the church, who cling to the nontraditional view of sexual formation.

In reality, though, the topic of homosexuality has been around since the foundation of civilization. For example, archeologists have discovered a considerable amount of Mesopotamian iconography, starting as early as around 3000 BCE, that depict sexual activity between men.¹ Middle Assyrian Law 18 explicitly mentions sex between two males in a manner similar to the Hittite Law, which states, “If a man has intercourse with another and they indict him and prove him guilty, they will have intercourse with him and turn him into a eunuch.”² In the Egyptian Book of the Dead, there is story of a man who lists vices he has not committed, among which is having sex with a boy.³

For most of history the Judeo-Christian tradition has held to the belief that God created male and female in His image and blessed them in the partnership of marriage. One of the ways they represent God’s vulnerable, self-giving, oneness in relationship to humanity is through

¹ Jarosz, Ian. “Homosexuality in Leviticus: A Historical-Literary-Critical Analysis.” *James Madison Undergraduate Research Journal* 9, no. 2 (2022): 33–43. <http://commons.lib.jmu.edu/jmurj/vol9/iss1/4>, 35.

² G.J. Wenham, “The Old Testament Attitude to Homosexuality,” *Expository Times* 102, no. 12 (1991): 359–63, <https://doi.org/10.1177%20%2F001452469110201203>, 360.

³ *Ibid.*, 361.

sexual intimacy. Any sexual expression, including reducing sex to a pure pleasurable recreational activity, as well as any sexual expression outside marriage such as lustfulness, pornography, cohabitation, sexual joking, and harassment of any kind, heterosexual or homosexual, is sinful.

More recently, those within the church are rejecting this traditional view of marriage in exchange for a more liberal view. One of the people leading the charge is Matthew Vine, the author of *God and the Gay Christian*, who identifies as a “gay Christian.” In his book, Vine argues that the church condemns gay marriage because traditionally, they have misread Scripture. He believes the early Christians have taken all the texts in Scripture on abusive, same sex relationships and wrongfully applied them to gay marriage. To no surprise, Vine is pro-gay marriage, which he defines as a man/man or woman/woman in a monogamous, loving, committed marriage.

This paper will serve three functions: First, it will identify a number of arguments for biblically endorsed same sex marriage from the liberal understanding, represented by Vine, alongside the traditional viewpoint of homosexuality, represented by Gerry Brashear, a Professor of Theology at Western Seminary. Secondly, it will thoroughly define and present my own position on the topic. Lastly, I will share how my personal position on homosexuality and marriage practically relates to pastoral ministry.

Vine (Liberal Christianity) and Brashear (Conservative Christianity)

Vine begins his argument from the first pages of the Bible. Vine believes that God created a “suitable helper” for man because He saw that it was not good for man to be alone (Gen. 2:18). He posits that man if unmarried is lonely. He believes this verse address the importance and purpose of marriage. He sees marriage as the answer to loneliness. Therefore, if a man or women is born with a disposition toward the same sex, then to it would be obeying God for their

“suitable helper” to be of the same sex. Brashear and the conservative viewpoint push back on this argument and say that marriage is not the answer to intimacy and ultimate fulfillment.

Marriage is a beautiful covenantal relationship and a very significant sacrament of God’s oneness with His creation, but it is not the only intimacy one can experience. Jesus is a perfect example. No Christian, conservative or liberal, would argue that Jesus was not the true Adam, one that lived every breathing second in the fullness of what it means to be human. Yet Jesus did not marry. In fact, Jesus proves that one can be fulfilled without marriage so long as there is intimate relationship with God and others, just like He had with Peter, James John, Mark, Mary, Martha and Lazarus (Mark 14:22, John 11).

For centuries, the Christian debate on same sex marriage focused on the Mosaic Law, specifically two verses found in Leviticus. Both passages state that it is an abomination, guilty of the death penalty, if a man lies with another man as he would with a woman (Lev. 18:22, 20:13). Vine makes the argument, and rightfully so, that there seems to be a lot of hypocrisy, picking and choosing of sorts, to which Mosaic Laws still apply today and which do not. Why have Christians decided it was okay to eat bacon, shrimp and lobster when it is clearly deemed unclean in Leviticus 11:11-12? Vine quickly turns to post Pentecostal writings that state because of Jesus and His New Covenant, the Mosaic Covenant has become obsolete. Even circumcision, the most sacred sacrament that separated Abraham’s descendants from all other nations became obsolete because of Jesus (Acts 15; Heb. 8:13; Rom. 7:6; Gal. 3:23-25). Vine argues that because the old covenant is done away with, the two Old Testament passages regarding refraining from homosexual activity are also obsolete, thus, creating a new way of living for the gay community.

Brashear also agrees that the Mosaic covenant was added to the Abrahamic covenant until the Messiah came and the New Covenant was inaugurated. While followers of Jesus no

longer require obedience to the Mosaic code to restore one's relationship with Yahweh, much of the Mosaic code remains part of the bigger biblical narrative of morality. A helping model, though not definite, is to see how New Testament authors judicate wisdom regarding Old Testament law in the newly formed Jesus communities. Concerning homosexuality, there are three New Testament passages (Rom. 1:26-27; 1 Cor. 6:9-11; and 1 Tim. 1:10) that bring clarity and provide a window of how a follower of Jesus can live in the New Covenant and still carry underlying Mosaic principles.

Vine goes onto argue that Jesus permitted homosexuality because He never condemned it. Again, Brashear agrees that Jesus never directly spoke against homosexuality, but he points out that Jesus also never spoke against rape or incest, does that mean He condones those actions? Most would say certainly not. Brashear argues that Jesus does say that sexual activity outside of marriage is defiling (Matt. 15:15-20). If a marriage is defined by a male and a female in covenant oneness, then same sex relationships are immoral sexual acts, which Jesus takes a stance against.

For Vine, loving a gay or straight neighbor means accepting them as they are, sexual orientation and all. To Vine, love is love, but Brashear argues that is simply is not true. For example, the love for good food is very different than the love for a son, daughter or enemy. Brashear also identifies that there is a disagreement on the meaning of words. What Vine calls accepting, most conservative Christians would call affirming. Brashear accepts a follower of Jesus who has a same sex sexual disposition, whether they are acting on it or not, into his church and community with loving and embracing arms, but that does not mean Brashear agrees their actions are morally or ethical biblical.

Vine blurs the lines when it comes to seeing a difference between same sex attraction and same sex sexual activity. He believes that God made all people sexual and that in order to live as

their true self, they must act on their sexuality, anything less is cruel and seen as a punishment.

This argument is very feelings based and holds less validity than his exegetical arguments.

Brashear believes there is a vibrant difference between same sex attraction and same sex activity.

He basis his believe on Jesus' temptations. Although Jesus was tempted, He never gave into any temptation (Matt. 4:1-11). In other words, the feelings aroused through same sex attraction can be present, but if not acted upon in thought or action, it is not a sin. Once same sex attraction turns into same sex action (mentally, emotionally or physically) then it becomes a sin, just like if Jesus gave into the adversaries temptations in the desert, he would have been found guilty.

Brashear personally knows men who are attracted to the same sex but also believe in the traditional understanding of marriage and sexuality and choose to remain celibate or marry the opposite sex. Again, Vine's longing for validity and fulfillment through marriage is deceptive.

Brashear argues that it is a great lie to say we are tortured if one does not get married or have sexual relationships. A lot of people do not get married, like Jesus, and they have fulfilled lives.

Personal Position

As we have identified, those in support of biblical same sex marriage believe the purpose for God creating a suitable helper in Genesis Two serves as an absolute call to marriage. They hermeneutically reject Mosaic covenant language, such as Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13. As a result, they are left interpreting Jesus' lack of direct attention recorded by the Gospel writers in regard to homosexuality, as well as the Apostolic letters which serve as an insight on how first-generation followers of Jesus took the wisdom and revelation of Jesus and applied it to very specific settings and situations. Their nontraditional exegetical arguments on biblical sexuality and marriage seem rather weak and typically reliant on ignoring the clear and majoring on the unclear, leaving me unsatisfied and not convinced. So then, what is my position on marriage and sexuality and how

did I get there? I believe that a marriage is a lifelong covenant between male and female from different families, and that all sexual relationships and expressions outside of marriage are sin. I will exegete the same passages (plus more) that Vine used to reveal how I believe the traditional understanding of homosexuality is biblically accurate.

Genesis 2

When reading Scripture, specifically the Hebrew Bible, it is important to understand the historical background within which the book was written, recognizing it was heavily influenced by the author's relationship to that context. Old Testament Theologian, John Sailhamer, notes that "looking at the book from the point of view of the time and place of its composition can help us understand some of the main features and purposes of the book"⁴ The historical events God makes known in Scripture come to the reader mediated through the pre-interpreted lens of the author. Again, Sailhamer helpfully adds "as readers of these biblical texts we stand before them as their authors have constructed them, and we look to them, the texts themselves, for our understanding of the world they depict"⁵

As we begin to apply this kind of analysis to Genesis One and Two, it becomes evident that Moses, the most probable contributor to Genesis, wants the reader to see Eden as a sacred, temple garden. When compared to one another, the literary structure of the tabernacle and temple echo the creation story in Genesis One and Two. All these stories share a repetition of seven speeches/acts (Genesis 1-2:3, Exodus 25-31, Exodus 39-40, 1 Kings 6-8), followed by an equivalent culmination of sabbath (Genesis 2:1-3, Exodus 31:12-17, Exodus 40:32-35, 1 Kings

⁴ John Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative : A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1992), 4.

⁵ Ibid, 10.

8: 46-53), immediately paralleled by a temptation and fall narrative (Genesis 3, Exodus 32, Leviticus 10, 1 Kings 9:1-9 and 11:1-13).⁶

Additionally, the Garden of Eden connects with the three-tiered design pattern of the tabernacle and temple. First, the skies of Genesis One serve as the throne room of God as seen as the Holy of Holies with the ark of the covenant as God's throne. Second, the land with trees, animals, humans in the garden of Eden are depicted as the Holy place where the Menorah (tree), Cherubim (animal), and priest (Adam) are located. Lastly, the seas outside Eden are portrayed by the courtyard and its bronze sea (1 Kings 7:23).⁷ God then commands Adam to serve (*āḥaḍ*) and keep (*šāmar*) the garden, language that is primarily used of the Levitical priests task in the tabernacle/temple, in order for them to preserve the sacred space (Gen. 1:15; Num. 3:28).

It is within the context of seeing Eden, and creation, as God's sacred space that God recognizes it is not good for Adam to be alone. So, God creates a suitable helper for him (Gen. 2:15). Before a woman is created, though, animals are created and Adam names them, but he still cannot find anyone suitable for him. Finally, God creates Eve, out of Adam's side (*sela*). This is not an anatomical term, as some translations have assigned it, but rather, the forty other times this word is used in the Bible it refers to the other side of a building/structure, as in the tabernacle.⁸ Additionally, calling Eve his helper (*ezer*), should not be thought of as a subordinate position either. In almost all of the other twenty references of *ezer* in the Hebrew Bible, God is referred to as the *ezer*. Together, these passages show that the woman is not just a reproductive

⁶ Mackie, Tim. n.d. "Temple: Study Notes." Portland, Oregon: Bible Project.

⁷ L Michael Morales, *Cult and Cosmos : Tilting toward a Temple-Centered Theology* (Leuven ; Walpole, Ma: Peeters, 2014).

⁸ John H Walton, *The Lost World of Adam and Eve : Genesis 2-3 and the Human Origins Debate* (Downers: Intervarsity Press, 2015), 78.

mating partner. She is Adam's ally, equally yoked, to help him radiate God's presence and communion, in sacred space.⁹

While Genesis Two closes declaring "a man shall leave his father and his mother and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh", it must not be neglected that before marital function was assigned, Adam and Eve represented a union with each other and their Creator for the purpose of cultivating and radiating God's presence in creation (Gen. 2:24). This is an important point because many gay Christians use Genesis Two and marriage imagery as a means to elevate their significance and fulfillment. Paul certainly did not find think marriage was imperative for living as image bearers of God. In fact, quite the opposite (1 Cor. 7:8-10). Paul talks about brotherly and sisterly intimacy and love towards one another significantly more than marriage and sexuality (Rom. 12:9-10; 1 Pet. 1:22; 1 Thes. 4:9; Eph. 4:1-2; Phil. 2:1-2; Col. 3:12-14). If we take our brotherly and sisterly relationship as seriously as Paul wants the Church to, then it would create an environment where loneliness (a leading factor for sexual expression) is replaced by community and discipleship.

Old Covenant Law

Arguments made from both sides of the debate when it comes to homosexuality and the Old Testament Law fundamentally boil down to one questions: what laws still apply to followers of Jesus today and which ones do not? For example, some say if a law from the Hebrew Bible is not quoted or repeated in the New Testament then it is not to be obeyed. They observe Paul quoting a handful of the Ten Commandments and believe the ones he used apply while the laws he did not quote do not apply. Others, like Vine, say that none of them apply because the New

⁹ Ibid., 81;117.

Covenant has done away with them all. Sadly, both approaches put roles and responsibilities on the laws recorded in the Hebrew Bible that they were not meant to be for its readers.

Scripture is the training ground for recognizing God's voice, not to provide the ultimate comprehensive manual book that God wants readers in the 21st century (or anyone outside of who they were originally given to) to follow. There is something profound and fundamental to learning to hear God speak from texts that are not originally written to us but are absolutely for us. Using Scripture to make ethical decisions requires a deep-rooted moral compass takes a lot of time, wisdom, meditation, solitude with God, and cross-cultural tools in order to train oneself not to need a rule book or behavioral manual but an internal compass, powered by intimate relationship with the Creator.

The best example we have in Scripture of this approach is Jesus himself. Jesus interacted with the laws of Moses and demonstrated how He discerned the wisdom about loving God wholly and respecting others dignity. For example, the Gospel of Matthew records how Jesus took one of the Ten Commandments, "do not murder", and turned it into addressing issues of contempt, pride, superiority, and anger in one's heart (Matt. 5:21-26). For Jesus, the divine wisdom within "do not murder" was really about respecting humans as made in God's image. In fact, it was much deeper than not taking someone's life (though, at the very least, practically, it was). It was about having a transcendent set of values become intrinsic to every person.

For followers of Jesus, this is the same process we are called to undergo with all of the 613 laws, all the warnings of the Prophets, all of Jesus' parables, and all of Paul's letters. While it is true that Ancient Israel and Moses would have had some sort of ancient constitution of laws, we do not have them. We only have pieces of what the biblical authors selected to pass on and felt important to insert into the story of the Bible in order to reveal God's wisdom to His people

for all times and all generations. To make a very black and white argument for or against homosexuality, solely because it is found in the Old Testament seems like a misuse of what the Bible is, even if you have the right intuition on what the Bible is for.

We are called to seek the divine wisdom that transcends the particular wording or situation of Scripture in its ancient setting and apply it to us today. Most of us are not ethnically part of the nation of Israel, however we are a non-Israelite who follow Israel's Messiah and have been grafted into His family that views the narrative, poetry, and letters that make up the Bible as a source of divine wisdom that will shape my values, truths, and decisions. Paul writes to a young, rising pastor, reminding him this very truth about Scripture, telling him to "continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, *which are able to make you wise* for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 3:14-15, emphasis added).

Having the law forever written on our hearts because of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus means our devotion is not to a written law code, but to an intrinsic set of values the texts represented. In one sense, all the laws still apply, but in another sense, none of them apply. Regarding the topic of homosexuality this means we must follow the entire biblical story, seeing how God has called His people to live set apart, belonging, and representing Him. It also means we must see how Jesus, the one who reestablished God's kingdom on earth and who is the full revelation of God, lived and commissioned His followers to live. It also means we must seek the wisdom of how His closest followers, Apostles, preserved the teachings and leadership of Jesus as they formed and lead the first churches.

Jesus' Address

Admittedly, I wish Jesus had just made a very direct statement approving or condemning homosexuality. It certainly would have helped end the debate. Unfortunately, He did not. What the biblical authors did preserve and pass on was how Jesus viewed of the larger topic of marriage. When Jesus was approached and asked about loopholes in marriage and divorce laws, He did not go directly to the laws of the Torah. Instead, Jesus went to the opening pages of Genesis, which describe a divine and human ideal, male and female, functioning in right relationship and union with the Creator as His image bearers and co-rulers in the world. This demonstrates how Jesus conceives of the topic at hand: One man and one woman in a lifetime covenant. In Genesis One, you have the one God who created images of Himself. Those images are one species that are made up of two others, male and female. And when those two make a covenant with each other they become one again, under a covenant of love, and new life is generated. This whole theme is said to be a theological symbol, or image, of God. Just as Jesus condemned sexual immorality and adultery because of His designed covenant oneness between a male and female, so he would condemn homosexuality.

New Testament Passages

Three Pauline passages directly condemn homosexuality. The first one is in Paul's letter to the churches of Corinth. He tells them, "Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men...will inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor. 6:9-10). The second one is to his young apprentice Timothy, a pastor to the churches in Ephesus. Paul similarly writes that the law is meant for the rebels, ungodly, and unholy. These are people who kill their fathers or mothers, are murderers, sexually immoral, practice homosexuality, are slave traders, liars and perjurers. They stand for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine

(1 Tim. 1:10). In both passages, the Greek word for sexually immoral is *porneia* and means any sexual wrongdoing or activity outside marriage, which is undisputed.

What is contested is the meaning of “men who have sex with men” and “homosexuality.” Those who support Christian homosexuality refute these phrases, limiting it to the fact that this Greek word, *arsenokoitai*, is not used anywhere else in the Greek language. It is made up by Paul. Contextually, they believe it only refers to a common practice of homosexual behaviors by straight married men (penetrators) upon their enslaved boys (receivers). Undoubtedly, this is a very sad and real aspect of the Greco Roman culture to which Paul is addressing. But limiting Paul’s audience to only this group diminishes another group who Paul means to address, those who are in mutual, genuine, homosexual relationships.

Even more significant is the fact that this Pauline word, *arsenokoitai*, is not made up. Rather, it is rooted in the Hebrew Bible. Paul derives *arsenokoitai* from the Septuagint, the Hebrew Bible that was translated into Greek by Alexander the Great. The Septuagint was the Scriptures Jesus and first centuries Jews, including Paul, would have grown up reading. The Septuagint’s translation of Leviticus 18:22 says “You shall not lie with a male (*arsenos koinethese*) as with a woman; such a thing is an abomination.” Paul combines the Greek words for homosexuality, *arsenos koinethese*, into one word, *arsenokoitai*. Paul intentionally coins the term to appeal to God’s design, observed in the Mosaic Covenant, for sexuality and avoids the ambiguity of the current Greek terms.

Romans 1:26-27 offers the third time Paul clearly writes to Christ followers regarding homosexuality. He states how God’s wrath is for the wicked, defined as those who rejected Him. Consequently, the wicked’s true colors, their evil desires, were exposed. These evil desires, also called shameful lusts, practically looked like abandoning natural relations (men’s desires for

women and vice versa) for unnatural ones, same sex sexuality (Rom. 1:18-27). Those in favor of homosexuality in the church will argue that since a gay person's natural relationship would be with the same sex, Paul obviously means they cannot hand over same sex attraction for an unnatural one (desiring the opposite sex.) While this is an intriguing thought, it misses Paul's focus. There are far too many literary clues and hyperlinks in the immediate context of Romans One to the Hebrew Bible, specifically Genesis One to Three. For a devote Israelite like Paul, "natural" is a definitive terms referring to God's natural design of sexual intimacy from Genesis Two as a covenantal male and female relationship.

Redemptive Movement Hermeneutic

If you are like me, then there is probably a huge question that looms in the back of your mind as you read the Bible: how do we know if very specific context is expanding the biblical ethic or if we should follow the exact biblical example no matter what? In his book, *Slaves, Women, and Homosexuals*, Theologian Dr. William Webb brilliantly provides a compelling hermeneutic to aid in one's exegetical quest. He calls it the redemptive movement hermeneutic. He says that in order for someone to live by a biblical ethic, they must know its trajectory in relation to the entire biblical narrative. It works like this: One must identify how the original culture lived in relation to the ethic; what ethic the Bible presents; how our present culture lives in relation to the ethic; and how the ultimate ethic of new creation is in relation the given ethic. Following this hermeneutic will reveal if the Bible is providing a widening or constricting ethical ideal.

Applying this hermeneutic to homosexuality, we observe that the original culture of both early Israelite nationhood and a Greco-Roman world were mostly accepting and had little to no restrictions on same sex sexual expression. Meanwhile, the Bible restricted same sex

sexual expression as well as any other sexual expression outside of a biblically defined marriage covenant. Today, our culture is almost completely acceptance and affirming any sexual expression with no restrictions between any two adults. But the ultimate ethic of new creation reveals that marriage and/or celibacy as a sacramental expression pointing to ultimate union with Jesus. In relation to the original culture, the current culture, and new creation, Scripture articulates a narrowing trajectory of homosexuality for a twenty first century culture.. Jesus and the subsequent New Testament authors aim at ending polygamy, counseling against divorce, and even renouncing sexual lust that followers of Jesus today are to emulate.¹⁰

Pastoral Ministry

What I have found is that the expression of my belief is often the more important question to those who stand in opposition but still in search of a spiritual home. They want to know if they or their loved ones will be welcomed by me and the church. And if so, is there a barrier where that welcome is worn out? As a shepherd, my beliefs and expression of my beliefs should mirror Jesus. It is important to communicate to those men and women who do not align with my understanding of biblical marriage and sexuality that no one will ever be excluded from meeting with me or worshipping with our church on Sundays, for Jesus is the head of the church, not me. Whether I am in the role of a pastor on a Sunday morning, a dad at my son's football game, or shepherd counseling a lost sheep, my first responsibility is to be a living display of covenant love and sexuality.

The church is not meant to critique the surrounding culture but to form a distinct counterculture where life to the full is on display as an invitation to all. However, in many ways

¹⁰ William J Webb, *Slaves, Women & Homosexuals : Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2003).

Jesus' teachings formed communities of counterculture, covenant love. Sexuality is one obvious example. Therefore, the Church's work is not to critique or judge the world outside the church family, but to live with the sort of fidelity, service, and love in singleness or in marriage covenants so that we become a living witness of King Jesus.

When talking with people who are misaligned on marriage and sexuality it is vital to differentiate between agreement and acceptance. In modern cultural rhetoric, agreement and acceptance are often used synonymously. They state that "if you don't agree with my ethical choices, you don't accept me." However, in Jesus, we observe the opposite phenomenon: one of the truly fascinating aspects of the life of Jesus is that the very people whose lives least aligned with his ethical teachings were most drawn to him. His dinner company and close friends were made up of people out-of-alignment with his teaching. For example, Jesus taught that to even look at a woman lustfully is to commit adultery but was consistently surrounded by prostitutes who profited on lust. Jesus taught an ethic of radical generosity, then welcomed a tax collector, whose life was defined by greed, into his inner circle. Therefore, I am committed to following Jesus. I am unapologetically aligned with every Word of Jesus' teaching. Equally, I am uncompromisingly insistent on becoming the sort of community where those out-of-alignment with His beliefs feel welcomed in our fellowship as Jesus and Holy Spirit transform the heart.

A key question that remains unanswered for me on the topic of same sex attraction and gender orientation that would be worth exploring in the future is if there is a chemical or physical reality (imbalance, deviation, or difference) in those people that have same sex attraction or gender dysphoria? Or is it all feelings, emotions, and experience based? As of a couple years ago, there was no definite literature, but I would be curious to see what medical findings have

been made. Although, any findings would not change my position on sexuality in the church, it may alter how I approach the subject in specific counseling sessions.

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