

## NICC TxP: (I) Single Sexuality

**Required Reading:** Rosenau, D. (2023). *Single and Sexually Whole: Soulfully Celebrating the Dance of the Sexes*. United States: Sexual Wholeness Resources.

Neuroscience Informed Christian Counseling® (NICC) provides a holistic and integrative approach essential for helping singles navigate sexuality. This is particularly significant given the diverse range of individuals who remain single for various reasons, including young adults, older adults, separated, divorced, widowed, celibate same-sex attracted, gender dysphoric individuals, those experiencing long-distance relationships due to work or deployment, and individuals with disabilities.

NICC addresses the multifaceted nature of human sexuality and identity from both a psychological and spiritual perspective. Sexuality, including erotic sexuality, deeply influences how individuals perceive themselves, their relationships, and their connection with God. For singles, navigating these aspects can be challenging due to societal expectations, personal beliefs, and unique life circumstances.

NICC integrates biblical wisdom with insights from contemporary psychological science to support singles in understanding and stewarding their sexual energy responsibly, fostering a sense of wholeness and alignment with their faith. This approach encourages individuals to embrace their sexual identity while honoring their values, enhancing their emotional and spiritual well-being.

### Categories of Singles

1. **Young Adults and Older Singles**
2. **Separated and Divorced Individuals**
3. **Widowed Individuals**
4. **Celibate Same-Sex Attracted and Gender Dysphoric Individuals**
5. **Long-Distance Relationships and Deployment:**
6. **Individuals with Disabilities**

### Social & Erotic Sexuality

Social sexuality and erotic sexuality are distinct yet interconnected aspects of human sexuality, each playing a vital role in how individuals experience and express themselves in the world and in relationships. Here's a detailed definition and differentiation of these two dimensions:

#### Social Sexuality

**Definition:** Social sexuality pertains to the broader experience of our male and female identities and how these influence our interactions, behaviors, and relationships. It encompasses the unique ways in which we engage with the world and others through our

gender. This aspect of sexuality includes the roles, norms, and expectations associated with being male or female, and how these are expressed and perceived in social contexts.

### Key Characteristics:

1. **Gender Identity and Expression:** How individuals perceive themselves and present their gender in society, including traits, behaviors, and roles traditionally associated with being male or female.
2. **Relational Dynamics:** The ways in which gender influences interactions and relationships, such as communication styles, emotional expression, and social roles.
3. **Cultural and Social Norms:** The expectations and norms around gender roles and behaviors shaped by cultural, religious, and societal influences.
4. **Interpersonal Relationships:** How gender affects the way individuals form and maintain relationships, including friendships, familial bonds, and social networks.

### Erotic Sexuality

**Definition:** Erotic sexuality encompasses the romantic, genital, and sexual energy that motivates the pursuit of physical intimacy. It involves both the physiological and emotional processes related to sexual desire, arousal, and attraction. Erotic sexuality can be experienced through erotic feelings and expressed through erotic behaviors, each playing distinct roles in our overall sexual experience and identity.

### Differentiating Erotic Feelings and Erotic Behavior:

- **Erotic Feelings:** These are the internal experiences of sexual attraction, arousal, and desire. They can occur in a variety of contexts, including familial, friendships, and interactions with strangers, as well as with individuals who are appropriate for sexual engagement and those who are not. Erotic feelings are a natural and integral part of human sexuality, reflecting our capacity for attraction and intimacy. They can be spontaneous and involuntary, influenced by biological, emotional, and situational factors.
- **Erotic Behavior:** This refers to the actions taken in response to erotic feelings, such as engaging in physical intimacy, sexual acts, or romantic gestures. Erotic behavior should be expressed in appropriate contexts, respecting the boundaries, consent, and dignity of all involved parties. It involves a conscious choice to act on erotic feelings in ways that align with one's values, relationship commitments, and social norms.

### Normalizing Erotic Feelings in Various Contexts

Erotic feelings can arise in numerous situations and with a wide range of people, including those with whom sexual engagement is inappropriate. It's important to normalize these feelings as a natural aspect of human sexuality, acknowledging that they do not

necessitate action. Recognizing and understanding our erotic feelings allows us to steward them responsibly.

1. **Familial Contexts:** Feeling a sense of closeness or attraction within family dynamics can sometimes include erotic feelings. These feelings are natural but should not lead to erotic behavior. Understanding this helps maintain healthy and appropriate family relationships.
2. **Friendships:** Erotic feelings in friendships can strengthen bonds but must be managed wisely to preserve the integrity and boundaries of the friendship (Righteous Flirting).
3. **Interactions with Strangers:** Experiencing erotic attraction to strangers is common and not something to fear or be embarrassed about. It reflects our inherent capacity for attraction and should be acknowledged internally without necessarily leading to action.
4. **Appropriate vs. Inappropriate Engagement:** Erotic feelings towards people with whom it is appropriate to engage sexually (e.g., a spouse or romantic partner) can enhance intimacy and connection. However, when these feelings are directed towards those with whom it is inappropriate to engage (e.g., colleagues, friends' partners), they should be acknowledged and managed without acting on them.

## Embracing and Stewarding Erotic Feelings

We do not have to be afraid of or embarrassed by sexual attraction or erotic feelings. These feelings are a natural and integral part of our sexuality, reflecting God's good design in us. By acknowledging these feelings within ourselves, we empower ourselves to steward them responsibly. This means understanding the difference between feeling and action, allowing us to channel our erotic energy in ways that honor our Creator, ourselves, and others.

- **Acknowledgement:** Recognizing and accepting erotic feelings as normal helps us to deal with them honestly and healthily.
- **Stewardship:** Managing these feelings with intention and care, ensuring that erotic behavior only occurs in contexts that respect boundaries, consent, and the dignity of all parties involved.
- **Empowerment:** Understanding our erotic feelings gives us the power to make conscious choices about our behaviors, fostering healthy and appropriate expressions of our sexuality.

By embracing erotic feelings as a natural part of our human experience and stewarding them with wisdom and respect, we can celebrate the fullness of our sexuality while maintaining integrity and honoring our relationships and values.

## Friendship Sexuality and Righteous Flirting

Doug Rosenau, a Christian therapist and author, uses the term "righteous flirting" to describe a healthy, respectful, and godly approach to affirming one another as men and women. This idea is rooted in Paul's instructions to Timothy, a young male pastor, on how

to relate to those in his church community: *“Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity”* (1 Timothy 5:1-2).

Righteous flirting acknowledges the intrinsic value and dignity of each person, fostering interactions that honor God and build up the community.

Satisfying social sexuality can sometimes grow into romantic coupling where interactions with the opposite gender take on a more sensual, erotic flair. However, most friendships never become romantic. Both married and single adults need supportive male and female friends who can help them steward their sexuality.

Opposite-sex friendships look different for married couples than for singles; however, both are necessary to experience community as God intended. Single adults especially need their married friends, who help meet some of their needs for opposite-sex interaction. Whether a person remains single or someday marries, healthy connections with both genders are critical to creating community and alleviating loneliness, contributing to sexual wholeness. Developing these relationships often requires intentional practice and learning, as creating opposite-sex peer relationships in adulthood can be challenging even with excellent role models growing up.

Women play a significant role in bringing out the best in the men in their lives. Similarly, men have a critical role in bringing out the best in women.

Same-sex friendships are equally important in social sexuality. Girls need girlfriends who resonate with their feelings in ways men can't. Men need other men to bond with through activities where they can affirm each other in masculine ways. These friendships are crucial for emotional support and personal growth. It's also important to acknowledge and steward any unexpected sexual feelings that might arise in intimate friendships wisely.

The energy of the erotic adds color, spice, and complexity to social sexuality and righteous flirting. A mistake the church has often made is not helping singles recognize, embrace, and steward their sexual energy—celebrating rather than fearing it.

Everyone, whether single or married, experiences erotic feelings, sexual attractions, and arousal. This sexual energy is not merely for propelling us toward sex and marriage; it can enrich our interactions and relationships. Righteous flirting, which appreciates and stewards this ever-present erotic energy, differs from worldly flirting. It's not selfish but is about building up our brothers and sisters, creating fun and fulfilling relationships.

There is something erotically sexual, by God's design, about righteous flirting and the interaction of the genders. Our human interactions may include varying degrees of erotic attraction, which must be stewarded with care. This sacred sexual energy that God blesses us with can create stimulating and supportive interactions when the masculine and feminine engage with love and respect. We don't have to fear being horny; we can embrace all the good our sexual energy can create.

However, it is crucial to be careful and wise, as flirting can become harmful. Flirting to manipulate or merely to satisfy selfish desires or ego can leave a brother or sister feeling used and abused. Righteous flirting takes on different flavors in dating relationships versus

friendships, but always the aim is to honor God and the dignity of the other person while fostering genuine connection and community.

## Stewarding Erotic Sexuality in Dating Relationships – 3 Lenses

Among Jesus-loving, Bible-believing Christians, there are matters pertaining to erotic sexuality where there is general agreement and others where interpretations vary significantly. Most Christians agree that God designed humans as erotic beings and that erotic sexuality is a good gift from God, meant to be stewarded in a manner that aligns with God's design and honors others. This includes the consensus that sex with non-consenting individuals, especially minors, is wrong, as it violates the heart of the Creator. Adultery, involving sex with someone other than one's spouse, is also widely recognized as violating God's sexual ethic. Similarly, exposing one's genitals without consent, prostitution, sex slavery and sex with close relatives are seen as inappropriate sexual expressions.

However, beyond these areas of consensus, significant divergence exists regarding matters such as modesty, fantasy and masturbation, and sexual behavior among singles. Romans 14:4-5, 8 NLT offers guidance on disputable matters:

*“4 Who are you to condemn someone else’s servants? Their own master will judge whether they stand or fall. And with the Lord’s help, they will stand and receive his approval. 5 In the same way, some think one day is more holy than another day, while others think every day is alike. You should each be fully convinced that whichever day you choose is acceptable. 6 Those who worship the Lord on a special day do it to honor him. Those who eat any kind of food do so to honor the Lord, since they give thanks to God before eating. And those who refuse to eat certain foods also want to please the Lord and give thanks to God. 7 For we don’t live for ourselves or die for ourselves. 8 If we live, it’s to honor the Lord. And if we die, it’s to honor the Lord. So whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.”*

Each Christian must seek the Holy Spirit's guidance on these disputable matters and live obediently according to their convictions. To facilitate mutual understanding and discussion, we can explore three perspectives: Traditional Lens, Moderate Lens, and Permissive Lens. While no single lens perfectly captures an individual's views, these frameworks help to understand generally held perspectives.

The Traditional lens emphasizes adherence to historical interpretations of biblical teachings, advocating for clear boundaries and absolute standards of sexual behavior to avoid immorality.

The Moderate lens seeks a balance, interpreting biblical principles within contemporary cultural contexts, allowing for some flexibility while still upholding key ethical standards.

The Permissive lens focuses on the principles of love, respect, and mutual consent, emphasizing the importance of consensual, non-exploitative interactions that do not defraud others, interpreting biblical teachings through the lens of these overarching values. Each perspective aims to honor God through sexual ethics but varies in its application of biblical principles to modern life.

## Traditional Lens

The traditional lens relies on historical interpretations of biblical concepts, seeking to avoid the “line” of immorality by defining it clearly based on these interpretations without considering evolving cultural contexts. Sexual immorality is defined by specific behaviors deemed inherently right or wrong, regardless of consent or exploitation.

- **Modesty:** Individuals are responsible for preventing others from being tempted. Exposing the body above the knee or below the shoulders, plus or minus some inches, is inappropriate outside marriage.
- **Masturbation & Fantasy:** Erotic sexuality is only appropriate in physical interactions between husband and wife. Thus, masturbation and fantasy are always inappropriate.
- **Single Sexual Behavior:** All erotic behavior is reserved for marriage. Any behavior that would be inappropriate with a sibling is inappropriate until marriage.

## Moderate Lens

Christians with a moderate lens define sexual immorality less restrictively, influenced by cultural context where Scripture is not specific.

- **Modesty:** Individuals should avoid intentionally causing arousal in others outside their spouse. Exposure up to the bikini line is permissible.
- **Masturbation & Fantasy:** Among married couples, fantasy and masturbation involving one’s spouse are permissible. For singles, the scripture’s silence on the issue means moderates often adopt a “don’t ask, don’t tell” stance.
- **Single Sexual Behavior:** Vaginal intercourse is reserved for marriage, while other sexual behaviors are open to personal interpretation, often with ambivalence, anxiety, and shame.

## Permissive Lens

The permissive lens operates on the principle that “*All things are permissible, but not all things are beneficial,*” (1 Corinthians 10:23) focusing on loving God and others. This perspective posits that the Bible does not explicitly prohibit consensual sex between unmarried individuals. Proponents argue that the biblical texts addressing sexual immorality primarily concern exploitation, prostitution, and unfaithfulness, rather than consensual relationships between singles.

- **Modesty:** Exposure is permissible if it is consensual, non-exploitative, and does not defraud another.
- **Masturbation & Fantasy:** Permissible as long as they are consensual, non-exploitative, and do not defraud another.
- **Single Sexual Behavior:** All erotic behavior is permissible among singles if it is consensual, non-exploitative, and does not defraud another.



When discussing sexual ethics, particularly from a permissive lens, it is crucial to clearly define the terms "consensual," "non-exploitative," and "does not defraud another."

**Consensual** means that all parties involved in a sexual activity have given their explicit, informed, and voluntary agreement to participate. Consent must be:

1. **Informed:** All parties understand the nature of the activity and any potential risks or consequences.
2. **Freely Given:** Consent is given without any form of coercion, pressure, or manipulation.
3. **Revocable:** Any party can withdraw their consent at any time, and the activity must stop immediately.
4. **Enthusiastic:** Consent is an enthusiastic agreement, not just a lack of resistance.
5. **Specific:** Consent to one activity does not imply consent to another; each activity requires its own explicit consent.

**Non-exploitative** means that the sexual activity does not take advantage of an individual's vulnerability, power imbalance, or lack of capacity to consent. This includes:

1. **Power Dynamics:** Avoiding situations where there is a significant power imbalance (e.g., teacher-student, employer-employee) that could influence consent.
2. **Vulnerability:** Not taking advantage of someone's emotional, mental, or physical vulnerabilities (e.g., intoxication, mental health issues).
3. **Mutual Benefit:** Ensuring that the activity is mutually beneficial and that no one is being used purely for another's gratification.
4. **Equality:** Both parties have an equal say in the terms and nature of the interaction, ensuring a balanced and fair dynamic.

**Does not defraud another** means that the sexual behavior does not involve deceit, betrayal, or violation of commitments to another person. It includes:

1. **Honesty in Relationships:** Ensuring that all parties involved in a relationship are truthful about their sexual activities and intentions.
2. **Commitment Integrity:** Respecting the commitments made within a relationship, such as exclusivity agreements in dating or marital fidelity.
3. **Transparency:** Communicating openly about one's sexual activities with relevant parties to avoid misunderstandings and ensure mutual agreement on the nature of the relationship.
4. **Avoiding Deception:** Not engaging in sexual activities that would deceive or betray a partner, such as cheating on a spouse or breaking an exclusivity agreement with a boyfriend or girlfriend.

#### Examples:

1. **Consensual:** Two adults agree to engage in a sexual relationship after discussing their boundaries, preferences, and the nature of their relationship.

2. **Non-Exploitative:** A relationship between two individuals of equal power, where neither party feels pressured or manipulated, and both find the relationship fulfilling.
3. **Does Not Defraud Another:** A married person who remains faithful to their spouse, honoring their vows and the trust within their marriage, or a person in an exclusive dating relationship who remains honest and faithful to their partner, respecting the terms of their exclusivity.

These lenses offer a structured way to understand the diverse perspectives among Christians on sexual ethics. Each Christian must seek personal conviction through the Holy Spirit and live in obedience to their understanding of God's will, while respecting the diversity of interpretations within the faith community.



## About the Author



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