

# Ethical Approach for Promoting Balanced Sexual Orientation among Christian Couples in Nigeria

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## Abstract

## Original Research Article

In the sacred dance of marital intimacy, where faith intertwines with human desire, Christian couples often navigate a labyrinth of cultural taboos and spiritual expectations, seeking harmony in their sexual lives. Yet, this divine gift of sexuality can become a source of discord, fracturing bonds meant to reflect God's eternal love. This study aims to develop an ethical framework for promoting balanced sexual orientation among Christian couples, justified by the need to integrate biblical principles with modern psychological insights for enhanced marital fulfillment. The problem lies in pervasive sexual dissatisfaction, including mismatched libidos and suppression of mutual pleasure, which contributes to high divorce rates; previous studies highlight cultural clashes in Nigerian contexts but overlook targeted ethical interventions for married adults, leaving a gap in guidance for aligning orientations with faith. The theoretical framework draws from Thomas Aquinas's Natural Law Theory, emphasizing sexuality's alignment with divine purposes of procreation and unity, relating to this work by providing a basis for ethical stewardship of attractions; Augustine's Virtue Ethics fosters habits like temperance for relational balance; and Mark Yarhouse's Integrative Model aids in navigating identities through Christ-centered approaches. Employing qualitative literature review and biblical exegesis, the scope focuses on Christian couples in Nigeria, justified as a microcosm of global faith-culture intersections amid urbanization. Its significance includes reducing marital breakdowns and modelling Christ-like unions. Findings reveal that ethical approaches mitigate cultural stigmas, promote open dialogues, and harmonize orientations for mutual joy. Recommendations urge church-led counselling and virtue education, concluding that such frameworks empower couples toward redemptive intimacy.

**Keywords:** Sexual Orientation, Christian Ethics, Marital Harmony, Nigerian Couples, Virtue Stewardship.

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## INTRODUCTION

In the tapestry of human relationships, few threads are as intricate and profound as those woven through the lens of sexuality within the sacred bond of marriage, particularly among Christian couples navigating the complexities of faith, culture, and modern societal pressures. Imagine a world where the divine gift of intimacy not only unites two souls but also serves as a mirror reflecting God's eternal love, yet in reality, this ideal is often shattered by misunderstandings, cultural taboos, and ethical dilemmas that lead to marital discord and broken homes. This study delves into the ethical approaches that can foster a balanced sexual orientation—one that aligns harmonious sexual expression with Christian teachings—among Christian couples, drawing attention to the pervasive challenges that undermine marital stability.

The problem at hand is multifaceted: sexual

dissatisfaction, including issues like sexual starvation, mismatched libidos, and the suppression of mutual enjoyment, has emerged as a leading cause of marital breakdowns, even within devout Christian households. Previous studies underscore this crisis; for instance, research on Nigerian Christian marriages reveals that sexual relations are a primary trigger for domestic conflicts, with couples often grappling with traditional beliefs that view sex solely for procreation rather than mutual pleasure (Adewale & Oyekan, 2022).

Similarly, investigations into Igbo Christian communities in Nigeria highlight how cultural norms clash with Christian doctrines, exacerbating ethical dilemmas around premarital chastity, contraception, and sexual health, leading to unspoken tensions that erode marital bonds (Nwagwu & Nwafor, 2024). Globally, surveys among evangelicals show shifting attitudes toward sexual orientation, with increasing acceptance of diverse orientations potentially challenging traditional

heterosexual norms in Christian marriages (Pew Research Centre, 2025), yet this evolution often leaves couples without clear ethical guidance, resulting in confusion and relational strain.

The aim of this study is to formulate an ethical framework rooted in Christian principles that promotes a balanced sexual orientation, emphasizing mutual fulfillment, respect, and alignment with biblical teachings to enhance marital harmony. This is justified by the urgent need to address the gap in literature, where most prior research focuses on adolescents or general populations rather than married couples, leaving Christian spouses ill-equipped to handle sexual issues ethically (Adewale & Oyekan, 2022).

The scope is narrowed to Christian couples in Nigeria, a context where Christianity intersects with diverse cultural traditions, such as those among the Igbo, Yoruba, and Hausa ethnic groups, often amplifying sexual conflicts through patriarchal structures and taboos like female genital mutilation that hinder women's sexual enjoyment. This focus is justified because Nigeria, with its large Christian population exceeding 90 million, represents a microcosm of global Christian challenges in sexuality, where rapid urbanization and exposure to Western ideals intensify ethical tensions, making localized insights essential for broader applicability (Nwagwu & Nwafor, 2024).

This study employs a qualitative literature review and exegetical analysis of biblical texts, integrating psychological, theological, and sociological sources to construct a comprehensive narrative, ensuring a robust foundation without empirical fieldwork. The significance of this study lies in its potential to empower Christian couples with ethical tools that reduce divorce rates—currently alarmingly high in Nigeria due to sexual dissatisfaction—foster spiritual growth, and contribute to societal stability by modelling healthy marriages that reflect Christ's love for the church, ultimately bridging the divide between faith and intimate life in an era of evolving sexual norms.

## CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

To navigate the discourse on promoting balanced sexual orientation among Christian couples, it is imperative to clarify key concepts, unpacking their meanings in psychological, theological, and cultural dimensions to avoid ambiguity and foster precise understanding. Sexual orientation, in psychological terms, refers to an enduring pattern of emotional, romantic, and sexual attractions toward individuals of the same sex (homosexual), opposite sex (heterosexual), both sexes (bisexual), or neither (asexual), often viewed as a continuum rather than binary categories, influenced by biological, environmental, and social factors (American Psychological Association, 2020).

This definition emphasizes that orientation is not chosen but emerges as a predisposition, with research indicating prevalence rates of 2-3% for persistent same-sex attractions in populations, underscoring its natural occurrence yet variability across individuals (Yarhouse, 2013). In a Christian context, however, sexual orientation

is often reframed through a theological lens, where heterosexual attraction within marriage is seen as God's intended design for human flourishing, as depicted in Genesis 1-2, while non-heterosexual orientations are attributed to the Fall—a distortion of creation's original order—necessitating ethical stewardship rather than condemnation of the attraction itself (Dei, 2022).

Balanced sexual orientation, a term not rigidly defined in mainstream literature, can be conceptualized here as a harmonious integration of one's sexual attractions and behaviours that aligns with ethical and spiritual principles, promoting mutual fulfillment and relational health without discord or suppression. Psychologically, balance implies concordance between orientation, behavior, and identity, where attractions are managed to support overall well-being, avoiding extremes like repression or unchecked indulgence that lead to mental health issues (Yarhouse, 2013).

From a Christian viewpoint, balance entails orienting sexuality toward God's purposes—procreation, unity, and pleasure within heterosexual monogamy—while addressing any imbalances, such as same-sex attractions, through grace-filled approaches that prioritize identity in Christ over sexual labels, thus preventing zero-sum perceptions where affirming diverse orientations is seen as a threat to faith (Wilkins et al., 2021). Ethical approach, in this context, denotes a principled framework for decision-making in sexual matters, drawing from deontological (duty-based), consequentialist (outcome-focused), and virtue-based ethics, but infused with Christian values like love, fidelity, and self-control, aiming to guide behaviours toward holiness rather than mere compliance (Hollinger, 2007).

Christian couples are defined as married partners who profess faith in Jesus Christ, committed to living out biblical mandates in their union, including sexual exclusivity as outlined in Ephesians 5:22-33, where marriage symbolizes Christ's relationship with the church. In Nigeria, this concept is enriched—or complicated—by cultural overlays, such as communal involvement in marriages and expectations of procreation, which can skew balance if not ethically navigated (Adewale & Oyekan, 2022). Promoting balanced sexual orientation thus involves ethical interventions that reconcile psychological realities with theological ideals, ensuring couples experience sexuality as a divine gift rather than a source of strife, while respecting cultural nuances that shape identity and behaviour.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical underpinnings of this article draw from a synthesis of ethical theories adapted to Christian contexts, providing a robust lens for understanding and promoting balanced sexual orientation among couples. Central to this framework is Natural Law Theory, as articulated by Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), which posits that human actions, including sexual behaviours, should align with the natural order established by God, discernible through reason and scripture. Aquinas argued that sexuality's primary ends are procreation and unity within



marriage, viewing deviations—such as non-heterosexual acts—as contrary to nature's teleology (Summa Theologica, II-II, q. 154). This theory relates directly to the work by emphasizing that balanced sexual orientation entails orienting attractions toward heterosexual marital fulfillment, offering Nigerian Christian couples a rationale to reject cultural practices like polygamy or sexual suppression that disrupt this natural order, thereby fostering ethical harmony (Dei, 2022).

Complementing this is Virtue Ethics, rooted in Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics but Christianized by theologians like Augustine (354-430 AD), who integrated virtues such as chastity, temperance, and love into sexual morality. Augustine viewed sexuality as good but corrupted by original sin, advocating virtues to restore balance (Confessions, Book 8). In relation to this study, virtue ethics encourages couples to cultivate habits that promote mutual respect and self-control, addressing imbalances like same-sex attractions through virtuous living rather than mere prohibition, thus enabling spiritual growth and relational stability (Yarhouse, 2013).

This framework is expanded by contemporary theories, such as Mark Yarhouse's (2010) Integrative Model of Sexual Identity, which combines psychological development stages with Christian theology. Yarhouse delineates sexual identity synthesis through milestones like attraction awareness and labelling, proposing trajectories where Christians steward attractions without forming a "gay" identity, centering instead on Christ (Homosexuality and the Christian). This relates to promoting balance by providing tools for couples to navigate orientations ethically, viewing same-sex attractions as post-Fall realities to be managed through redemption, not eradication.

Additionally, the Zero-Sum Beliefs Theory, as explored by Wilkins et al. (2021), posits that some Christians perceive advancements in LGBT rights as threats to religious freedoms, fostering prejudice. This theory, drawn from social psychology, relates to the work by highlighting how such beliefs can imbalance sexual orientation discussions in marriages, urging ethical approaches that mitigate symbolic threats through biblical acceptance, thus promoting inclusive yet orthodox views among Nigerian couples (Wilkins et al., 2021). Collectively, these theories—Natural Law for foundational ethics, Virtue for character formation, Integrative Model for identity navigation, and Zero-Sum for relational dynamics—form a massively expanded framework that not only diagnoses imbalances but prescribes ethical pathways, ensuring sexuality serves God's glory in Christian unions.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The body of literature on sexual orientation and ethics within Christian marriages reveals a rich yet contentious landscape, where theological interpretations intersect with psychological insights and cultural realities, often highlighting the tensions that Christian couples face in achieving balanced sexual lives. Early studies, such as those examining biblical perspectives on homosexuality, emphasize a traditional ethic that reserves sexual intimacy

for heterosexual marriage, viewing same-sex relations as deviations from God's design, as seen in analyses of Leviticus 18:22 and Romans 1:26-27, which condemn such acts while distinguishing them from orientations themselves (Dei, 2022).

This distinction is crucial, as psychological research indicates that orientations are enduring and unchosen, with causes blending biology and environment, challenging Christians to respond with compassion rather than judgment (Yarhouse, 2013). For instance, surveys among evangelicals show a gradual increase in acceptance of homosexual orientations, from 44% supporting same-sex marriage in 2014 to 55% in 2025, reflecting evolving views that could promote balance by reducing stigma within marriages (Pew Research Centre, 2025).

In Nigerian contexts, literature underscores how cultural and religious synergies exacerbate sexual issues, with studies revealing that patriarchal norms and taboos like viewing sex solely for procreation lead to dissatisfaction and conflicts among Christian couples, often resulting in divorce or infidelity (Adewale & Oyekan, 2022). Research on Igbo Christian marriages expands this, noting ethical dilemmas from modernity, such as contraceptive debates and emerging LGBTQ+ discussions, which force couples to reconcile traditional chastity with contemporary health needs, often without adequate church guidance (Nwagwu & Nwafor, 2024).

Broader Christian ethics literature advocates for a holistic approach, where sexuality encompasses physical, emotional, and spiritual dimensions, promoting virtues like fidelity to counter distortions from sin (Hollinger, 2007). Studies on zero-sum beliefs further elaborate, showing that Christians perceiving LGBT gains as losses heighten prejudice, impacting marital discussions on orientation and requiring interventions to foster balance (Wilkins et al., 2021). Overall, the prose of existing scholarship calls for integrated ethical frameworks that honor scripture while addressing psychological realities, paving the way for healthier sexual orientations in Christian unions.

## ETHICAL APPROACH AND ITS ROLE IN PROMOTING BALANCED SEXUAL ORIENTATION AMONG CHRISTIAN COUPLES IN NIGERIA

The ethical approach to promoting a balanced sexual orientation among Christian couples in Nigeria represents a transformative paradigm that harmonizes biblical teachings with the lived realities of modern marital life, addressing the intricate interplay of faith, culture, and psychology in a nation where Christianity is both a spiritual anchor and a cultural force. Rooted in the theological conviction that sexuality is a divine gift intended for mutual joy, procreation, and unity within the sacred covenant of marriage, this approach draws heavily from scripture, particularly 1 Corinthians 7:1-5, which emphasizes mutual submission in sexual relations, instructing spouses to fulfill each other's needs and to avoid deprivation except by mutual consent for prayer.



This biblical mandate directly challenges Nigerian cultural practices, such as those among the Yoruba and Igbo, where patriarchal norms often suppress women's sexual agency, leading to imbalances like sexual starvation or mismatched libidos that erode marital harmony (Adewale & Oyekan, 2022). By promoting gender equality in sexual initiation and fulfillment, this ethical framework empowers couples to view intimacy as a mutual responsibility, fostering a balanced orientation where both partners' desires are honoured within the bounds of Christian ethics. This approach is further enriched by integrating Natural Law Theory, which, as Aquinas articulated, aligns human actions with God's intended purposes.

In the context of Nigerian Christian marriages, natural law provides a robust ethical foundation by affirming that sexuality serves procreation and unity, thus encouraging couples to orient their attractions—whether heterosexual or otherwise—toward these ends. For instance, when addressing non-heterosexual attractions, which may arise even in committed Christian marriages due to the complex interplay of biology and environment (Yarhouse, 2013), the ethical approach advocates for stewardship rather than suppression. This means acknowledging such attractions as part of the human condition post-Fall, yet guiding couples to channel their sexual expressions into behaviours that align with biblical fidelity, thus maintaining a balanced orientation that prioritizes marital unity and spiritual identity in Christ (Dei, 2022).

In Nigeria, where cultural silence around non-heterosexual attractions often leads to shame or secrecy, this approach encourages open, grace-filled dialogues within the safety of marriage, supported by pastoral counselling, to prevent relational strain and promote psychological well-being. Virtue ethics, as Christianized by Augustine, plays a pivotal role in this framework by cultivating habits of chastity, temperance, and love that underpin a balanced sexual orientation. In Nigerian contexts, where cultural expectations often prioritize male dominance and female subservience, virtues like mutual respect and self-control counteract practices that imbalance sexual dynamics, such as the taboo against discussing sexual health or the stigmatization of female pleasure (Nwagwu & Nwafor, 2024). For example, among the Hausa, cultural norms sometimes discourage women from expressing sexual needs, leading to dissatisfaction that can manifest as relational discord or even infidelity.

By fostering virtues, couples can develop a shared commitment to ethical intimacy, where both partners actively pursue each other's flourishing, thus aligning their sexual orientation with God's redemptive plan. This is particularly vital in urban Nigerian settings, where exposure to Western media and evolving gender norms introduces new tensions, such as debates over contraception or sexual experimentation, which can destabilize marriages if not navigated ethically. The ethical approach also leverages Yarhouse's Integrative Model of Sexual Identity to address the psychological dimensions of orientation, particularly in navigating same-sex attractions within a Christian framework. This model encourages couples to view their sexual identities through the lens of their primary identity in Christ, allowing them to manage

attractions without forming identities that conflict with their faith commitments (Yarhouse, 2013).

In Nigeria, where public discourse on non-heterosexual orientations is often polarized due to legal prohibitions and cultural stigmas, this model offers a compassionate pathway for couples to discuss attractions openly, reducing the fear and isolation that can imbalance their sexual lives. For instance, a spouse experiencing same-sex attractions might feel torn between cultural condemnation and personal faith, but an ethical approach rooted in integration provides tools for both partners to address this through prayer, counselling, and mutual support, ensuring that their marriage remains a space of grace and growth.

Moreover, the Zero-Sum Beliefs Theory highlights the societal challenge of perceiving advancements in sexual minority rights as threats to Christian values, a dynamic prevalent in Nigeria's conservative religious landscape (Wilkins et al., 2021). This perception can create marital tensions when couples encounter discussions about diverse orientations, either through media or personal experiences, leading to prejudice or fear that disrupts balance. The ethical approach counters this by promoting inclusive dialogues that affirm biblical orthodoxy while embracing compassion, encouraging couples to view diverse orientations as opportunities for ethical reflection rather than threats. In practice, this might involve church-led workshops that educate couples on the psychological realities of orientation, reducing zero-sum fears and fostering a balanced perspective that honours both scripture and human dignity.

In Nigeria's unique context, where rapid urbanization and globalization introduce competing sexual ethics, the approach also addresses practical challenges like access to sexual health resources and education. For instance, cultural taboos among the Igbo against discussing sexual dysfunction often prevent couples from seeking medical or psychological help, perpetuating imbalances (Nwagwu & Nwafor, 2024). The ethical framework advocates for church-based interventions, such as seminars on sexual health grounded in biblical principles, to normalize these discussions and equip couples with knowledge about anatomy, consent, and mutual pleasure. Additionally, it encourages partnerships with Christian healthcare providers to address issues like erectile dysfunction or low libido, which are common yet underreported due to stigma, thereby promoting a holistic balance that integrates physical, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of sexuality.

Ultimately, this ethical approach transforms the marital bedroom into a sanctuary where sexuality reflects God's glory, countering Nigeria's high divorce rates driven by sexual dissatisfaction—reportedly affecting over 30% of Christian marriages in urban areas (Adewale & Oyekan, 2022). By fostering open communication, mutual respect, and alignment with biblical mandates, it ensures that Christian couples in Nigeria experience intimacy as a divine gift, promoting a balanced sexual orientation that strengthens their union and witnesses to the redemptive power of Christ's love.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Churches should implement premarital counselling programs emphasizing biblical teachings on mutual sexual enjoyment to prepare couples for balanced orientations.
2. Christian leaders in Nigeria must advocate against harmful cultural practices like female genital mutilation to ensure women's full participation in marital intimacy.
3. Couples are encouraged to engage in regular open dialogues about sexual needs, guided by ethical principles of respect and consent.
4. Denominations should provide resources for individuals with non-heterosexual attractions, focusing on stewardship and identity in Christ without condemnation.
5. Educational workshops on psychological aspects of orientation should be integrated into church ministries to reduce stigma and promote ethical understanding.
6. Pastors ought to preach on virtue ethics in sexuality, highlighting temperance and love as keys to marital balance.
7. Community support groups for married couples facing sexual imbalances should be established to offer peer guidance and prayer.
8. Research institutions and churches should collaborate on studies tailoring ethical approaches to Nigerian cultural contexts for ongoing refinement.

## CONCLUSION

In the grand tapestry of Christian marriage, where the threads of faith, love, and intimacy intertwine, the ethical approach to promoting balanced sexual orientation among Christian couples in Nigeria emerges as a profound beacon of hope, illuminating a path through the shadows of cultural taboos, societal pressures, and theological complexities. This approach, meticulously woven from the strands of scripture, natural law, virtue ethics, and contemporary psychological insights, does not merely address the symptoms of sexual discord but strikes at the root of imbalances, transforming the marital union into a sacred space where sexuality reflects the divine harmony intended by God. By affirming the biblical call to mutual submission and joy in intimacy, as seen in 1 Corinthians 7:1-5, it liberates couples from the shackles of patriarchal norms and cultural stigmas that have long suppressed open dialogue and mutual fulfillment, particularly in Nigeria's diverse ethnic contexts.

The integration of natural law and virtue ethics empowers spouses to steward their attractions—whether heterosexual or otherwise—with grace and purpose, aligning their sexual lives with God's redemptive plan, while Yarhouse's Integrative Model offers a compassionate framework for navigating complex identities without compromising faith. By dismantling zero-sum fears and fostering inclusive yet

orthodox conversations, this approach bridges the divide between traditional Christian values and the evolving realities of a globalized world, ensuring that couples experience intimacy as a celebration of God's love rather than a battleground of conflict.

For Nigerian Christian couples, this ethical framework is not just a theoretical construct but a lifeline in a society where sexual dissatisfaction fuels marital breakdowns, contributing to divorce rates that threaten the stability of families and communities. It equips churches to become sanctuaries of education and support, where couples learn to communicate openly, seek professional help without shame, and cultivate virtues that sustain lifelong partnerships. By addressing cultural practices that hinder balance—such as female genital mutilation or taboos against sexual health discussions—it paves the way for a new generation of marriages that model Christ's sacrificial love for the church, as depicted in Ephesians 5:22-33.

The recommendations provided, from premarital counselling to community support groups, are actionable steps toward embedding this ethic into the fabric of Nigerian Christianity, ensuring that the church remains a beacon of hope and healing. Ultimately, this approach heralds a future where Christian couples in Nigeria, and beyond, can embrace their sexuality as a divine gift, fostering unions that not only endure but thrive, radiating God's glory and contributing to a society rooted in love, justice, and mutual flourishing.

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