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Juanita Bynum: No More Sheets as Narrative Emancipation

### Introduction

I find it very difficult to listen to anybody preach to me about being single when they've got a pair of thighs in their bed every night. ... I'm tired of being lied to.

Juanita Bynum

The above statement encapsulates Juanita Bynum's directness and evangelistic style of communicating her belief that fundamentalist Protestants can be empowered to live without breaking biblical laws which she interprets as a commandment from God forbidding premarital sex. It also explicates well her idea that the message should come from someone who has lived the experience from which a sermonic text is expounded. And, she believes it should be taught in the church.

However, before getting to that juncture in her life, it is critical to relate the context in which Bynum spoke. It is 1997, and a young, thirty-something African-American woman is seen pacing, almost marching, back and forth in a path across a long stage in front of a live audience full of, primarily, African American women at a Christian conference. She is carrying a microphone and has sheets wrapped around her mid-waist; sweat beading and then pouring off her face as she preaches to the gathering of women and men about removing themselves both spiritually and literally from "between the sheets" of non-virtuous relationships (Bynum Videocassette 4). The sermon was video-taped and soon became a popular sought-after female evangelical sermon, which was later released in book form as well. The conservative evangelical community had just been introduced to Juanita Bynum. Before this point and time, few had heard

about the woman who would soon become very well known not only in the southeastern United States religious circles but across the country and in other parts of the world as well. The videotape was titled, No More Sheets. The message was taped during a revival and conference under the auspices of Bishop T.D. Jakes, the founder and pastor of The Potter's House ministry located in Dallas, Texas (tdjakes.org).

The ministerial role was not new in Bynum's life. In fact, religion has played a significant part in the life of Bynum who was born into a spiritual household and was taught the ways of God into adulthood (Bynum No More Sheets 44). However, before establishing herself as a nationally acclaimed minister, Bynum, in her videotaped sermon and a book later written from the text titled No More Sheets: the Truth about Sex, detailed the struggles she encountered before being able to live what she proclaimed a sex-free, victorious Christian life as a single woman.

Currently, Bynum is a "Bible teacher, prophet, psalmist and media personality" (juanitabynum.com) as well as the Founder and President of a ministry that bears her name. The organization's headquarters are located in Waycross, Georgia, along with her new record company, Flow. Bynum received her Ph.D. in theology from Truth for Living Bible College in Jacksonville, Florida (juanitabynum.com).

According to Bynum, following a difficult and heartbreaking divorce, which she briefly recounts in both the video sermon and her book, and living a single's life for many years, she married a full-time minister, Bishop Thomas Weeks III. A multifaceted woman, Bynum further describes herself as a person "fueled by a passion to fulfill God's mandates for these turbulent times" (juanitabynum.com). She places particular emphasis on character building by merging the spiritual with everyday life to encourage people to pursue a life of integrity. On her various speaking engagements, Bynum is known for exhortation and encouraging her listeners to "deepen their intimacy with God and to arise to their divine calling and destiny" (juanitabynum.com). Bynum is also known for not being afraid to deal with difficult issues and has an in-your-face

style ministry that has reached thousands of men and women in the United States and abroad. Bynum is also lauded as one of the “leading and highest rated” ([juanitabynum.com](http://juanitabynum.com)) hosts on the televised Trinity Broadcast Network. Her work in ministry has reached beyond the African American community and into other ethnicities and to men as well. She currently plays an instrumental role in the Global Destiny Church alongside her husband, who is the pastor ([myglobaldestiny.com](http://myglobaldestiny.com)).

One may question why it is necessary to focus on one particular woman’s ministry. In accordance, there has not been a superfluity of scholarship produced on her life. Nevertheless, of particular interest for this study will be the way in which Bynum has used her own spiritual life narrative to propel herself into a “success story” and used that same process to reach back and move others forward as well. Therefore, this study will focus on Bynum’s use of the metaphor of “pulling off sheets” to disclose in the narrative the hidden baggage that may be prevalent in her audiences and how she can communicate with others to move them toward something better. Bynum has used her own story to relate how as a fellow Christian she can identify with spiritual strongholds and the process it takes to pull them down.

This analysis will search Bynum’s narrative style to see how it can help lead to freedom since she has told the intimate details of her story before an immense audience in oral and written form. There appears to be no hidden agendas. She has been able to identify her issues, own them, regroup, and reshape them into strengths. Before this point, as a single woman, she wrote of feeling alone and having no commonality with anyone. In sharing her story through sermon, she has rid herself of a social disease by “crawling out of the sheets” (Bynum 91) to feel emancipated and whole again. She relates, “All I could say was, ‘Lord I thank you.’ Immediately, the Lord began to tell me, ‘I’m in control. I’m in control. I’m in control.’ Sometimes, even now, when it gets rough in the ministry, I have to remember, that God is in control. God is in control” (Bynum 94).

This same type of strategy has been used to bring success and a type of “deliverance” to other type groups that adhere to a behavior from which they seek freedom. For instance, Alcoholics Anonymous uses the telling of others’ stories in a group setting to help destroy the behavior that leads them to excessive drinking (Alcoholics-Anonymous.org). Their use is a focus on a higher power, though narrative is the key method used in most groups (Alcoholics-Anonymous.org). This same phenomenon has been seen in groups dealing with such issues as domestic violence and drug addiction as well, revealing that all have messages, symbolic language, or personal narratives to share. The rhetoric is always about self-disclosure through personal narratives which expands to group narrative and identity formation with those groups.

In this critical review, a Burkean analysis of the dialogue used in Bynum’s book and video will be applied in the area of female evangelism and her role in speaking out on sexual relationships and related issues that lead to hurt, spiritual desolation, despondency, and long-lasting guilt, using narrative as a way of moving beyond such circumstances. The specific analysis will apply Burke’s dramaturgic pentad.

This review will argue that the evangelistic style used by Bynum is key in revealing how she brings a refreshingly honest and straight-forward approach to bring about emancipation from certain struggles encountered in life. But, is it realistic to believe that one can accomplish such a life altering change after reading a text or viewing a single video on the matter? Both are vivid illustrations of a break away from the more conservative style of ministering about such private and controversial matters and open the door to at least the possibility of such freedom. It is Bynum’s female imagery and experiences that build identity with her audience of women.

Therefore, the purpose of this essay is to argue that Bynum’s direct and unordinary candid style of preaching she is so well known for is a new and effective tool for reaching audiences of women on a mass scale. In addition, it will reflect Bynum’s severing from the conservative style of female evangelism to establish a worldview of God being readily available to assist in obtaining freedom from the circumstances that Bynum addresses in her sermon, and

that even with this availability, Bynum gives an accurate portrayal of the difficulty of abandoning an unfavorable lifestyle as an ongoing and extended process but one that is achievable.

The significance of these artifacts communicate how Bynum took a momentous risk to minister, in particular a female minister, on a controversial subject from a personal standpoint from a *public* pulpit on a scale that had not been done before, compelling women to leave premarital and post marital sexual relationships, breaking a spiral of silence and barriers to healing and hope, and then offering a solution to women in the conservative Christian institution. She did this by revealing her own struggles as an example for women to use to enhance their walk with God. This is believed to have broken down barriers in the evangelical church to encourage open dialogue on what may have been considered a taboo subject in not only the African American church but ministries of other ethnicities as well, bringing about empathy and understanding for a challenge faced by many conservative evangelicals who live in a secular world that regards sexual freedom as an individual choice void of religious thought or consequence. Rosenau and Sytsma, too, support the thought that the church “Moving beyond our embarrassment and shame to wrestle with God’s design for sexuality within healthy boundaries will continue to provide a medium for our own learning and spiritual formation in this arena of our lives” (261). They postulated further, “Today’s society has created even greater idolatry of sexuality and sexual intimacy. Sex permeates our culture as a shortcut to intimacy, the marketing of most products, or recreational alternatives” (262). Bynum’s messages speak loudly and asserts against such practices.

#### Narrative and Rhetorical Emancipation

Kenneth Burke believed that the use of language is essential in human responses to precise situations. He understood man as “... the symbol-using (symbol-making, symbol-misusing) animal inventor of the negative (or moralized by the negative) separated from his natural condition by instruments of his own making” (Language 16). Dennis Day referred to this when he wrote, “He [Burke] considers the basic purpose of rhetoric to be ‘the use of words by

human agents to form attitudes or to induce actions in other human agents” (271). As alluded to earlier, Bynum utilizes narrative language to tell her own story as a way of emancipation for women. She has done so in hope that a pathway is laid out for her hearers and readers to follow—taking action to obtain a more fulfilling life and a newfound celibacy. Bynum’s story begins in the preface of her book, No More Sheets: The Truth about Sex, with her sharing how the video-taped showing of her sermon, by the same title, and later distributed to vast audiences, “exposed the intimate details of my life, so you can only imagine what I’ve had to face while writing this book” (preface). It was this type language used by Bynum to connect with her audience in a persuasive way. She begins her narrative by revealing she is willing to share the secret parts of her life as a way to lead her fellow spiritual sisters to emancipation. While personal narratives are not uncommon in a testimonial way, few women ministers reveal such intimate details of their personal lives as public examples for others, perhaps because of the stigma attached to promiscuity and women.

She does this by beginning with her sharing how she married a man she felt she was not supposed to marry and was outside of God’s will and His intentions for her life. She reveals very early on that when her husband “came along, he was not God’s will for my life” (Bynum No More Sheets 46). She relates how he too had issues from his past and “carried baggage that had traumatized him years before” (46). However, she married him anyway because of his willingness to do “things I wanted my previous boyfriend to say and do” (46), thus beginning a downward spiral that would forever change her life. Stephanie Taylor supported the use of such narratives as being essential, “talk about place can do discursive work around the construction of continuity within an orderly life narrative, to establish or deny connections from the past into the present and forward into the future” (194). Gusfield related, “We cannot avoid rhetoric” (Burke On Symbols 17), and he informs us that our everyday actions form the stories of our lives and communicate something in a persuasive way to someone else and ourselves. He sees it even in the most common ways, “When we speak, act, dress, eat ...” (17). However, the most prevalent

way to communicate with an audience one is attempting to persuade is to establish a connection through identification with them.

### Identification and Emancipation

Identification has to exist between the speaker and audience. Without it, persuasion is unlikely to occur. Burke purported “A is not identical with his colleague, B. But insofar as their interests are joined, A is *identified* with B” (Burke Rhetoric 20). As a woman of faith and a spiritual leader, Bynum explains that she can identify *and* relate to her audience of women and utilize her own experiences as a way for “emancipating” them. She owns, discloses, and renders her own story before them, therefore, forming a bond with them. Without this disclosing discourse, both sides, Bynum and her audience, would remain silent, impeding identity as a group, progression toward personal healing, and ultimate emancipation from an unconstructive lifestyle and entrapped existence. Socrates believed it unproblematic “to praise Athenians among Athenians” (qtd. in Burke A Rhetoric 55). In other words, Bynum saw herself connected and as one with her audience. She wrote in reference to her No More Sheets video sermon that disclosing intimate details of her life was not a simple matter, especially after the reality of what she had done began to sink in after preaching her own life story, “Last night I didn’t uncover myself with a man, but I stood before a crowd and bared my soul. I shared the intimate details of my life with single men who have likewise been trapped in unholy relationships” (19). This sharing of common ground with her audience boosts her ability to identify with them and them with her, setting the ground for her sermon to take hold. This overlapping of substance between Bynum and her audience increased their level of identification with each other. Burke’s concept of identification included consubstantiality as necessary to a way of life. He wrote, “For substance, in the old philosophies, was an act; and a way of life is an *acting-together*; and in acting together, men have common sensations, concepts, images, ideas, attitudes that make the *consubstantial*” (Burke On Symbols 181). Dennis Day wrote in

Persuasion and the Concept of Identification, “It is in the means of achieving persuasion that Burke’s approach appears unique. He contends that persuasion can be achieved only through identification (271).

Identification with her audience was also essential in building a rapport with them, which Bynum established with her own style and content. However, the style and content were very familiar to her African American audience, allowing for a necessary flow to occur between Bynum and the group she was trying to reach. Burke expanded on this:

Here is perhaps the simplest case of persuasion. You persuade a man only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, *identifying* your ways with him. Persuasion by flattery is but a special case of persuasion in general. But flattery can safely serve as our paradigm if we systematically widen its meaning, to see behind it the conditions of identification or consubstantiality in general. (A Rhetoric 55).

This closed any division that may have presented itself beforehand, since without division there would not have been a need for identification and thus no need to try to persuade the women that another life was available to them (Rosenfeld 179). Burke wrote placing identification and division alongside each other, eliminating any lines of demarcation, sets the perfect stage for inviting rhetoric (Rhetoric 25), and therefore, opportunity for convincing one to take action.

Finally, to connect the role of narrative and identification as seen in Bynum’s religious or spiritual style rhetoric and other “survivor” groups, Jeremiah McAuliffe included in his dissertation that the well-known and respected organization Alcoholics Anonymous has used this same type rhetoric of alcohol as a disease that cannot be treated with medicine. Instead, he explained how “implicit in AA’s rhetoric is the idea of humankind as more than a biological and psychological animal. Its primary focus is on humankind as spiritual and consequently moral beings who, in the case of alcoholism, can be healed by choosing a spiritual solution” (McAuliffe chapter 1 Rhetoric of AA). He, too, included Burke’s idea of dramatism as a way in which to

emancipate alcoholics. McAuliffe believed that AA's use of dramatism is a method of analysis that is:

Necessary because the rhetoric of AA does not reduce the experience of alcoholism to one set of manageable propositions. Rather it embraces ambiguity and contradictions. Describing Burke's dramatic method of symbolic analysis, Duncan states that Burke 'seeks not to avoid ambiguity, doubt, question, incongruity, and contradiction, but to include them in his theory of the act.' The hallmark of communication in AA is its vivid and dramatic use of storytelling. (McAuliffe chapter 1 Rhetoric of AA)

#### Dramatistic Sermonizing

Using a Burkean pentadic framework, this essay reviews a symbolic social drama by Bynum as one grounded in her motivation to see women free themselves from premarital sexual relationships or enter post marital celibacy. She does this using a straightforward dialect familiar to women within the African American community, though the message could be directed to and embraced by most women, regardless of ethnicity.

Bynum's use of a book based upon a live-to-tape sermon has been distributed in an effort to persuade fellow Christian women to let go of non-platonic relationships and live in a way that is pleasing to God until a mate is sent for her. She does this as an effort to have those women hopefully adopt her message in the book as reality and as true, constructing a new spiritual reality.

Based upon Burke's pentad, the act names what took place in thought or deed (Burke Grammar xv). Burke wrote, "'Formal' cause ('the form or pattern, i.e. the formula of essence') is the equivalent of our term act" (Grammar 228). In connection with Bynum, this would refer to her videotaped sermon and a book based on that message. She related in her book, No More Sheets: the Truth About Sex, "Trust me when I tell you that upon completing this walk with me, you will have become a better person. You will have done what a lot of people are afraid to do. You will have faced your past" (introduction).

The agent is the person or kind of person who performed the act (Burke Grammar xv). In this case, it would be Bynum who wrote and performed in the video. Burke believed that with the agent, “unadulteratedly idealistic philosophy starts and ends in the featuring of properties belonging to the term agent” (Grammar 171). Tonn et al. wrote the agent “reveal a perspective that views agents as rational and reality as constructed or caused by human choices” (166). This idealism, Burke wrote “leads readily into both individual and group psychology” (Grammar 172). Bynum’s idealistic attitude is self-evident in her book and video. She exhibits the belief that her sharing of her journey from a backslidden lifestyle to one of a victorious Christian follows a pattern that can be readily accepted. She shared how she had to “dismantle” (95) her old lifestyle by ridding her house of any and all things that had been given to her by any man she was not married to. Bynum revealed, “For God to heal me and for me to step into the purpose He had for my life, I had to take the other person off of the throne of my heart. I had to put God back on the throne” (96).

The scene in the Burke pentad as it relates to Bynum would be the background of the act, or where it occurred (Burke Grammar xv). This is explained by Tonn et al. as Burke’s claim that the scene “reflect[s] a perspective that is committed to viewing the world as relatively permanent and deterministic” (166). Bynum’s view of the world does allow for choice within her audience in making decisions that affect them. She encourages women to go through a purification process that allows them to discern when good and evil are presented, “Not only does He call you His, He also turns around and brings restoration to your power to discern. When He does that, you’re able to discern what is good and what is evil, what is God and what is not” (Bynum 107). However, the textual context from which Bynum’s scene arises is based in her life story and experiences she has encountered while she believes living outside the boundaries of God’s laws and commandments. As for the physical scene and background in which Bynum spoke in her video, it involved a large, auditorium style seating arrangement that surrounded the stage Bynum spoke from on three sides. During the taping, her preaching style ignited electricity that

circulated throughout the congregation, bringing audience members to their feet with rousing hand claps and shouts of amen, and yes Lord (Bynum videocassette 4). Bynum appeared to be at home and in her element—she and the audience feeding off each other. The text was written as a by-product of the video, allowing her to present the same discourse in a way in which her audience could digest the words at their own pace and in their own setting. It also allowed Bynum's rhetoric to reach a larger audience.

When referring to the agency in Burke's pentadic framework, he defined it as the means or instruments used to perform the act (Burke *A Grammar* xv). The agency, then in Bynum's case would be the language used in her book and video-taped sermon. She first revealed her life story during the video-taped sermon and released a book by the same title with the extension of the "Truth about Sex" added a year later. Her directness and honest portrayal of her life before she completely submitted to God was laid out without hesitation before her audience. Betz explains Burke's belief that use of language operates from an implicit principle of perfectionism and in our "attempt to control the world around us, we choose words to help us deal with persons, situations, and events around us" (30). These words come to represent our experience in a type of purity and perfection in a semantic sense. However, Betz added in a pragmatic sense words and their personal meaning "become the focus of expectations" (30). Though this may be true in Bynum's case, it doesn't appear to be an issue of controlling her world. Instead, it appears to be an attempt to open dialogue to such a hidden and oftentimes hush-hush subject, particularly, in the conservative, evangelical Christian world and thus allowing a way for the subject to be confronted and addressed from a position of spiritual authority. Bynum lets her readers know, "When the devil comes against you, you must have power to rebuke him. You're a body fighting against itself" (112). She goes further to explain that the enemy that was once inside the woman, once delivered becomes her enemy in a new fight. She suggests a process of purification and purging (113).

Burke refers to a fifth tool used to persuade when applying his pentadic model. It is referred to as purpose, which he describes as the “why” of a person’s motive and actions (Burke Grammar xv). When applying this model to Bynum’s work, the purpose would be described as the main motivation behind her sermon and book. She elucidates in her book, “My heart is heavy with the burdens of people who hide their secrets and suffer behind fake smiles. I have such a love for God’s people, and I want to see them live victorious lives” (30). In her video, Bynum relates how she was painfully embarrassed when God spoke to her to pull the sheets off of her own life in order to show others how to do the same. This type rhetoric had not been seen before the making of Bynum’s video-taped sermon. In fact, talking about such a subject was not as likely to occur within a conventional church setting, much less on a larger scale as the one on which this issue was addressed. Bynum basically uses her story to lead women back to a type of redemption.

#### Symbolic Redemption

In addition to applying the pentad to Bynum’s rhetorical practices, a look, should perhaps, be taken as well at his guilt-redemption cycle, which Burke saw as being at the root of all rhetoric. The guilt-redemption cycle centers on the arousal of guilt experienced by the speaker, who in turn seeks purification by either mortification or self-sacrifice or victimage, which Burke refers to as the “scapegoat mechanism” (Grammar 206). In this case, the scapegoat was Satan or the persistence of evil influence in keeping women from reaching their fullest potential in spiritual growth. Bynum blames the enemy of the “flesh”, or worldliness, for causing the problems of wanting to be in unholy relationships. Burke spoke of such transference as a way of cleansing oneself by “... loading the burden of their own iniquities upon it (the scapegoat)” (Grammar 406). Appel wrote of this cycle as being the “cyclical term for order” that would include “the four-stage progression of dramatic action, from order to guilt, through sacrifice, to redemption” (27). Redemption was then gained after “vicarious atonement” (Grammar 406). However, on the other hand, Bynum has also gained redemption with her audience through her

own mortification, naming herself (self sacrifice) for making some decisions that brought numerous troubles into her own life.

Continuing in the thought of guilt-redemption cycle, Samra explains Burke's three notions of guilt, purification and redemption as being brought on by acceptance or rejection of hierarchy (par. 2). This rejection leads to the person in the position feeling guilt, and in order to deal with the rejection that Burke felt was so inherent in society, one seeks a "ritual purification" through one of the methods mentioned above, victimage or scapegoating. Bynum reveals her own fallacies and fall from grace when she entered what she calls unhealthy relationships and the in presenting herself as a self-sacrificing example in order to help others;

I have a mandate from heaven to solidify the singles so they may find satisfaction in a Savior. I must divulge some truths to the divorced so they can reach their divine destination. I also must challenge the couples so they can be more than conquerors in Christ. Finally, I must offer hope to a dying world so that they can have all that God has promised them. (33).

Samra supported this act of mortification, "The act of purification must then be appropriate to the sin of the guilty for the drama to succeed as an act of redemption" (par. 2), and she commented further that the extent of self-sacrifice or mortification must be equal to the amount of guilt that led to rejection by the social order or redemption is still not met. After gaining redemption, Bynum then begins to move to another spiritual level.

#### Transcendence and Revelation

Bynum's message of being freed from and remaining free from unholy sexual relationships adheres to Burke's transcendence. Betz explains it from a perspective of human motive. He defines transcendence as a rhetorical appeal that "speaks to that part of every person who seeks to create a better self or a better world" (28). He applies Burke's idiom of transcendence to explain that such an existence is based on humans' needs to seek some sort of salvation while trying to help others solve a problem of human existence, though not always

necessarily from a religious viewpoint (28). Bynum states “You must earn the privilege of walking out the deliverance you speak of. Many of us have not paid the price but we want the results” (No More Sheets 124). Her writing about existing apart from the secular world standards speaks directly to her audience:

This is the way you put on the new man: You put on the new man by searching for him through the Word. How is this man made? He is made after God, Who is Righteousness and True Holiness. When you find truth in God’s Word, it is seed that is planted in your heart. You must be careful to protect your seed. You must work on your own life to protect your position in God. (No More Sheets 125)

Transcendence is related to Bynum’s openness. Revelation is an area in which Bynum’s narrative forms the strongest bond with her audience of both viewers and readers. This, according to Roseau and Sytsma is an area that needs to be delved into in the evangelical world. They explain that discussions about sexual intimacy are still a topic of struggle in the church (261). They posit that “Today’s church is still filled with ignorance, avoidance and confusion in this central area of life and relationships” (261). Their call is for a theology of sexuality and sexual intimacy; though Bynum’s rhetorical argument goes even farther in calling for an abandonment of sexual relationships outside the bounds of matrimony, her beliefs meld well with Rosenau and Sytsma when they say, “Now, more than ever, the Church needs to provide a better answer than a simple, ‘sex is for marriage’” (261) message. The two carry equivalent beliefs in another area of ideology as well in promoting the idea that such spirituality can lead to redemption and healing for those who have encountered broken sexual relationships and seek help from the church (261).

#### Analysis

Foss et al. describe Burke’s pentad as a critical instrument designed to reduce statements of motives to the most fundamental level which he suggests consists of five terms: act, agent,

agency, scene, and purpose” (200) as were explained beforehand and is restated here. The act would be any conscious or purposive action, which in this case is Bynum’s preaching and writing with intent to persuade and move her audience to a different realm of existence. The agent, Bynum herself, is the group or individual who performs the act—the message, while the agency is the means used to perform the act or the instruments used to accomplish it. This would refer us to Bynum’s videotape and her book. Whereas, purpose is the agent’s private intention in performing the act, the scene asks the critic to name the ground, location, or situation in which the act takes place (Foss, et al. 201), which in this instance is the revival setting in which she ministered.

Concerning a dramatic approach, L. Virginia Holland wrote, “Burke believes that all literature grows directly out of a social situation and is a man’s response to a condition in human affairs” (353). This would relate to Bynum’s use of her own life and shared reality as an example and, perhaps, textual roadmap for other women. This is reflected in Bynum’s book, “I feel as though I am about to enter into covenant with many of you who have longed for someone with whom to share their innermost thoughts” (30). Here Bynum is offering to open up herself to her audience in a realistic way while encouraging whoever is reading the text or viewing the video to do the same. This constructed and shared reality is intended to further her female readers to take steps to get out of their situations. Holland further postulated that “a speech is just as much a creative strategy for solving a social problem as building a bridge is a strategy for solving a physical problem” (354) and that the critic “must realize that there are just as many strategies which a speaker may use to solve a situation as there are ways which the speaker has of reacting or responding to a situation” (Holland 354). Here, Bynum takes the opportunity to shed the cloak of secrecy and make herself as vulnerable as she is asking her audience to become. She relates, “We are so afraid of someone taking advantage of our nakedness that we keep ourselves totally covered. Whether mine or yours, wounds will not heal without getting some air” (Bynum No More Sheets 31). Metaphorically, this “air” would be revealing the secrets that keep Christian

women (and men) enshrouded and ashamed, dealing with the wounds of not only having sexual relations with someone they are not married to, but breaking a command from God.

In analyzing Bynum's written discourse it is important to consider pentadic ratios, which Burke believes is crucial because, they are "... principles of determination" (Grammar 15). It appears that the agency is the dominant element of the five areas of the pentadic ratio. This emerges because Bynum's sole purpose for preaching from a public pulpit in an arena of hundreds of people and for writing the book that was distributed nationally is to reveal her own faults and actions to her audience and her path to triumph over degrading relationships in hopes her view will be supported and taken on as truth. The other half of the ratio would be that of the agent. Without her story, the incidents that occurred in her life, the video-taped sermon would not have taken place, nor would the book have been written. This is supported by Tonn et al. who wrote arguments that feature "agent" reveal a perspective that views agents as rational and reality as constructed or caused by human choices" (166).

It is important to note that the central relationship in Bynum's work reflects a strategy of agent-agency since she (telling her story) played a major role in the unfolding and the telling of the narrative and in connecting with her audience. Bynum takes on a philosophical role of realism in which she sees her experiences as real and revelatory in helping others. The agency, or the book and video, are propelled in a way for her audience to pragmatically escape the situation they're in with a man to whom they are not married. She delves into what was not right about herself and asks women in her audience to take a long and hard look at themselves, too, and admit when things aren't going well by telling them to look into a truth-seeking mirror, "You need to explore what it is about you that may not be right; do this before you dwell on what was not right in your mate. You can't change your mate, you can only change you. That's why I had to forgive my ex-husband" (Bynum 62).

Bynum's words reflect her belief and motives to have the women she addresses do the "right thing". Returning to Holland, the author speaks of Burke's contention that the "rhetorical

critic must understand the substance of man, what he is, what his problems are, why he acts as he does, and how he molds thoughts and concepts of others” (Holland 352). She further explains Burke’s belief that, “man’s substance may best be described through the dramatic metaphor of Man as an Actor” (352) and that:

He is an actor acting out his life with purpose in view of achieving the Ultimate Good. Since man is specially a symbol-using animal who expresses himself symbolically primarily through linguistic structures, the main way that he acts is verbally, or through the medium of language. Through his verbal ‘naming’ or describing things and situations he acts in speeches he makes and in documents he writes. (Holland 352)

This ties in directly with Bynum’s use of language in her oral sermon and the writing of No More Sheets: The Truth About Sex. Gusfield wrote language is essential when communicating with an audience. He feels it affects an audience through “its form and style” (Burke On Symbols 18). It is imperative to note that Bynum’s unique use of language in both her text and video is of major importance in the way in which she relates to her audience. She speaks in a down-to-earth and matter-of-fact dialect that reaches directly to the African American woman who may identify with her. This may be considered unusual and unconventional from a standard, conservative fundamentalist viewpoint. However, Bynum sees her plain-speak as a way of getting at the root of the problem that has been able to exist because of a lack of this type of direct communication with women in the church. In the beginning of her video she establishes the fact that her message will not be a “sugar-coated” one. For instance, in one part of her video-taped sermon she addressed the usually hands-off subject of masturbation. Bynum is quite pointed with her audience in her thinking on the matter:

This ain’t 1920. This ain’t 1969. Aw, come on. Wake up and smell the coffee. This ain’t 1980. Aw, we’re going into the year 2000. Aw, come on somebody! And if the church

don't get real with the people of God, we're gonna lose a whole lotta folks. It's time out for putting the covers on it and trying to hide it up, and don't wanna say it, and don't, no, no, no, no. It's time to confront the situation as it is. Call a spirit a spirit. Don't tell me. I want to know how to be free! (Bynum videocassette 4)

Response to Bynum's videotaped sermon was enthusiastic and emotional as hand-clapping, nods of agreement and shouts of amen echoed across the auditorium in which she ministered.

It is this type strategy of "realness" that makes Bynum's style of preaching and writing so genuine and receptive to her audience. It is a fracture from the traditional, conservative method of sermonizing from both a male and female evangelical perspective, especially when dealing with such private issues. Holland noted that it is important for the way in which the speaker utilizes speaking patterns. She explained that a speaker using Bynum's method might use "... specific devices as these: satirizing, flag-waving, whitewashing, debunking, tear-jerking, getting-on-the-bandwagon, and so on" (354). Bynum simply wants to get the message across to the women in her audience by whatever means necessary, "You're not going through this alone. I've been there. Whatever you're feeling, I've felt it too. That's why you see me on the platform praising God with my whole heart" (Bynum 59). The strategy of the dramatic pentad might remind the critic of all the factors present in any speech situation (Holland 355). However, Bynum's style may be described or defined; it apparently fits with her audience's responsiveness.

Overall, pentadic ratios come together to represent Bynum's motives. The motivation for the making of the video and the writing of the book are believed to be to promote change in the lives of women, particularly those in the church. While her speaking and text may be taken as an indictment to any and all women, especially African American women who were in her audience, it is not the belief that that is the intention of the speaker. She appeared to be simply stating, if you're in this situation, here is what you can do about it. Bringing a private subject to the public arena in such a blunt and blatant way is one that while Rosenau et al., agree is private, there are

times the subject needs to be broached, “Yet, while our sex lives *are* private and the topic holy, we can reflect God’s example and communicate about sexuality [(e.g., Song of Solomon)]” (261).

While Bynum’s book and videotape were aimed primarily at contemporary society, there are scholarly writings that share a call for waiting until marriage for sexual intimacy. McClymond wrote that there are few books that market celibacy. He says the books are out-of-date and targeted more towards “teenagers and monks” (218). He cites statistics from among those never married, widows and divorcees to account for sixty nine million unmarried people since 1990 who have to deal with the issues of either premarital or post marital sex (219), which makes Bynum’s evangelical messages quite timely.

Delving deeper into the purpose of Bynum’s work, one cannot overlook the message that goes far beyond her communication about sex outside the boundaries of marriage. Her book and video are also about establishing a deeper and more meaningful relationship with God. Her metaphoric use of “sheets” is a declarative call for Christian women (and men) to cast off the bondage of sexual sin and open themselves to the will of God. She demonstrates this through showing her own humanness and trial and error deliverance. Bynum’s frank method of communication ties in with Schultze’s beliefs about God and communication. He sees humans helping each other in communication as being “caretakers of creation, as symbol-using stewards who can create life-giving cultures, or ways of life” (15). Bynum is trying to “create” a better spiritual life for those who seek it, and in the process a deeper intimacy with God.

#### Other Views

On the other hand, not all agree with Bynum’s assessment of God calling for a holy intimacy for married couples only. In a review written on the book *The Poetics of Intimacy and the Problem of Sexual Abstinence* by Michael Hartwig, J. F. Keenan addresses the issue of religion and sexual intimacy. He refers to Hartwig’s call for questioning the fundamentalist belief that sex is for those who are married and how he posits the development of a “heuristic guideline” (637) of a virtue based sexual ethics “based on the notion of poetic intimacy” (637).

Keenan claims Hartwig discharges the idea that individuals should have life-long abstinence, which he sees as negative containment. In the review Hartwig, thus, proposes several methods that surround the idea of self-giving in such intimate relationships. In one instance, Pope cites Hartwig's belief that the Bible supports such relationships in quoting verses from the book of Genesis that admonish men and women to be fruitful and multiply (637). Furthermore, Ellingson et al. purport traditional issues dealing with sexuality have centered mainly on celibacy and heterosexual marriages. But, they see the discussion expanding to include other issues. They stated, changes in sexual mores and practices since the 1960s have led religious bodies, as well as individual clergy and laity, to question the traditional ethic of control" (6), leading to tensions within religious organizations. Conversely, Bynum refutes such notions, calling for fundamentalists, particularly women, to obey scripture and submit to the teachings of their church leadership, whom she refers to as shepherds (Bynum 84). She wrote, "God placed leaders in our lives to watch over our souls" (85). She makes a call for women to go back to Biblical truths and apply them to their lives without regard for what the secular world may support. Her writings reflect the belief that going against scriptural truths can "wreak havoc" in the church (102). In fact, she tells her audience of readers that it is their turn to take control of their lives and follow the plan God has laid out for them but only through obedience. Bynum relates, "There is a plan God has for you. Right now, the Lord is earmarking people and destinations where you are going to be birthed into the fullness of your calling" (102).

#### Conclusion and Implications

In conclusion, there appears to be a lack of scholarly research into the area and role of the modern day female evangelists, particularly African-American women, who use personal and candid narratives as Bynum's in their messages of abandoning unhealthy sexual relationships or other types of self-destructive behaviors. This may be an area most appropriate for pursuing further study in relation to this subject matter.

This critical essay acquaints us with the aspect of narrative emancipation through the telling of a self-story from the perspective of one African-American evangelist, Juanita Bynum. As stated earlier, Bynum uses an unconventional method of plain-speak in reaching her audience. The method is employed both in her video-taped sermon and a subsequent book written from the same message. Hers is one of hope and encouragement to women who have been in unholy relationships and who need guidance in abandoning them and throwing away the “sheets” or bondage that keep them bound and from an intimate relationship with God. This essay’s purpose was to show how Bynum used her own story of sexual promiscuity and failed relationships as a case in point to other women, particularly those in the church to construct a new spiritual reality that does not include pre or post marital sex and includes a view that this can be achieved through God who is readily available to help when earnestly asked. This open dialogue and style of offering a conservative Christian worldview of celibacy communicated on a public and national scale had not been achieved before, breaking down a wall of silence or barrier between the audience members who may have been suffering from such a plight. Bynum’s sense of realness had not been seen before from a personal perspective which can be effective and persuasive. Schultze wrote that each of speak from our own distinct personalities, “an underlying personhood”, which is very powerful in communicating with others (93). He explained that audience opinions of a speaker influences communication. And, he relates that charisma has much to do with those opinions. Bynum does not lack in that area of communication. She demonstrates charisma in her videotaped sermon that connects with her audience. Schultze stated such communication is considered authentic and not just image (94).

As conjectured before, there has been little scholarly research carried out on Bynum’s rhetorical *style*, which allows one to surmise that the field is wide-open for investigative study and the opening of new dialogue and questions in this area, such as how frank, open and personal should a minister be when communicating to an audience of people attending worship, appears to

be a good question. And, are there limitations on just how much should be revealed is another. These questions and what has been written beforehand in this exposition are just an illustration of what could lead to a larger research area on this or similar topics. Bynum's work may be just a beginning.

It is believed however, as long as there is a role and place for the female evangelist, there will always be room for narrative emancipation as these spiritual leaders tell their stories in order to help other women find their way to spiritual independence from *any* type life-hindering obstacle in their lives. McDougall supports this premise when writing about theology from a feminist standpoint. She believes the experiences of women's everyday lives are being drawn upon for "theological reflection" (20), however, not in the traditional sense at which it was first looked upon to see how women were being marginalized in ministry work. She sees today's narrative style preaching by women as a source of knowledge in the area of religious work and embodied knowledge. She also sees women's stories as the "testing ground for new theological proposals" (20). This analysis appears to be successful in applying Burke's dramatic pentad in revealing Bynum's motivation for sharing such intimate details of her life with such a vast audience, and attitude in presenting it in the way in which she did. In referring to Burke's method, Samra wrote that the "...process is based on the notion that we are imperfect creatures who appeal to an authority higher than ourselves for absolution from our own weaknesses" (par. 6). Bynum's style was consistent with this postulation.

Even further implications for future research would be to expand to all women, regardless of their ethnicity or racial background, which may already have occurred with the national release of the video and the distribution of Bynum's book. This is an issue that affects many women as they attempt to grow and leave behind issues of hurt that keeps them from leading spiritually fulfilled and successful lives. Additional questions may include whether or not the women who responded so fervently to Bynum's book and video led to *any* changes in their lifestyle or any *lasting* lifestyle change. Another area of exploration could inquire into whether or not such

public revelations are accepted by those in evangelical roles and what effect, if any, her work has had on the offering of help for such problems within the conservative evangelical church and community in developing a new spiritual reality.

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