

## **Proposal**

### **AAR Regional Development Grant Application**

#### **Sex on the Margins: Navigating Religious, Social, and Natural Scientific Models of Sex Differences**

**Institutions:** Institute for the Bio-Cultural Study of Religion and Boston University

**Project Co-Directors:**

Stephanie N. Arel, PhD  
[snarel@bu.edu](mailto:snarel@bu.edu)

Megan K. DeFanza, PhD  
[defranza@bu.edu](mailto:defranza@bu.edu)

Kate Stockly, MA  
[kstockly@bu.edu](mailto:kstockly@bu.edu)

## **Statement of Significance and Impact**

### **for Scholars in the American Academy of Religion, Boston Region, and Beyond**

We request support for a conference entitled “Sex on the Margins: Navigating Religious, Social, and Natural Scientific Models of Sex Differences” and a collection of essays emerging from this conference for a special edition of a journal (we are inquiring with *Zygon* and the *Journal of Science, Religion and Culture*) which will bring together scholars of sex, gender, and sexuality to examine how the conception of these develops in religion, the natural and social sciences, and medical care particularly for those on the margins.

Boston is home to some of the leading healthcare providers for sex, gender, and sexual minorities. From Fenway Health (one of the first medical facilities for sexual minorities) to Mass General and Boston Children’s Hospitals (some of the leaders in pediatric care for children with sex and gender differences), Boston is home to those institutions where the rubber of theory meets the road of personal well-being. Yet, even here sex and gender minorities do not always receive equitable health care. Despite the recommendations by intersex groups cautioning against non-medically necessary interventions and encouraging conversations with affected adults, parents of intersex children are still routinely encouraged to pursue “medical correction” and not always given contact information for intersex support groups. Care for gender minorities can also be difficult to find; thus, Fenway Health is working to educate health care providers so that medical care for transgender people is no longer a specialty practice but a routine part of primary care, addressing what we believe to be a fundamental human right to health care. Nevertheless, preference for binary sex difference continues to influence medical professionals in this region.

Of course, medical care for minorities takes place across the country and around the globe. As Boston is among the leaders in healthcare facilities, we believe that the work we do in our region will benefit those elsewhere. At this time, we have acquired support for about 55% of our budgeted costs. We are requesting the full \$4,000 of the AAR Regional Development Grant to help us bring this conference to Boston (see page 5).

#### **The project addresses fundamental research questions:**

- How does our growing knowledge of sex, gender, and sexualities impact binary models of sex within religion, science, and medicine?
- How do religious and theological traditions influence conceptions of sex and gender?
- How does science problematized categories of sex and gender?

**The goal of the conference is to enlarge the framework through which we approach sex and gender through cross-disciplinary conversations.** Building on the energy generated by the 2015 conference co-sponsored by the Boston University Department of Biology, Center for the Philosophy of Science, and Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Program entitled *Diversity, Plasticity, and the Science of Sexuality*, we propose to contribute to this discussion by introducing the consideration of religious beliefs and praxis.

Sociologists and gender scholars highlight the marginalization of women, sexual minorities, gender minorities (genderqueer and transgender persons), and sex minorities (intersex/differences of sex development) in order to correct past and present social and religious marginalization. The method entails deconstructing the binary anthropological model, which defines men as male, masculine, and gynephilic and women as female, feminine, and androphilic. These scholars assert diversity among men and women, including the presence of those who cannot be categorized as male or female, adjudicating an inadequacy in the binary as a theoretical model for advancing human knowledge. On the other hand, scholars in the physical and evolutionary sciences base their research on binary patterns of sex difference facilitated by reproductive complementarity. In looking for broad patterns of sex difference, they often overlook exceptions to the binary model. In order to work against the marginalization of minorities, sociologists describe sex differences on spectra while natural scientists focus on statistical majorities within these spectra supporting a binary framework for the investigation of human sex differences. The emphasis on statistical majorities and minimizing of exceptions can be seen to run counter to efforts to understand human diversity and protect minority groups. While both approaches have their benefits, a more integrated model would advance understanding of sex, gender, and sexualities from an interdisciplinary perspective.

Religious scholars explore the question of what it means to be human and the religious significance of sex differences. In the West, cultural norms informed by Christianity have influenced scientists in reading the male/female binary as “given by God.” While many scientists are moving away from these Christian readings, the impact of conservative religious thought remains (often unrecognized) to make an impact on scientific and medical traditions. Meanwhile, scholars attempting to bring theological resources into conversation with contemporary science find themselves caught between ethical concerns to protect and care for the marginalized as well as epistemological concerns for interpreting both sociological and natural scientific studies of what it means to be human as sexed, gendered, and sexual beings.

Inquiry into the dynamic interactions among and between social, religious, and biological factors is critical for moving the conversation about sex and gender past the impasse brought about by the current divide in disciplinary approaches to sex differences. Since all questions, including scientific ones, are culturally and therefore also religiously informed, we cannot understand what scientists do without placing science in dialogue with the cultural/religious framework within which it operates. Similarly, religious questions are also formed by science, which has now become the de facto epistemological framework of modernity. Without such an understanding of the interconnection between biology, culture, and religion, we are left with an incomplete analysis of theories of sex/gender that fails to recognize the biological diversity and statistical similarities of human experience. If we are grow in our skills to adequately care for all people, in our hospitals, educational institutions, communities, and places of worship, we would do well to bring together diverse specialists for the benefit of all.

### Confirmed Conference Participants

<b>Name</b>	<b>University</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Role</b>
Alviso, Xochitl	California State University	Los Angeles, CA	Respondent
Arel, Stephanie	IBCSR	Boston, MA	Organizer
Barthold, Lauren	Gordon College	Boston, MA	Paper Presenter
Cornwall, Susannah	Exeter University	Devon, UK	Key Note
DeFranza, Megan	Boston University	Boston, MA	Organizer
Devore, Tiger	Clinical Psychologist	Las Vegas, NV	Respondent
Knust, Jennifer	Boston University	Boston, MA	Consultant
Malatino, Hilary	East Tennessee State	Johnson City, TN	Panel Speaker
Petro, Anthony	Boston University	Boston, MA	Consultant
Preston, Carrie J.	Boston University	Boston, MA	Consultant
Schippert, Claudia	University of Central Florida	Orlando, FL	Panel Speaker
Stockly, Kate	Boston University	Boston, MA	Organizer
Wildman, Wesley	Boston University	Boston, MA	Consultant

## Budget

1. Travel:		Total: \$--
a.	The travel costs cover air or train travel, and travel to and from the airport/train station for the keynote speaker (Susannah Cornwall) and speakers, who either serve as responders during the Friday evening opener and those who have been preselected to be responders to a panel. The approximated cost for air or land travel for these participants totals at approximately \$--, with travel to and from the airport/train totaling \$--, to come to a final cost of \$--.	
2. Supplies and Materials:		Total: \$--
a.	Fliers and paper materials to advertise the conference internally will run \$-- for printing costs.	
3. Services:		Total: \$--
a.	Services include payment for facility clean-up at Boston University at a rate of \$-- per day totaling \$-- for this three-day event.	
4. Other Costs:		Total: \$--
a.	Lodging: The keynote speaker and the panel respondents will be accommodated at a local hotel, Boston Hotel Buckminster at approximately the following rates: Thursday, February 16 at \$-- per night; Friday, February 17 at \$-- per night and Saturday, February 18 at \$-- a night. Total costs, including taxes and fees at 14.45%, will be \$-- per person for the duration of the conference.	
b.	A stipend of \$-- will be distributed to the conference keynote, Susannah Cornwall. Other participants will donate their time to the conference.	
c.	Food and drink provided at conference: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Friday evening appetizers and drink for 75: \$--</li> <li>ii. Saturday morning coffee, fruit, bakery items for 75: \$--</li> <li>iii. Coffee throughout the day Saturday: \$--</li> <li>iv. Lite fare provided for lunch Saturday: \$--</li> <li>v. Dinner Saturday evening for conference keynote and panel consultants for 13 people \$--</li> <li>vi. Sunday morning coffee, fruit, bakery items for 75: \$--</li> </ul>	
d.	Other sustenance for the keynote speaker and each panel speaker at a total of eight people will be provided at a rate of \$-- per diem, totaling \$-- per person for the conference at coming to a final total of \$--.	
5. TOTAL CONFERENCE COST		\$--
6. Sponsors contributions:		
a.	Institute for the Bio-Cultural Study of Religion	\$--
b.	Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies	\$--
7. Total Remaining		\$--

## Proposed Program

### FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 24

4:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.

Registration

5:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.

Opener: Panel Discussion (5 Participants on questions regarding project in general and brief viewing of Documentary on Intersex Persons of Faith) – Open to the public, who will be encouraged to attend

### SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 25

8:00 a.m. – 8:30 a.m.

Registration

8:30 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.

Parallel Sessions

1A Sexuality in the church

2A Sex and Gender at the intersection of religion and culture

10:15 a.m. – 11:45 a.m.

Parallel Sessions

1B Translating scientific research about sex for religious communities

2B Transgender/intersex and education

11:45 a.m. – 1:30 p.m. Lunch

1:30 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.

Parallel Sessions

1C The impact of stigmatization of sex/gender by religion

2C The psychological effects and implication of living intersex

3:15 p.m. – 4:45 p.m.

Parallel Session

1D Transgender in culture and religious communities

2D Public policy issues around gender/sex

5:00 p.m. – 6:30 p.m.

Plenary Speaker: Susannah Cornwall, Ph.D. (Exeter University), a global leader in the field of Sex Difference and Religion.

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 26

9:00 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.

Parallel Sessions

1E Reconstructing masculinities

2E Historical religious representations and treatment of intersex

10:45 a.m. – 12:15 p.m.

Parallel Sessions

1F Cross-cultural interpretations of gender/sex

2F Applying genetics, endocrinology, neurobiology to the study of sex/gender

**We are encouraging paper contributions which fit into the following themes but welcoming submissions with related topics:**

- Social and Natural Scientific approaches to the study of sex and gender
- Sex and Gender at the intersection of religion and culture
- Cross-cultural interpretations of gender/sex
- Educating religious communities and publics on transgender and intersex
- The impact of stigmatization of sex/gender by religion
- Historical religious representations and treatment of intersex
- The psychological/spiritual/religious effects and implications of living intersex and/or transgender
- Transgender in culture and religious communities
- Applying genetics, endocrinology, neurobiology to the study of sex/gender
- Reconstructing masculinities
- Translating scientific research about sex for religious communities
- Public policy issues around gender/sex

## Working Timeline

### *January 2016*

- Consolidation of consulting team and first meeting of monthly planning meetings

### *February –April 2016*

- Selection of figures and topics to be discussed, invitations to invited speakers, call for papers for remaining conference speakers
- Get on the calendar of major related organizations or journals: FEAST, National Women's Studies Associations, American Academy of Religion, Zygon, Center for Theological Inquiry, Boston Theological Institutes, Center for the Study of Religion at Princeton, American Anthropological Association
- All of the above on IBCSR Website including ability to register

### *August 2016*

- Review submissions from call for papers and select papers for conference inclusion

### *September 2016*

- Finalize conference program
- Begin arranging travel for participants

### *October 2016*

- Finalize conference lunches/dinners and travel
- Begin putting conference materials – schedule, programs, streaming information, abstracts, etc. on IBCSR website
- Conference poster produced

### *November 2016*

- Bibliography and resources on IBCSR Website

### *December 2016*

- Posts paper abstracts, password protected papers, and commentaries on IBCSR website
- Conference programs and attendee packets produced
- Pre-selection of essays for journal edition



*January 2017*

- Deliver papers to respondents
- Advertise Conference locally

*February 2017*

- Conference, February 24-26

*March 2017*

- Conference proceedings, photos, additional materials on IBCSR website
- Compose introductory essay for journal submission
- Contact authors for journal

*April-May 2017*

- Collect Essays for journal submission
- Edit essays

*June 2017*

- Submit essays to journal

*October 2017*

- Publication of Special Edition Journal
- Advertise Journal on IBCSR Website