Thoughts on patriarchy

I felt I could not let the diatribe* posing as a scientific article by Professor Malcolm Potts and his wife, Dr Martha Campbell, go without commentary. The article reads an article that is grossly inaccurate, even in part, the credibility of the rest and of the journal running it is thrown into question.

The article has an understandable modern problem with St Augustine but that is no excuse for their absurdly inaccurate summary of over a hundred theological works,* that he “saw God as an arbitrary judge who could be placated by bribes”. Nor does it justify ridiculing him from a 21st century perspective with no attempt to understand his historical or personal context, or indeed any other (highly selected) examples. To then link patron saints in a non sequitur to bribery and the etymology of ‘grace’ (wrongly)* to the same is as ridiculous as it is irrelevant. (I note they are only able to quote Potts’ own authority for this.)

To limit the development of Christian sexual ethics only to the context of sexual exploitation tolerated in the Roman Empire is profoundly misleading. They show no awareness of the contributing influences of Judaism, Hellenism, Stoicism or Gnosticism.*

How blinkered the authors’ historical viewpoint is can be seen from the fact that the discussion is limited to one theologian among many, to only the Western tradition, ignoring Eastern and Catholic perspectives completely, and subsequently narrowing within that to Roman Catholicism.

Islam fares worse, seeming only to be represented by the Taliban in the authors’ minds. If the two faiths both have “liberal and conservative interpretations”, why is discussion limited to the negative ones? The highest one from this article is something of the prejudices of its authors. This is not the first time Malcolm Potts has been accused of a lack of objectivity.

Space precludes a more detailed response but I wonder how this got through the Journal’s peer review process. It would have been sensible to mention Martha Campbell’s membership of the Editorial Advisory Board as a competing interest. It would have been sensible to give balanced and informed discussion. If polemic is to be part of the offering, it should be flagged as such.

I am certainly no friend of patriarchy, but a scientific article is not the place to abandon such.

Editorial Advisory Board as a competing interest.

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many, to only the Western tradition, ignoring other strains of Catholicism.* However, our Reply


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Implant removal by modifying access

I read with great interest the recent article by Diana Mansour and colleagues on ‘Methods of accurate localisation of the non-palpable subdermal contraceptive implant’ and ‘Removal of non-palpable contraceptive implants’ in the January and April 2008 issues of the Journal, respectively.* I totally agree with the author’s suggestion to modify access with 2–3 ml of local anaesthetic applied under the palpable portion. This helped me greatly to modify the procedure, depending upon the patient’s clinical circumstances and requirements as outlined in the following two cases:

Case 1: A 24-year-old mother of two children was fitted with Implanon® 18 months previously. The patient requested removal of the Implanon for her next conception. On examination the distal end of the implant was non-palpable and the proximal end was palpable with difficulty. An ultrasonic scan was done as suggested in the article. The patient was not content to refer that; “The Implanon is located in the left arm, the lower edge is marked and is at a depth of 1.6 cm. The upper edge is palpable”. After explaining the possible difficulties, I obtained fully informed, written consent from the patient for removal of her implant. I made a 4 mm incision at the proximal, barely palpable, end of the Implanon and dissected the subcutaneous fat tissue* and finally managed to get the Implanon out without any surgical complications. Here I realised the importance of having an assistant and the use of ultrasound which were mentioned in the article but which were not available in our clinic. Consequently we ordered two small skin retractors with immediate effect for future use.

Case 2: A 38-year-old Zimbabwean woman was referred to me by a colleague for removal of a Norplant® device inserted 6 years ago in Zimbabwe. I explained to the patient that I am not trained in Norplant insertion or removal, although I am trained and experienced in Implanon insertion and removal. Unfortunately I was referred to a doctor trained in Norplant insertion/removal. The patient declined referral and insisted that I undertake the removal procedure. On examination, four of the rods were palpable and close together and a few millimetres above the insertion scar. Although the rods on either side were about 1.5 cm away, they were superficial and easily palpable. I informed the patient that the middle four rods could be removed by means of the ‘pop-out’ technique with one incision and the remaining two rods could be removed by the same technique but with two separate incisions, similar to Implanon removal. The patient happily gave written consent to this suggested treatment plan and accepted the risks and complications (if any) of the procedure such as multiple scars, infection, bruises, nerves and vessel injury and their consequences.

Even though the Mansour et al. article mentioned a vertical incision for removal I went through the original horizontal scar and carefully dissected tissues vertically and removed four rods by using each one of them to remove three rods. Rather than attempting the heroic removal of the remaining two rods (located laterally and above) through the same incision, I felt it was much safer and easier to employ two small incisions (<2 cm each) and use the ‘pop-out’ technique, similar to Implanon removal. This avoided a T-incision with the old scar and I hope the patient will end up with only the single, old incision scar. A patient review visit after 1 week confirmed a nicely healing wound. I discharged the patient from the clinic since she had not decided on her future contraception, except the use of condoms. The patient was extremely happy to have avoided referral to an unknown clinic for removal of her Norplant.

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Norplant removal forceps

I was interested to read the article by Diana Mansour et al.* reviewing removal techniques for contraceptive implants.

Furthermore, I am sure, with many other readers, I am continuing to see patients requiring Norplant® removal who have had this implant fitted outside the UK. Our primary care trust has opted for a single-use instrument policy, and we have had to get rid of our desktop sterilisers, so we are no longer able to reuse the modified vasectomy forceps (“implant removal forceps”)* referred to in the article.

The best that any of the single-use manufacturers I have contacted can come up with is Norplant device inserted 6 years ago in diameter of approximately 4 mm, which allow the Norplant rods to slip during “U” removals (Figure 1, right).

I am left with the unsatisfactory situation of using the wrong instruments, or referring to the
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