

Erin Lane and Enuma Okoro: Talking Taboo

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I've been interested in the idea of "taboos" for a long time—those intricate rules that overarch our society and ideas of the sacred. Cultures use taboos tools to keep people from harming others or themselves. They can also be a form of social conditioning, arbitrarily enforcing certain behaviors as a means of control.

Some taboos were in place because we believed that a supernatural event would occur if we broke them. It's still the case. It's a common joke. When people move furniture in the sanctuary, and a man stubs his toe, he mutters a curse, and everyone looks up, expecting lightning bolts to fry the place.

Some taboos are strong and almost universal, and keep us from hurting one another, like taboos against incest.

Others are more arbitrary. We have various taboos surrounding our religious practices—many are matters of taste and tradition that we learn in seminary. For instance, if I decided that Advent needed to be more festive and showed up in a sparkly red stole, there would be an outcry from the congregation. My closest friends would shun me. If I posted my red stole on Facebook, I would be virtually crucified. Red—though it is the color that bursts forth in our shopping malls—is not for Advent. We declare the sacred space by using the colors of preparation and longing. We wear purple or blue, but not red.

Other taboos surround gender. They can often be cruel and capricious. Haggard preschool teachers are told that they are not to let the boys play with dolls or dress up in princess costumes. Girls (especially when they become teens) are taught that they cannot wear certain shades of lipstick, or too much makeup, or heels that are too high, because that would mean they are promiscuous.

When we cross our [religious taboos with our gender taboos](#), the social conditioning abounds. What about sex and how we have it? What happens when we're tempted? Why can't speak of domestic violence? Why are we shamed when we show our strength? Erin Lane and Enuma Okoro expose this fascinating intersection in [Talking Taboo: American Christian Women Get Frank about Faith](#). They gathered women under forty (I slipped in there too... I wrote my essay before my birthday) and asked us to expose the taboos with which we work. We come from a wide spectrum of traditions and perspectives, and you'll find so many of those [fresh and interesting voices](#)--Grace Biskie, Julie Clawson, Amy Frykholm, Kate Ott and Lara Blackwood Pickrell--to name a few.

I invited Enuma and Erin onto [God Complex Radio](#) in order to talk about the book a bit more. You can listen to it here, download it from iTunes, or listen to it at the GCR site.