2015


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ABSTRACT

In 1978, James Dobson, psychologist and founder of the conservative evangelical group Focus on the Family, Inc., published *Preparing for Adolescence: Advice from One of America’s Foremost Family Psychologists on How to Survive the Coming Years of Change*. Over the next twenty years Dobson’s pocket-sized advice manual went on to sell over a million copies and symbolized the desire of white conservative evangelicals to control the moral and social development of adolescents—and in turn the nation. During the same period, black conservative evangelicals were engaged in a separate yet equally vocal struggle to support adolescents and their families against generations-old stereotypes of sexual deviance. Despite their differing goals, both white and black conservative evangelicals viewed the education of young people as critical to the health and influence of their respective communities. Remarkably, however, young peoples’ lived experience is rarely studied as a distinct field within American religious history and studies. Moreover, historians often exclude conservative black evangelicals from studies of evangelical Christianity and instead subsume them under the generic and artificial grouping of “The Black Church.” This dissertation critically analyzes how conservative evangelicals understood the relationship between sexuality, gender and race in the development of adolescent sex education and ethical leadership. I argue that the critical factoring distinguishing the two groups was not politics, but diverging ideas of American citizenship. Moreover, this project reclaims evangelicalism as a theological identity rather than a political one and illustrates the symbiotic relationship between faith, the human body, and notions of belonging.
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First, I am grateful to every person who completed the survey for this dissertation, and most especially, to those who so graciously shared their experiences with me in interviews. I could never due justice to the depth of their stories, but I have done my best to regard them with the care and reverence they deserve. Although many of the participants are not named individually in these pages, their stories all over this dissertation and in my heart.

The story of how this dissertation came to be began twelve years ago when I asked my Latin professor, Dr. Molly Levine, to write a letter of recommendation on my behalf for a master's program. She agreed, but on one condition: I had to apply to a Ph.D. program. Her words seemed ludicrous to me: “You don't need to be shelving books, you need to write them.” Days later, I told the Dean of the Chapel, Dr. Bernard Richardson, what Molly had said. He affirmed her, but I suspected he was performing the role of the encouraging chaplain. Needless to say, I applied to Ph.D. programs more out of duty than any belief I would succeed. While I was in seminary they kept encouraging my love of history and religion, convincing me that critical scholarship and faith can coexist. Over the years they have read chapters, shared advice of all varieties, provided meals and respite, and encouraged me to get out and play. More importantly, they have been bedrocks of love, wisdom, and friendship. Thank you, M. and B. I'm so glad I went to Howard U.

On the night of Barack Obama's election to the American presidency in 2008, my classmates and I gathered at the home of my dissertation advisor, Dr. Maureen Fitzgerald. As the results came in, I struggled to fight back tears of awe and longing; I so desperately yearned to share that moment with my late dad and grandparents. As I left Maureen's house that night she looked in my eyes and told me to let the tears fall. In her hug and knowing nod, I felt the history of the past descend onto a moment that can only be described as a holy mystery. That was one of many times over the course of the program in which the study of history became a means of grace. Maureen welcomed my questions and ideas and never stopped pushing me toward excellence. She not only has made me a better writer and scholar, she has instilled in me the belief that history does more than instruct, it inspires and transforms.
Dr. Leisa Meyer's courses on sexuality and gender sharpened my mind and deepened my respect for the beauty of humankind. Her scrupulous attention to detail and her willingness to provide resources for further study are gifts that continue to grow. Through her, I saw how history is more than a job, it's a vocation. I am fortunate to have had her on my committee.

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While working on this dissertation, I had the privilege of calling Hickory Neck Episcopal Church home. Their joy, love, and interest in my work was an ongoing gift of sustenance. I am grateful to have been a part of their family.

As I prepared to defend this project, I began serving as rector at St. Paul's Church. Besides being a welcoming, creative, and loving community, they are also a wise and discerning one. They provided me time and space to complete the final details of this project and told me, "there would still be a home for me when I returned." It is my great privilege to be their pastor.

I am grateful to all my amazing friends who've filled my life with laughter, patience, and the gift of companionship. I love you all deeply and thank you for commiserating with me, celebrating with me, encouraging me, playing with me, and praying with and for me. Thank you for everything.

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To the Writing as Spiritual Practice Cohort of 2012: In times of uncertainty, you reminded me my present was not my future. Thank you for standing in the gap over and over again. Thank you God for friends who give life...

To my family: there really are no words to express who you are to me and what you have given me. Growing up, I assumed it was normal to have 10, 20, 30+ family members at any and all recitals, games, or birthday parties. I have since learned that what we have is a one-of-a-kind gift. I am grateful to be a part of such a creative, loud, loving, and unfailingly supportive family.

My godparents, Earl Lord and Barbara Lord Watkins (and Aunt Mildred and Uncle Myron) have set the standard for what it means to be a godparent. Since I was a young kid, they've indulged me, loved me, and encouraged me. They're among my greatest cheerleaders and I am grateful for the ways they have poured into my life.

I end by thanking the people whom I could never thank enough...

I will go to my grave believing my sister Katherine is the smartest and most gifted person in the world, but she has always made me feel like I'm brilliant in my own right. I will never have an interest in blood and guts, but I will never stop being in awe of her craft and her commitment to it. Katherine, the gift of your constant support and belief in me cannot be overstated.
To my mother: even the greatest failure I could make would not be a failure to you. Thank you for nurturing every dream & fanciful whim. Your love and unwavering support are ongoing graces in my life. At 49, you unexpectedly took on the role of two parents; though it's probably the hardest thing you've ever done, you did it with such grace and consistency that I scarcely had reason to question if I ever missed out on anything. It's so easy to dedicate this project to you and Dad, who knew all along this day would come.

*The Feast of All Souls 2014*
To my mother, Patricia Anne Lord Kane, 
and in the memory of my father, Samuel Kermit Kane
Introduction: “First Comes Love”

For many white middle-class suburban teenagers in the late twentieth century, Friday nights were synonymous with high school football games, people-watching at local shopping malls, and noise-deafening house parties with friends. Since the postwar era, time spent with peers—and away from family—has marked the yearning for independence and like-minded social interaction many American adolescents crave. However, for some teenagers, the community and fun found at their local church was just as exhilarating and engaging as the halftime show down the street.

These young people did not go to church to listen to an aging preacher in a three-piece suit talk about the importance of obeying one’s father and mother or the need to serve the poor. Nor did they thumb through worn hymnals in search of a song to sing. Instead, they swayed to Christian rock music blasting from oversized speakers and laughed at a series of skits and catchy videos interspersed throughout the night. On the surface, these youths were no different from their peers looking for something to do on a Friday night. Yet one thing set them apart: they didn’t gather to have fun for fun’s sake; they came to have fun in the name of Jesus and publicly commit to a life of sexual abstinence until marriage. Although these young men and women faced the normal stepping stones of adolescence—acne, hormones, crushes, and homework—they believed such struggles paled in comparison to the triumph and joy of setting themselves apart in the name of purity, thereby assuring themselves a future of
romance, contentment, and sexual fulfillment in marriage. They also believed that they were not only following God's will for their lives; they were creating a new definition of coolness that others would secretly yearn to emulate.¹ In the eyes of their parents, their commitment was a direct byproduct of their parents' discipline and faithfulness. To the Religious Right, they were the assurance that a heteronormative marriage could withstand the modernization and secularization of American society.

White conservative evangelicals (WCE), however, were not the only ones concerned with the changing sexual mores of the late twentieth century. Scores of middle-class black conservative evangelicals (BCE) had created their own rituals for acknowledging and celebrating the role of teenage sexuality in the transition to adulthood. Without the flashy lights and loud music of purity-centered gatherings, these rites of passage programs—a combination of conservative evangelical theology, West African folklore, and American history—brought together teens and adults into churches' auditoriums, gymnasiums, and worship spaces with the goal of preparing teens to become biblically literate, culturally enriched, and community-oriented young men and women. Ranging from nine months to two years, these programs organized teenagers into groups and paired each teen with an adult mentor. Together, teens and mentors participated in regular worship services, cultural seminars, and community service. These programs not only ritualized adolescence as a formative and

¹ Author participation and witness of “Silver Ring Thing: High Stakes Tour,” November 19, 2010, Herndon, Virginia.
sacred process, they grafted black youths into a broader history of oppression, victory, and communal support. Like the purity programs popular in white conservative evangelical communities, rites of passages programs (often simply called that in many black churches; hereafter referred to as ROP), recognized the importance of sexuality, sex education, and the family in a teen's present and future life. However, rather than focusing exclusively on these three components, ROP treated sexuality, sex education, and the family as pieces of a much larger story of adolescent transformation.

To white and black conservative evangelicals of the late twentieth century, a strong response to the modernization of the American family demanded the incorporation of teenage experiences into. Though both communities approached the matter through the lens of their Christian faith, they did so alongside an understanding of American citizenship that was inextricably tied to different attitudes about race and nationalism. Their contrasting interpretations of American nationalism effectively neutralized the commonalities in their evangelical theology and exposed the fault lines of conservative evangelicalism in the United States even as its popularity and influence spread like wildfire across the nation.
Argument & Method

This dissertation argues that rather than politics and theology, contrasting embodiments of cultural nationalism determined the distinctive theological hermeneutics and practices of white and black conservative evangelicals and how they used adolescent sexuality and sex education as barometers of spiritual, political, and social well-being. Although conservative evangelicalism's lack of a denominational structure and hierarchical leadership makes its boundaries seemingly open-ended, their impassioned belief in the Bible's infallibility and the necessity of a definable moment of conversion provides a common and essential base for this disparate group of Christians. I contend that white conservative evangelicals of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries believed that an essential part of their calling as Christian citizens of the United States was to push back against the modernization of America's sexual mores in order to secure the country's role as the international beacon of freedom and democracy. On the other hand, in light of 400 years of racialized and sexual oppression, African American conservative evangelicals embraced their Christian faith as a way to strengthen black Americans' social, spiritual, and economic stability.

In his work, Imagined Communities, Benedict Anderson argued for a reading of nationalism not as a philosophical ideology, but a categorization of a community. As Anderson proposed, "the nation...is an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign." A nation is

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I expand upon the definition of evangelicalism later in the introduction.
imagined in so far that not everyone within a nation-state knows one another; it is limited because of “finite, if elastic boundaries;” it is sovereign because of its claim on a specific territory; and finally, it is a community because even amidst systems of oppression, because its members conceive of themselves as valid members of the whole. 3 Although Anderson’s theory of nationalism provides a foundation for studying the modern nation-state, limitations remain: 1) While noting that hierarchical systems and oppression may exist in a nation-state, Anderson does little to account for how the creation of distinct “imagined communities” within the central community shapes nationalism; 2) There is no account for the way in which the imperialism and evolving dominance of the United States as a “superpower” in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries helped manufacture an American identity that relied upon the sublimation or transformation of other nation-states.

Aware of these limitations, I loosely adapt Anderson’s definition of nationalism as a framework for understanding how black and white conservative evangelicals understood (or “imagined”) their identity and role as Christians and citizens of the United States. Within each respective community, I make space for smaller “imagined” communities and differing viewpoints that shaped the identity and mission of the larger nation or community. Thus my use of the word “community” in reference to evangelicals

refers to that “imagined nation” of beliefs and practices in which white and black conservative evangelicals understood themselves to exist.

More specifically, I contend that the black conservative evangelical embrace of American nationalism in the late twentieth century was deeply rooted in the concept of a “nation with a nation.” Based on E. Franklin Frazier’s description of post-Civil War black Baptist churches as the epicenter of civic, spiritual, and political engagement and autonomy, the “nation within a nation” identity that BCE embraced served as the foundation for establishing political, social, and economic structures for African Americans in an increasingly mobile and self-proclaimed colorblind nation.

White conservative evangelicals of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, on the other hand, adopted an embrace of American nationalism rooted in the belief that America’s moral—and specifically sexual—values were among its greatest possessions. In turn, they believed themselves to be America’s official ethical gatekeepers. Secondly, they understood that to be an American citizen was to be an international emblem of freedom and democracy over and against the forces of godless communism or socialism.

Concurrently, while nationalism explains the motivations and perspectives of white and black conservative evangelicals on the family, it does not do so in a vacuum. As such, I employ an intersectional approach to illustrate how nationalism, race, sexuality, and gender intersected with one

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another and gave shape to the theology and priorities of conservative evangelicals (CE). Doing so highlights the differences among white and black conservative evangelicals and speaks to the contestation for meaning within these communities. In her article, “It’s All in the Family: Intersections of Gender, Race, and Nation,” social theorist Patricia Hill Collins argues that the family serves as a “privileged exemplar of intersectionality,” allowing it to serve as a site indicative of how systems of oppression shape and are shaped by one another and contribute to inequality in a society. As Collins contends, those analyzing the “traditional family” in America must wrestle notions of privilege, hierarchy, and equality that are biologically formed, state-sanctioned, and reliant upon gendered ideals of authority expressed in a heterosexual two-parent family defined by a father working outside the home and a mother providing care within it. By using an intersectional approach to nationalism to examine the sex education, sexuality, and gender ideals of evangelically conservative faith communities, one not only sees the extent to which gender and sexuality are socially constructed—even among evangelicals—but also how nationalism and race have evolved alongside and intersected with such contestations.

While a handful of studies of have considered what evangelicals of the late twentieth century believe about gender, sexuality, and the family, less attention has been given to the role that race and nationalism have played in

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5 Patricia Hill Collins, "It’s All in the Family: Intersections of Gender, Race, and Nation," *Hypatia* 13, no. 3 (1998): 62.
the construction of these ideals. By approaching conservative evangelicalism's imagined communities intersectionally—rather than through ecclesiology or theology alone—this dissertation explains why 11 o'clock on Sunday morning remains what Martin Luther King, Jr., referred to as the “most segregated hour in America.”

**Historiography**

In 1985, Robert Orsi published his groundbreaking *The Madonna of 115th Street*, opening the door to a new approach of religious studies that examined religion through the everyday practices of its adherents. Rather than looking only at a group's particular theology, the study of lived religion acknowledges religious practice as a manifestation of belief and meaning. As Orsi asserted, lived religion looks at what *is*, not what we imagine or desire religion to be. This project uses lived religion to analyze the purpose and implication of sex.

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8 Ibid., xvii.
education as a form of adolescent ritualization and identity formation. Unlike other studies of evangelically conservative adolescent rituals, this study contextualizes these rituals in the broader social changes of conservative evangelicals in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century and places them alongside the experiences of adults, giving equal weight to both demographics.

Second, while there have been a handful of studies on conservative evangelical purity rituals, they have focused exclusively on the experiences of white teenagers, effectively ignoring the experiences of black conservative evangelicals and rendering sex education and sexuality as the defining feature of adolescence. As I argue, white youths’ understanding of nationalism, or the community to which they belonged, influenced this focus, just as Black youth’s understanding of the importance being committed to “their” community. This dissertation addresses that gap by studying both groups comparatively and connecting them to the actions of adults.

Third, as historical studies have addressed the rising popularity of conservative evangelicalism in the late twentieth century, they have often done so while emphasizing its role in national politics and the formation of the Religious Right. As a result, we know a great deal about the viewpoints and role of influential leaders such as Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, and James Dobson.

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but less so about those outside the spotlight. This dissertation seeks to give voice to the "ordinary" adherent of the faith, in turn revealing the struggle for meaning within communities of black and white evangelical conservatives, respectively.

Fourth, this study places the experiences of white and black conservative evangelicals side-by-side and gives them equal measure. Excluding Kate Bowler’s *Blessed* and Paul Harvey and Edward Blum’s recent study, *The Color of Christ*, which examines the racial representations and appropriations of Jesus throughout American history, studies of race in conservative evangelicalism have traditionally addressed race as a source of conflict and dis-ease for white conservative evangelicals. Mark Noll’s *God and Race in American Politics*, for example, examines the relationship between race and evangelicalism throughout American history, but only in so far as evangelicalism (in predominately white environments) responded to and addressed racial change in America. This has rendered the experience of black evangelicals as a negligible entity and subsumed their beliefs and practices into that of white evangelicals.¹¹

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Fifth, despite the limitation of scholarship on race and evangelicalism, historical studies focused exclusively on the faith of black Protestants have done an excellent job of articulating the public and prophetic role of black male preachers, the internal influence of women's organizations, the role of black churches in the struggle for civil rights, and more recently, the popularity of the prosperity gospel. Such studies have captured the centrality of religion in the lives of black Americans and the political and civic functions of black churches as prophetic voices of equality and justice. Other works, such as Kelly Brown Douglas' *Sexuality and the Black Church*, have addressed the role of sexuality and gender in the life of black churches and the rise of womanist theology and womanist studies in confronting the church's patriarchy. Although this dissertation joins the chorus of works examining the theology and practices of Protestant black churches, it specifically focuses on black conservative evangelicals and not the entirety of black Protestantism. Doing so further dispels the myth of a monolithic "black church" and the association of evangelicalism

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with white Protestants alone. It also gives authority to the beliefs of these communities and not simply their manner of worship; for while black Christians at a non-denominational megachurch may worship similarly to those at a predominately black United Church of Christ, the beliefs—and in turn, the practices—of communities often have different motivations and goals. Historically, studies of black Protestantism have focused on the faith’s more liberal members. In using the terminology “black conservative evangelical” I am insisting that the style and expression of worship of many black Protestants is not an entirely substantive explanation of a church’s theology. Furthermore, this dissertation insists that what makes a faith community conservative and evangelical is not limited to its affiliation with a political party.

**Importance of Topic**

Upon the nomination and election of Barak Obama as the President of the United States in 2008, political commentators began declaring a new generation in American history—one deemed “post-racial.” According to one popular media analyst: “The post-racial era, as embodied by Obama, is the era where civil rights veterans of the past century are consigned to history and Americans begin to make race-free judgments on who should lead them.” Another longtime political commentator suggested that after President Obama’s election, the

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United States became “a place where the primacy of racial identity—and this includes the old Jesse Jackson version of black racial identity—has been replaced by the celebration of pluralism, of cross-racial synergy.”\textsuperscript{16} It is simply politically incorrect not to be “colorblind.”

Yet, as one contemporary cultural theorist noted, race remains a defining factor in American society, especially when considering the economic, social, and educational disparities among whites, blacks, and Hispanics.\textsuperscript{17} Although public schools are desegregated and the black middle-class has grown in numbers in the last twenty years, much of this is the result of enforced legislation. Churches, however, places where people choose to participate in of their own free will, are rooted in cultural and religious assumptions that the government does not legally mandate. This suggests that while the United States has become a more diversified nation, such diversification is not attendant in all cultural matters. Why then is religion one of the last cultural holdovers of racial and gender diversification? This project argues that different understandings of American identity—deeply formed by the social construction of race—shape an embrace of Christianity deeply invested in giving meaning to America’s history and vision for its destiny.

The period between 1970 and 2010 is a critical phase for understanding the continued divisions among white and black evangelicals because of the


cultural, social, and political changes that took place following the perception of sexual and political liberalism of the 1960s and the rise of religious and political conservatism in the 1970s and 1980s. By 1970, the United States was at a cultural and social crossroads. The long Civil Rights Movement, then reaching its denouement, had recently witnessed the historic passing of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Over the next three years, race riots both reflected and increased tension and upheaval in many urban locales across the country as clamors for economic justice for African Americans and Latinos/Latinas increased. In 1968, following the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robert F. Kennedy, racial rioting reached its peak, devastating such cities as Newark, Washington, D.C., Chicago, and Oakland. Many coalesced under the banner of Black Power and a new generation of young African Americans no longer viewed the church or cooperation with whites as the best avenue for change. Instead, they saw the church limiting black men from asserting their claim to power because of the desire to maintain the status quo.18

Black poverty, rather than civil rights per se, also took center stage in discussions of the “race problem” in America. Five years earlier, in 1965, Daniel Patrick Moynihan released the Report on the Black Family. Moynihan’s claims stemmed from female-led families that prevented black men from achieving their

supposed "rightful place" as leaders of the home.\textsuperscript{19} Although Moynihan's report
stirred controversy nationwide and many black Americans rejected its findings, it
nonetheless placed black sexuality and gender construction in the public
spotlight and forced African Americans to once again struggle against
stereotypes that had been placed upon them in slavery of hyper-male sexuality
and overly matriarchal mothers, a subject I will analyze in greater detail in
Chapter One.

As American culture underwent a shift, so too did its politics. As President
Lyndon B. Johnson led Democrats into support for the Great Society in the
middle of the 1960s, the party saw many of its most conservative members
fleeing to the Republican Party. Conservatives cited loosening sexual mores and
continued anti-war protests against the war in Vietnam as a sign of America's
rapid decline. Along with a new wave of feminism and the Supreme Court's 1973
\textit{Roe v. Wade} decision legalizing abortion, white conservative evangelicals
believed that a renewed emphasis on the family and gender roles would quell the
unrest in American society and restore a semblance of peace and respectability
in American society.

By the 1980s, with the election of Ronald Reagan to the presidency, white
conservative evangelicals were already marching full-steam ahead in their
attempt to legislate morality to restore a gender and sexual order they imagined
was ubiquitous in their heavily-nostalgicized vision of the 1950s. White

conservative evangelicals formed powerful coalitions across the country that reached their zenith in the 1990s, as they crusaded against homosexuality and abortion and advocating for abstinence-based sex education and prayer in public schools. African Americans also struggled with these issues, but their narrative of change over time was distinct. From the perspective of a history in which slavery, oppression, and injustice dominated, African Americans sought to approach the problems of poverty and self-help with a renewed pride in their community, and an emphasis on the African roots of the family, gender, and self-help. While the attributed sources of the problem differ according to each group, both subcultures struggled to carefully proscribe a narrow norm for the family, sex, gender roles, and sexuality that would lead to social, economic, and spiritual prosperity and influence—a practice not unfamiliar to the history of evangelicalism in America.

Definitions

Evangelicalism, as it is used and understood throughout this dissertation, refers explicitly to its theological foundation rather than contemporary political connotations. The purpose for doing so is twofold—1) to resuscitate evangelicalism from the media’s monopoly of viewing it only as the provenance of white Republicans, and 2) to incorporate the experience of African Americans, evangelicals who are often ignored in studies of evangelicalism except in brief asides on the relationship between the National Association of Evangelicals and
the National Association of Black Evangelicals. As noted historian George Marsden aptly reminds us: "our understanding of most of the core groups who might call themselves evangelical can be enhanced by looking at their common past...All share to some degree the common experience of becoming outsiders to the most sophisticated modern culture. All are part of a recent evangelical resurgence. While some subgroups share these common experiences more directly than do others, there are enough widely overarching themes to ensure that our current understanding can be illuminated by looking at the past."20

Today, historians have agreed on the following five tenants as foundational of evangelical theology: 1) The Bible as the supreme and infallible authority on all matters; 2) a definable moment of conversion and desire for behavioral change, 3) salvation through Jesus Christ alone, 4) strong belief in the necessity of missions, 5) autonomy of the individual in his/her relationship with God (In other words, there is no need for a mediator to interpret the word of God, which is how Protestants historically viewed tended to view the role of priests in the Roman Catholic Church).21

Many expressions and strains exist within evangelicalism's boundaries. Historians of religion Randall Balmer and Lauren F. Winner contend that within this foundation, there are five subsets of evangelicalism:

Pentecostalism, Charismatics, Holiness churches, fundamentalism, and New


21 Marsden, Understanding Fundamentalism, 4-5; Grant Wacker, "Evangelicalism" (lecture, Duke University, Durham, NC, February 23, 2005).
Evangelicalism, the last of which they associate with predominantly white conservative evangelicalism. As to their categorization, I would argue that New Evangelicalism should be divided into conservative and liberal camps to incorporate the different embodiments of evangelism and missions to which each group primarily adheres.

Sexuality as I use it in this dissertation draws upon the work of Siobhan Somerville, who defines sexuality as a “culturally contingent category of identity. As such, ‘sexuality’ means much more than sexual practice per se. One’s sexual identity...more often describes a complex ideological position, into which one is interpolated based partly on the culture’s mapping of bodies and desires and partly on one’s response to that interpellation...there is no strict relationship between one’s sexual desire and one’s sexual identity, although the two are closely intertwined.” This stands in contrasts to the common conservative evangelical understanding of sexuality as sexual behavior or preference alone. I will use the phrases “sexual identity,” or “sexual preference” when referring to evangelical expressions of sexuality. When I use the phrase “gendered family” or “gendered order” it is to express the historical evolution and fluidity of gender as a social category and


23 “Webber’s Evangelical Subcultures” as quoted in Amy Frances Davis, “Rites of Passage for Women in Evangelical Christianity: A Theological and Ritual Analysis,” (PhD diss., Drew University, 2010), 35.

expression of power. While sexuality and gender intersect, they are not necessarily subsets of one another.

My use of the word conservative refers not only to political ideology but one's theological beliefs, especially in contrast to theological liberalism and liberal evangelicalism, which has historically regarded the Bible as inspirational and foundation for Christian life, but not infallible or subject to literal interpretation. Indeed, some black evangelicals who adopted a conservative interpretation of the Bible, nonetheless maintained liberal political affiliations. This dissertation challenges the traditional assumption that one's political affiliation foreshadows one's theological belief and practices.

Limitations

While this dissertation examines black and white conservative evangelical in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, it is not all encompassing, as it focuses predominantly on middle class evangelicals. Most of the literature white conservative evangelicals have produced has largely spoken to and addressed the needs of the middle class. Literature and documents from the African American community have addressed the needs of lower economic classes, but from the socially dominant perspective of the middle class, suggesting that within these respective faith traditions there was

\[25\] Ibid., 7-10.
a desire to maintain and appeal to the mainstream ideals of economic
security as a standard of success. As such, perspectives of those outside of
the middle class are not heard, especially those evangelicals who turned to
the Prosperity Gospel as a source of hope and promise in the face of
economic distress. Second, as this study focuses on the conservative
evangelicals, the experiences of liberal evangelicals is omitted. Third, as
evangelicalism does not have a singular structure or doctrinal statement, its
population is diverse. As such, this dissertation does not account for the
evangelicalism of the Holiness Movement, Pentecostal Church or Anabaptist
communities. Fourth, this study does not yet address the attitude and
approach toward abortion that both groups adopted and the impact it had on
its approach to marriage and sexuality.

Outline

This dissertation is organized thematically and makes use of archival
materials, ethnographic research, and oral histories. Over the course of twelve
months I conducted a series of interviews with men and women who were raised
in conservative evangelical families and churches. These interviews were based
on a nationwide survey of more than 150 questions ("Gender, Race, Sexuality,
and Evangelical Adolescents;" hereafter referred to GRSEA) that I created and
distributed via the Internet and postal mail, and that more than 200 people
completed. Survey responses and conversations supported what I found in
archival material and observed as an ethnographer and illustrated the contestation between clergy, laity, adults, and adolescents for the meaning and purpose of their faith—both personally and communally.

Chapter 1 illustrates how discussions of gender and heteronormative marriage shaped black and white conservative evangelicals' expectation for the family in civic and spiritual life. I pay close attention to the history of black sexuality in the United States and the rise of white conservative evangelicals in public life following World War II. I also examine the complex history of the black family in the United States since slavery and how it has informed the twentieth-century understanding of the family as the bedrock of stability and prosperity for both white and black conservative evangelicals. Finally, chapter 1 examines the concept of submission and authority as a foundation to white and black evangelical understandings of the family and gender roles of the late twentieth century.

Chapter 2 looks at the history of sex education in the twentieth century and how abstinence rituals in predominately white evangelical communities provided a measure of control for adults, a sense of purpose for young people, and a means of ensuring the vitality and prominence of conservative evangelicalism as the torchbearer of America's moral vitality and historical destiny. I look at the adolescent purity rituals of white conservative evangelicals as found in True Love Waits and the Silver Ring Thing.
Conversely, Chapter 3 considers adolescent rites of passage rituals for African American youth and how the incorporation of West African traditions alongside conservative Christian theology nurtured the concept of African American nationalism as a “nation within a nation.” I contend that in doing so, BCE sought a holistic approach to adolescence that did not prioritize sex education and sexuality over other matters of morality and public health.

Chapter 4 looks at how evangelicals—white and black—deemed people who identified as gay, straight, or lesbian as morally and socially deficient and the greatest threat to the vitality of their communities. I argue that in normalizing heterosexuality and pregnancy within marriage white and black conservative evangelicals found common footing, which they would in turn capitalize on in the political arena. In keeping nationalism at a key component of the conversation, I will also illustrate the “nation with a nation” interpretation characterized same-sex attraction between men as a threat to the masculinity of the community and vitality of the black family. Comparatively, the white conservative evangelical impulse toward patriotism and virility as a reflection of America’s international power characterized same-sex attraction and relationships as an active threat to America’s national security.

The conclusion brings together the themes of nationalism, sex education, sexuality, race, and gender as a reflection of the social transformation white and black conservative evangelicals faced in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. It invites us to consider the impact of diverging nationalist impulses in
the spread of conservative evangelicalism in America. In questioning the influence, belief, and practices of conservative evangelicals, this dissertation argues the necessity of intersectionality in the study of American religion and the tension inherent between the articulation and practice of religion as a path to influence, power, and nationalist ideology.
Chapter 1: "Then Comes Marriage": Gender & Marriage in the Construction of the Ideal Evangelical Family

Less than a month after then-presidential and vice-presidential candidates Bill Clinton and Al Gore ignited the fervor of thousands of Democratic supporters in New York's Madison Square Garden with promises of economic renewal for America's families, conservative commentator and presidential candidate Pat Buchanan declared to nearly 50,000 supporters and journalists gathered for the Republican National Convention in Houston's Astrodome that America's greatest battle was a "cultural war" against feminism and "homosexuality." At stake was nothing less than the vitality of the "traditional" American family.26 Days later, conservative televangelist Pat Robertson contrasted Bill Clinton and George H.W. Bush as candidates with conflicting views on the American family: "When Bill Clinton talks about family values...[he] is talking about a radical plan to destroy the traditional family and transfer many of its functions to the federal government." Further emphasizing his beliefs in gendered roles within marriage, Robertson characterized First Lady Barbara Bush as a "devoted wife, a dedicated mother...a caring grandmother," and an exemplar of the kind of values needed in American society.27 Although the 1992 RNC Convention was not the first time "family values" entered the American


vernacular via popular media, Robertson and Buchanan's speeches made it clear that the politics and theology of white conservative evangelicals intended to became the standard bearer American family values. In doing so, their diatribes continued normalizing the white evangelical conservative notion of gendered roles within the family.

Meanwhile, scores of African American preachers encouraged parishioners to cast votes for Democratic candidate Bill Clinton, citing his promises to support American families via economic renewal. Yet, rather than emphasizing Clinton's statements as an example of America's family values, the media framed the lives of black families strictly as an economic matter If both groups of supporters cited Christian values and the family as motivators in voting, where did the division lie?

As mentioned in the introduction, this chapter challenges the notion that although popular culture has unofficially designated conservative white evangelicals as the primary embodiment (as women rarely took center stage among white evangelical conservatives, except as helpmates) for American family values, black evangelicals were equally influential to the construction American politics and culture in the late

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28 Lawrence Stone notes that the term "family values first appeared in 1976 as part of the Republican presidential platform. See Lawrence Stone, "Family Values in a Historical Perspective," (The Tanner Lectures on Human Values, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, November 16-17, 1994).

twentieth century. In addition, the dominant conservatively evangelical approach to the idea of the American family from 1970 to 2010 was also unavoidably tied to a racialized embodiment of patriotism, gender, and sexuality among middle-class white and black conservative evangelicals and often contested within these respective communities. America’s nearly 400-year legacy of racial oppression and sexual objectification has created a nation of citizens with often contrasting opinions of what it means to be American and Christian. Different understandings about the responsibility of a Christian in America have stood alongside ideas and experiences of race, gender, and sexuality.

In the 1960s, black conservative evangelicals witnessed the legalization of measures to prevent racial discrimination and oppression. However, from 1970-2010, battles against institutional racism and their social and economic consequences remained. For black evangelical conservatives, this translated into a church whose identity and mission resembled that of its institutional ancestor from the turn of the twentieth century. Rather than simply a place for religious worship, the church became a place to address challenges and celebrate joys unique to their experiences. As charges of matriarchal dominance and male irresponsibility abounded from politicians and media, black conservative evangelicals called upon the church to support all variations of extended and heterosexual families, including single parents and remarried parents.
While some upper middle-class families preached messages of male authority and wifely submission, a survey of over 200 respondents suggests that away from the listening ears of fathers and male preachers, many mothers encouraged their daughters to be strong, independent, and able to speak up for themselves, they encouraged their daughter to not rely upon a man for purpose, identity, or even financial resources, reflecting the subtle differences in practice across class and race. At the same time, throughout the 1970s and 1980s pastors and laity did not expend a lot of energy demanding a strict expectation for gendered difference within marriage. Such matters remained secondary to the idea of focusing on the family in its entirety. By the mid 1990s, however, as the Prosperity Gospel gained traction in predominantly conservative black churches and the number of mega-churches grew, single-sex conferences, classes, and publications became the norm for many black evangelical conservatives. Messages and theology now focused on gendered relationships:, women were expected to assume a position of domestic and emotional support for the family as men provided financial and “strong,” definitive leadership. Although marriage and the family were of prime importance for BCE, the practicalities of day-to-day living as a historically oppressed minority forced them to grapple with white middle-class ideals built through racialized and gendered exploitation. For black conservative evangelicals, being an American and a Christian was less
about a sense of patriotic duty to one's country, but instead a pride in and support of one's culture and community that had been created and adapted amidst the limitations and prejudices of being black in America. Moreover, black conservative evangelicals generally understood that expressions of the family that did not model two-parent heteronormativity, while perhaps not ideal, were not something to be condemned. While some pastors would individually question or critique a teenage pregnancy, pastors tried to avoid doing so, focusing instead on providing support to single parents, young parents, and generations of extended families living and caring for one another.

For white conservative evangelicals, the idea that marriage was based on distinct roles between men and women was not a new concept. Since the nineteenth century, white evangelical conservatives had preached such ideas. As debates about women's leadership, the ERA, feminism, and abortion rose to prominence in the 1970s, white evangelical conservatives struggled to maintain their relevance in a changing culture without losing their strong belief in a divine gender order for males and females. By 1976, moreover the conservative arm of white evangelicals assumed dominance and gendered ideas were prescribed under the language of submission and authority. By the 1980s, as more women worked outside the home and children grew up in divorced families, white evangelical conservatives struggled to acknowledge such realities while
still maintaining a belief in God’s preference for wives whose primary
dominion was within the home. By the 1990s, people such as James
Dobson and Jerry Falwell turned to the growing therapeutic movement to
articulate their ideas outside of the political arena. With language
appealing to one’s emotions, ideas of servanthood, and a need for
practical advice and solutions, the Christian therapeutic movement—
evolutionary Christianity’s adaptation of the rhetoric of contemporary
psychology and self-help philosophy—became the swan song of white
conservative evangelicals who sought to broaden their influence beyond
their communities to the entire nation. White conservative evangelicals’
belief in a divine order for marriage not was about strengthening one’s
home life, but about transforming a nation who they felt had strayed from
its moral foundation.

Organization

In this chapter, I will first provide historical context for the ways in which
slavery and segregation imposed a race-based understanding of black and
white sexuality and how it shaped the racialized consciousness of black

30 The U.S. Census Bureau reports that between 1970-1975, the divorce rate among women
began rising and reached its highest levels during the late 1970s and early 1980s. From the mid
1980s to the early 1990s, the divorce rate remained relatively stable. National Center for Health
Statistics, Monthly Vital Statistics Report, v. 39, no. 12 (May 21, 1991), 1-2; U.S. Census Bureau,
Number, Timing, and Duration of Marriages and Divorces: 2001 (February 2005), 4-5. From 1970
to 1985, the number of women working outside the home increased from nearly 44% to over
55%. United States Department of Labor, Women at Work: BLS Spotlight on Statistics (March
Americans, or as W.E.B DuBois famously coined, “the problem of the color line.” Second, I will illustrate how the contestation for power among postwar neo-evangelicals indirectly forced white evangelical conservatives to create a theology of gender within the family based on nationalist assumptions of manifest destiny and a desire to make sense of and have a stake in national debates on sexuality. Third, this chapter will look at various instances of how black and white conservative evangelicals have conceptualized gender within the family unit. This third and final section also incorporates the lived experiences of persons who came of age as teenagers between 1970 and 2000 and considers the impact that these discourses had on their own sexual and gender identities. By considering the evolving beliefs of white and black evangelicals alongside one another, this study contributes to an emerging body of literature challenging the traditional separation of white and black Christian communities in religious history and does so through the racially fraught arena of sexuality.

31 Neo-evangelicalism is the emergence of white evangelicals into the public scene following more than two decades of retreat following the crumbling of their public image in the Scopes Trial.

32 Paul Harvey and Edward J. Blum’s recent study, The Color of Christ: The Son of God and the Saga of Race in America is one such study that gives equal attention to both groups and highlights the ways in which race has shaped the formation of Christian ideas, namely perceptions of Jesus. See Paul Harvey and Blum, The Color of Christ; Randall Balmer has noted this tradition in the literature. See Randall Balmer, Blessed Assurance: A History of Evangelicalism in America (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999). Mark A. Noll has also argued that the distinct of evolution of black Christian communities in slavery demands that historians study them separately, further giving credence to the myth of the monolithic “Black Church.” He says this has been the case historically because of white evangelicalism’s “race problem.” See Noll, God and Race in American Politics.
The Historical Foundation of Slavery & Segregation in the Formation of a Racialized Sexuality

Race and sexuality's central role in the formation of evangelical identity in the twentieth century began nearly four hundred years prior with the advent of slavery in the United States. Slavery and the concept of owning a human body—a black body—forced enslaved Africans in America to create and adapt communities and religious faith amidst patterns of violence and oppression. During slavery, whites categorized enslaved Africans as subhuman, treated them as commodities, and resisted their attempts to define and maintain intimate relationships. In doing so, they left African Americans with little if any control over their bodies in the public sphere.33

White owners and proponents of slavery also linked sexuality and race and rendered black bodies deviant—a pattern that would continue following the Civil War and extend to the turn of the twenty-first century. In her book *Queering the Color Line*, social theorist Siobhan Somerville contends that the creation of sexualized categories (e.g., heterosexuality as an identity) at the turn of the twentieth century were closely linked with the formation of

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33 Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism* (New York: Routledge, 2004): 43, 55-9. Although one could argue that even in the privacy of the so-called "home" the rape of enslaved women by slave masters took away any control they might have had.
racialized categories that sought to place boundaries around the human body and cross-body interaction.\textsuperscript{34}

Throughout slavery and in the hundred-plus years since the end of the Civil War, whites labeled black women with a variety of names whose purpose was to demonize the bodies and sexuality of black men and women as pathologized creatures. As Deborah Gray White argues, black women were divided into three categories—Jezebel, Aunt Jemima/mammy, and Sapphire. Jezebels were women whose sexual prowess and fertility made them prone to deviant behavior in need of white domination; Aunt Jemima/mammies were matriarchal persons who dominated the wills of men despite lacking their own sex appeal. Finally, Sapphire referred to women who were devoid of Aunt Jemima’s maternal spirit but embodied her looks and Jezebel’s personality.\textsuperscript{35} White slave masters often used these stereotypes to justify raping and beating black women. They also had the simultaneous effect of rendering white women as delicate, refined, and respectable. Black males did not fare much better and were often treated as violent animal-like creatures to be kept away from white women lest they defile white purity.\textsuperscript{36} They were characterized as intellectually deficient and large or violent and viral. In both

\textsuperscript{34} Somerville, Queering the Color Line, 5-7.

\textsuperscript{35} Collins, Black Feminist Thought, 5, 81-2; Cornel West, Race Matters (Boston: Beacon Press), 83; See Deborah gray White, Am’t I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1985).

\textsuperscript{36} West, Race Matters, 83; See Susan K. Cahn, Sexual Reckonings: Southern Girls in a Troubling Age (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).
cases, proponents of these racialized ideologies considered deviant and unworthy of authority or autonomy. Slave laws also prohibited enslaved men and women from legally marrying. While this did not entirely destroy the sense of family in the eyes of enslaved Africans, it did delegitimized them in the eyes of whites. Men and children were frequently sold apart from their female partners or mothers, rendering the black familial unit incomplete under the white definition of a traditional family. Further, as Patricia Hill Collins has argued, black women were never able to participate in the white ideal of the traditional family because rather than providing primary care and attention to their home and children, they were doing it for their master’s family.37

Equally devastating was the inability of men black men to prevent slave masters from raping their wives, denying them the ability to protect their family in such a way, lessening their authority as protectors. Whether institutionalized through laws prohibiting miscegenation or social practices such as rape and lynching, antebellum and Reconstruction era sexual politics illustrate the extent to which the sexuality of antebellum African Americans became a public entity of the dominant white majority to define and defile. It also recognizes the limitations of defining a “traditional family,” as the social, political, and economic environment for whites and blacks was built upon the restriction of black mobility, sexuality, and equality and the depiction of black women as unable to control the vitality and criminality of black men.

37 Collins, Black Sexual Politics, 49-50.
The racialization of sexuality continued throughout the twentieth century. As Susan Cahn has argued, during the interwar years, the growing sexual awareness of white adolescent girls became a concern for a generation of Southern white men and women who saw virginity, purity, and whiteness as interrelated. Rickie Solinger has documented the way in which the pregnancy of single women before the Roe v. Wade decision led to a racialization of pregnancy and female sexuality. Single and pregnant white women were understood to have gone through a psychological disturbance or momentary aberration while single, pregnant Black women were treated as representing a racialized community's deviant sexuality.38

Just as important to discussions of black and white sexuality are the debates that historians—white and black—have had over the last century on the impact of slavery on black sexuality and the extent to which slavery shaped the modern black family. Early debates suggested that while slavery destabilized the African American family, such adaptations and changes to the structure of black families were based on the size of plantations and the nature of the work.39 By the middle of the twentieth century, Stanley Elkins and Kenneth Stamp used an economic approach to understand the impact of slavery and suggested that enslaved Africans were unable to retain much of their African heritage and familial unity. Eventually, scholars such as John


39 Ibid., 5-7.
Blassingame, Herbert Gutman, and Eugene Genovese shifted away from a purely economic analysis and offered a more descriptive look at the nature of slavery. Their findings resulted in a portrait of slavery that reflected a strong, male-led family structure weakened by paternalism and sexual exploitation, yet nonetheless sustained in creative ways.\textsuperscript{40} Indeed, what is most important about these interpretative debates is not simply the arguments, but the reminder that they are yet another example of a public discussion in which black sexuality has stood center stage as a problem to understand, define, and control through the guise of what Collins called the so-called "traditional family" (heteronormative two-parent family with men working outside or and "heading" the home and women finding their primary vocational domain is within the home).\textsuperscript{41}

Perhaps nothing has reflected this phenomenon better than New York Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan's now-famous \textit{Moynihan Report} (officially known as \textit{The Negro Family: The Case for National Action}). Released in 1965, \textit{The Negro Family: The Case for National Action} argued that the dominance of women in black families led to the emasculation of black men and contributed to a culture that engendered poverty. Further, Moynihan asserted that the lack of black men as head-of-households was a historical

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., 9-13.

\textsuperscript{41} Collins, "It's All in the Family," 62-3.
malady affecting black families' lack of vitality.\textsuperscript{42} According to James Patterson, Moynihan, who was President Lyndon B. Johnson's Assistant Secretary of Labor for Policy Planning and Research when the report was released, was motivated to look into the lives of black families partly because of his own childhood upbringing in poverty and the lack of a father in his life.\textsuperscript{43} At the same time, Moynihan was increasingly frustrated by the limitations of the labor department to provide assistance to families in need as the employment rate continued to rise. He felt that "freedom was not enough" for blacks and argued that job programs, economic support, and attention to crime were crucial for black people to flourish. While Moynihan drew the early praise of some liberal whites and black pastors for his willingness to tackle issues disproportionately affecting African Americans, he also drew the criticism of black pastors for labeling the black family as pathological and suggesting that it instead parallel white families. Others criticized the lack of a concrete solution, the report's jarring language, and Moynihan's constant standardization of the white experience, which many recognized as unable to account for generations of discrimination and oppression.\textsuperscript{44} Patricia Hill Collins argues that rather than simply putting black sexuality in the limelight

\textsuperscript{42} James T. Patterson, \textit{Freedom is not Enough: The Moynihan Report and America’s Struggle over Black Family Life from LBJ to Obama} (New York: Basic Books, 2010).

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 2-14.

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., 24, 33-41, 59-62.
again, the Moynihan Report "[located] the source of cultural difference in flawed gender relations provid[ing] a powerful foundation for U.S. racism."45

Indeed, it is amidst these assumptions of deviance that African Americans have formed an identity that emerges at the intersection of black nationalism, race, sexuality, and an ongoing social oppression that has evolved for nearly 400 years. In the years following the end of the Civil War black churches served as a place where African Americans were able to find both a space and means of organizing collectively as citizens of the United States. Indeed, the black church—in some instances as as far back as slavery, but most especially after slavery—was not only a place to worship, but a centrifugal force of "identity and empowerment" for growing networks of activists, teachers, and civic leaders.46 From their early establishment black churches blurred the lines between the sacred and the secular, making the religious community a center for education, mobilization and resistance. As Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham has persuasively argued, self-help, self-reliance, and self-determination were essential in creating these post-Emancipation churches that sought to challenge racial injustice and improve the welfare of African Americans as Reconstruction politics proved to blacks that they could not rely on the government or other public institutions for

45 Collins, Black Feminist Thought, 77.

support. For blacks, the experience of American citizenship was a relative notion. Therefore the church became the arena through which identity formation for black communities occurred—an identity rooted in resistance from oppression and a consciousness of American citizenship lived through their status as minorities. This distinctive view of nationalism would evolve over the next 150 years as different perspectives emerged, but it would still retain a strong notion that the Africa American community was still a "nation within a nation," especially when systemic racism limited full and equal participation in American society.

At the same time, as Higginbotham notes, black Baptist churches were also a place in which gender and authority were negotiated. Black men were able to assert authority and leadership in their churches in ways that they could not during slavery. However, their leadership did not limit the opportunity for women to contest men's dominance as leaders. Women in these churches created a vast network of educational and social ministries through which they established their own standards for leadership and authority that did not undermine the work of men, but stood alongside them. These black female networks did not limit the authority of one sex as both

47 Higginbotham, Righteous Discontent, 3, 5.
48 Ibid., 47-8.
49 Ibid., 3.
50 Although the focus in this section is primarily on the Black Baptist Church, it serves as a representative of the African American Christian community, because by 1906 it was the largest denomination in the country. See Higginbotham, Righteous Discontent, 6-7.
sexes had the same desire to raise the level of racial consciousness, solidarity, and uplift of the African American community. For women, however, this desire was expressed through improving the literacy rate, opening and supporting seminaries for women that taught them to read and embody a respectability that racism sought to deny them. At the same time, many recognized that they would never command the authority that men did, setting up a dynamic of gender relations that mirrored the white model of women as helpmeets with one important difference—these women were serving alongside men outside of the traditional women's sphere of the home.

Leaders among these women taught young women what Higginbotham called the “politics of respectability,” which included lessons on black history and on caring for the family—notions that would manifest again for a growing handful of adolescent rites of passage programs in black churches in the 1990s. Although the model of black women in the church—Baptist, especially—resembled the respectable notions of white women, they were not mere emulations, as they were driven by racial uplift and equal participation in society and not simply by ideas of innocence and purity. Nevertheless, at the heart of black women's desire for racial uplift was also a

\[51\] See chapter 3 of this dissertation for more detail.
conscious desire to subvert accusations that black women were lewd
Jezebel-types whose sexuality could not be contained.\textsuperscript{52}

For the black Christian community of the early twentieth century, race, sexuality, and black consciousness were a holy trinity shaping black bodies and religious faith. This trinity remained throughout the century, and by 1970, as new arguments of black sexual and social deviance emerged through media reports of increased crime, drug use, and increased numbers of teenage pregnancy, members of a number of black Christian communities would again turn to their churches and faith to not only respond to them, but to recreate their definition of family and sexual norms.\textsuperscript{53} Until then, evangelicalism as experienced by the majority of America’s white population underwent its own shift that cemented the divide between white and black evangelicals, as well as those subscribing to more progressive politics. It

\textsuperscript{52} Womanist theologians not only critiqued the patriarchal privilege of black Protestant churches, they also sought challenge the lack of black voices in mainstream conversations around feminism. Author Alice Walker first coined the term “womanist.” For more information, see Katie Geneva Cannon, \textit{Katie’s Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community} (New York: Bloomsbury 1998).

\textsuperscript{53} It is important to note that drug use and pregnancy rates among white teenagers was also on the rise during this time. See Gary Creets, \textit{American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century} (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 350-8. Before continuing on, it is important to note that there is no singular, unified Black Church. Rather there are various representations and expressions of faith among African American Christians. However, in the years following the Civil War and Reconstruction, these diverse ideologies were often restricted to a handful of select leaders. However, by the 1970s, more voices emerged from the ground up, and as Kate Bowler and Barbara Dianne Savage have argued, the notion of a “Black Church” was anachronistic then as it is in 2013. Nevertheless, that phrase is dying a slow death, as assumptions of a monolithic African American faith. Thus I use the term black conservative evangelicals to stress a large, yet diverse faith expression that retained the tenets of evangelicalism that is not limited to denominational ties.
would be a division rooted in different attitudes about race, sexuality, and the idea of American citizenship.

Christian Marriage Goes to Therapy: White Conservative Evangelicals’ Approach to Marriage as an Exemplar of Gendered Authority

From 1970-2010, white evangelical conservatives went from being an innocuous handful of conservative voices in the early 1970s trying to find their niche amidst conversations on gender and sexuality to a powerful coalition of male preachers and pastors who crowned themselves the authority on gender and marriage in America. Despite voices of dissent among them, white conservative evangelicals affirmed marriage as an incubator of gender roles that prioritized women’s practical care of the home over work outside of the home and white men as leaders outside and over the home. Central to their growing relevance among white evangelicals was their careful use of rhetoric which adapted to the growing cultural shift in language and habits of mainstream society. Even when acknowledging the reality of women working outside of the home or single-parents families, ideas of godly submission and authority were held up as the ideal and adapted to different situations. From explicit, rigid, and politically focused and driven definitions of gender in the 1970s to an adaptation of therapeutic and practical approaches to gender in the 1980s, white conservative evangelicals leaders (nearly all of whom were men) sought to broaden their influence beyond those in the pews. By the
1990s, these same leaders created single-gender programs and Bible studies challenging critiques that evangelicalism gave greater attention and value to the experiences of men over women. In all their efforts, white conservative evangelicals sought to spread their gendered notions of marriage, family, and adolescence across the nation.

The influence of white conservative evangelicals' attitudes on gender and marriage did not remain confined to their communities. Their beliefs and political machinations would also influence the practices and faith of black evangelicals—liberal and conservative. In advocating for "traditional" marriage as a two-parent heterosexual marriage with a male breadwinner and stay-at-home wife, white evangelical conservatives (WCEs) created a political and social hierarchy that rarely spoke to the lives of black evangelicals—regardless of class—and rendered their faith experience an anomaly. In 1973, the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE), National Association of Black Evangelicals (NABE), and the social justice arm of the NAE, Evangelical Social Action (ESA) gathered in Chicago to consider how they could more fully embrace women and African Americans. Out of that meeting emerged the Chicago Declaration for Evangelical Social Concern. The Declaration called for work on racism, gender inequity, the end of the Vietnam war, and the exclusion of black churches and leaders in broader evangelical conversations. Most evangelicals—black and white were skeptical. By 1975, the proposals of the Chicago Declaration would fall flat as supporters
disagreed on the best way to implement them. Some wanted to separate themselves entirely from government engagement, others wanted to continue legislative lobbying and engagement. William Bentley, president of the National Association of Black Evangelicals at the time also became disaffected with the Declaration’s goals believing that without first addressing racism in the organization and throughout the nation, nothing else could be addressed. In coalescing around issues of belief, race, and sexuality, white evangelical conservatives carved a unique niche for themselves and began focusing on putting conservative evangelicals into federal positions of power. In doing so, neo-evangelicalism took on a decidedly theologically and socially conservative attitude.

From 1971-1981 and the inauguration of Ronald Reagan as President that year, WCEs, though united in the desire to have a moral voice in the nation’s political conversations, continued to send out messages on gender and marriage that often contradicted one another. These diverse and less-than-universal voices suggest that for WCEs the 1970s were not simply about reacting to Roe v. Wade, the Equal Rights Amendment, and Second Wave Feminism; it was also a period in which WECs were trying to consolidate their power and influence while retaining their distinct resistance to formal denominational hierarchies and authority. Prior to the Supreme Court’s Roe v. Wade decision in 1971, opposition to legalized abortion was limited to

54 See chapter 2 for more a thorough history of sex education in the United States.
the Roman Catholic Church. Instead, as noted above, WCEs were more concerned with issues of film censorship, divorce, pornography, and sex education. They also did not see the ERA amendment and the Women's Movement as a threat to marriage, but rather a change in American culture that required adaptation of the practical and theological nuances of their religious faith. In a 1974 editorial in the evangelical flagship publication *Christianity Today*, editors asserted that the ERA amendment was not necessarily a threat to Christian values, but one that needed to be considered prudently: “Most...favor the Equal Rights Amendment, and so do we: the view that there should be no arbitrary discrimination among people on the basis of sex....We...agree with those...who warn that the present amendment would produce...legal and social (and grammatical) entanglements...Much analysis and reflection remains to be done.”

In a May 1975 article titled “Who Will Wear the Pants?” evangelical psychologist Lofton Hudson questioned the source of Christian marriage roles and what qualified as a faithful Christian embodiment of marriage in “[the] day of women’s liberation, feminist movements, dual-career families, and rapid social changes all about us.” For Hudson, the problem was not that women were working outside the home, increasing their earnings, and suggesting greater participation in child-rearing from their husbands, it was that young

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55 “Some Thoughts on the ERA” *Christianity Today* September 27, 1974, 37-8.

married Christian couples were refusing to acknowledge the cultural and social changes influencing them and critically engaging scripture and theology to understand how it could speak to these changes. Instead, people either denied changes were taking place or simply ignored them.

Hudson went on to critique approaches to marriage that relied on biblical proof-texting—a hermeneutic that read Scripture literally without attention to context, history, or literary style—and instead suggesting that the foundation of marriage and every relationship ought to be based on an ethic rooted in love rather than power and traditional assumptions about gender.57 Seven years later, Lofton would go on to critique notions of manliness that he felt relied on gendered rules, rather than mutual harmony and talent, even going so far as to say, "somewhere in our culture we have hidden the cluster of traits that surround femaleness."58

But for some white evangelical conservatives, failing to make sharp distinctions between the sexes was an outright denial of God’s authority and intended order for the world. Conservative evangelicals—white and black—believe that God created men and women with unique purposes and to confuse them is to question God’s authority. As sociologist Susan Gallagher claims, the hallmark of white evangelical conservatives in the 1970s was not

57 Ibid. 50.

their firm belief in the veracity of gender roles, but their often conflicting beliefs on gender as they struggled to find their niche in mainstream politics.59

More fundamentalist-leaning evangelicals believed that denying biological, social, and spiritual differences between males and females defied notions of authority and submission they found in New Testament Scripture. The idea stems from Ephesians 5:21-3 and 1 Peter 3:1, although the latter verse is often less-sighted than the former. In one pamphlet distributed to Southern Baptist churches (SBC) nationwide, the Christian Life Commission (the branch of the SBC focused on social issues), outlined and expanded upon the idea of submission and authority in marriage, situating the concept and Paul’s words in Galatians in the context of the early church and the notion that ultimate authority rests in God.60 (According to orthodox Christian theology this understanding of authority is reinforced and made incarnate in Jesus as noted by the Gospels.)61 As the SBC explained, “the biblical revelation is authoritative as a guide to understanding how the Lordship of Christ is to be actualized in our own society.”62 By situating authority as a matter of following Jesus rather than simply having power and dominance, the pamphlet sought to limit the idea that authority is about asserting


60 Christian Life Commission (CLC), Authority and Submission in Marriage (Southern Baptist Convention, 1981).

61 See Matthew 28:19: All authority is give to me [Jesus] in Heaven and earth.

62 Authority and Submission, 2.
dominance and control over one another. Rather, as they explained, Christians were to see authority and submission as "responsive obedience to the Lordship of Christ." With husbands as the head of the household, WCEs believed that men were expressly designed to provide financially for their families and ensure that their life outside of the home was properly ordered.

In 1976, Jimmy Carter, the first president to claim he had been "born again," was elected and *Time* magazine coined 1976 as "the year of the evangelical." It seemed that evangelicals were poised to take center stage. However, as noted above, white evangelicals were not of one voice on all social matters. It would take a Roman Catholic housewife from the Midwest to change that. Phyllis Schlafly, a Catholic housewife and mother of six from Illinois, had had made it her mission to stop the Equal Rights Amendment from ratification and argued that a woman's greatest honor came from caring for her family. Although traditionally skeptical of the beliefs and practices of Roman Catholics, WCEs quickly latched on to Schlafly's claim that deep within their souls women did in fact want to stay home and raise their children and that doing so was not only their God-given calling, but a fulfilling one that made them critical to the vitality and future of the nation. Moreover, Schlafly insisted that the ERA and acceptance of homosexuality as an expression of one's sexuality went hand in hand with moral decay. To Schlafly, the ERA

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63 Ibid., 2-3.

64 Ibid., 351-2.
would take women away from the home, make them subject to the draft, and render the differences between the sexes mute. Ironically, Schafley was an attorney who attended law school while married and raising children. Later, her soon would come out as a gay man. And wasn’t she a lawyer?

Schlafly quickly learned the value of incorporating therapeutic language to her message, a tactic that many conservative evangelicals adopted in force by the late 1980s. In her monthly newsletter, The Phyllis Schlafly Report, Schlafly called upon psychiatrist Harold Voth to explain why the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment was nothing more than an attempt to deny the "natural" differences between men and women. According to Voth, while men and women were of "equal worth" they remained "qualitatively different...The fate of mankind [sic] depends on the durability of the heterosexual relationship...." as, "a woman needs a good man by her side so she will not be distracted and depleted, thus making it possible for her to provide rich humanness to her babies and children. Her needs must be met by the man and above all she must be made secure." Schlafly’s numerous speeches across the country quickly caught the attention of the media and fundamentalist-leaning evangelicals who viewed marriage as an incubator of traditional gender understood as men working outside the home and providing financial leadership while women nurtured their husband and children from within.

As Schlafly traveled the nation, a group of conservative evangelical women in California were waging their own war in support of a traditional family. Riding the wave of conservative grassroots politics taking shape in Southern California, these women found a like-minded community with the political and financial leverage to take their platform to the national stage. In the middle of the 1970s, Vonette Bright, wife of Campus Crusade founder Bill Bright, along with Beverly LaHaye, Shirley Boone, and Virginia Otis (wives of a rising crop of evangelical leaders in California) spearheaded a campaign challenging the idea of gender as a fluid, cultural construct. Living in California, they had benefited from the rising grassroots political activism of conservatives in southern California since the postwar era. Thanks to the influence of “Sunbelt” conservatism, evangelicals found a like-minded alliance and a means of pushing their agenda onto the national stage, especially following Richard Nixon’s election in 1972.66 Moreover, as historian Darren Dochuk notes, white evangelical conservative women riffed off of the feminist movement and created their own set of “sisterhood” gatherings through “seminars” for women associated with Campus Crusade. Feminism’s call for equality, sisterhood, and consciousness was a slap in the face to a group of people who believed that the Bible was primary and final authority on all matters and a threat to the nation’s moral fiber.67 Like Schlafly, these women

66 Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sun Belt*, 329-34.

also felt that the passage of the ERA would only lead to the demise of the American family. In a letter republished in several newspapers and magazines, Beverly LaHaye argued that the ERA would lead to: “abortion on demand” and “invalidate all state laws which require a husband to support his family,” and a genderless society” that would “obliterate sexual and racial identities and national loyalties.”

Rather than focusing on Schlafly’s Roman Catholic faith, which many evangelicals still viewed with suspicion, evangelicals and political conservatives joined under the passionate belief that the American family could be saved through the work of women in the home.

Thus, what had begun as a seemingly innocuous concern to the majority of white evangelical conservatives became a key unifier and platform by 1975. In addition, through the work and inclusion of more fundamentalist voices, such as Tim and Beverly LaHaye and Jerry Falwell—who would spearhead the founding of the Moral Majority—fundamentalism gained a foothold in the theology of white evangelical conservatives, effectively diminishing any mainstream political thought in the group that still remained after the breakaway of liberal evangelicals prior to 1976. At the heart of their new identity was a focus on the health of the entirety of the family, not just the role of women. Nevertheless, their firm belief in God’s gendered order would

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68 Beverly LaHaye, “The Nonsense of the ERA” Christian Courier August 1980. The article was originally published in The New Wire, date unknown.

serve as the backbone for their political machinations throughout the 1980s and 1990s.

By 1980, with the election of Ronald Reagan to the presidency and the ouster of Jimmy Carter, who many evangelicals felt had betrayed them with his role in the Iran-Contra crises and his threat to remove federal aid to fundamentalist Bob Jones University, white evangelical conservatives felt it was their moment to shine. Outside of the political spotlight, evangelical conservatives knew that they could no longer deny the reality that women were in fact working outside of the home, the divorce rate for Christians equaled that of non-Christians, and rhetoric in the political arena had little impact on home life. Taking cues from the field of therapeutic psychology, white evangelical conservatives—primarily men—incorporated the language of psychology, biology, and a New Age focus on personal happiness, to create a vast a publishing industry of books and tapes on family life. Rather than referring to submission and authority as non-negotiable roles, as some had insisted in the previous decade, they instead shifted to the language of sacrifice, servanthood, and faithfulness. In transforming submission and authority between a husband and wife from obedience and domesticity to Christian discipleship, the focus was less on the gendered expectations of Christian men and women, but a ubiquitous call to serve Jesus. Thus in serving others and doing it not for personal gain, as some argued, one was embodying the love of Jesus and had authority based not on power or
dominance but in humble service in the spirit of Jesus.70 In God’s Daughters: Evangelical Women and the Power of Submission, R. Marie Griffith notes evangelical women do not view ideas of submission and authority as confining or sexist. In fact, they understood submission as a holy empowerment of their unique calling as wives and mothers and the granting of a unique spiritual authority and freedom to serve under God’s eternal design.71 From this concept of servanthood, Christian husbands and wives do not have to vie for power based on their own merits and achievements. Rather, through a position of humility and dependence on the mercy of God, they are united in service to one another and their community.

This shift in language and theological hermeneutics was key in addressing challenges to WCE’s beliefs about the roles of men and women amidst changing attitudes about women in the workforce. In 1981, of example, the SBC published a handful of pamphlets on family life—the first since 1968. One of these publications included Changing Role of Women.72 Rather than framing the evolving experiences of middle-class white women as primarily a matter of politics or the doctrinal prescription of submission and hierarchy in marriage, the pamphlet instead approached the question of women’s role in the family, church, and society, from historical, political,

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70 CLC, Authority and Submission in Marriage (Nashville: SBC, 1981), 3-4.


economic, educational, and psychological perspectives. The publication's cover even goes so far as to feature a large photograph of a middle-age white woman seated behind a desk in a business suit with a nicely organized bookshelf flanking the walls behind her. Rather than beginning with a critique of differing viewpoints or an analysis of biblical scripture, *Changing Roles* recalled a 1950s school-age song on the differences between boys and girls as a reflection of a traditional approach. To the writers, the approach of the "new feminist movement" suggests that differing roles between men and women are artificial and arbitrary and demean the opportunities of women. As noted, there is no critique of the statement, just a presentation of it, followed by questions as how God might view such a matter. In shifting the focus from a human perspective to "God's perspective," the pamphlet neutralizes the authority as above human reproach. Moreover, such a perspective focused on God's reasoning, not a human's logic, even as they believed God to be far beyond any human categorization or description.73

The SBC also used history to suggest that the demands of the feminist movement were not new, but had existed as far back as the Revolutionary Era. While the lens of history served an important contextual function, it also gave the SBC authority as a bastion of moral and historical authority extending beyond modern Christianity. According to Alex Schäfer, postwar evangelicals intentionally sought to shed their exclusivist image by

73 Thanks to Dr. Leisa D. Meyer for pointing out this critical distinction to me.
incorporating knowledge of other discipline including, psychology and political science into their educational approach exemplifying their intent to appeal to people outside the fold.\textsuperscript{74} The \textit{Changing Roles} publication engaged political history, theories of education and economic history in its discussion of women's roles—all before even broaching any mention of the Bible. Just as the authors sought to present the position of feminists without editorializing, the same was done for those in opposition to feminism. Finally, when the SBC articulated its position it did so without literal proof-texting (a process of reading Scripture literally and without attention to context), an approach that fundamentalist evangelicals relied upon and conservative evangelicals used selectively in certain matters—such as the idea of submission and authority and the ordination of women. Rather, the main argument of the brochure was that the Old Testament depicts the gradual development of the equality and value of women throughout ancient history and scriptures in the New Testament that many use to support women's subordination should not be universally applied in light of the historical context of the early church. Instead, women ought to be encouraged and supported to discover and embrace who they want to become and do as long as it is done in service to the Lord and does not usurp the stability of one's marriage or children. Furthermore, the authors suggested that as couples and churches addressed issues of gender and marital relationships, they should do so in the context of

each family in response to their unique situations; an affirmation of the changing dynamic of marriage.\textsuperscript{75}

Even in SBC press releases, pamphlets, and Sunday school literature that advocated a biblically literal interpretation of wifely submission and centralized male authority, one could find the therapeutic language of servanthood, vocational clarity, personal call, and faithfulness to God. In 1986, Grace Liddle, a white Baptist woman shared her belief that submission was the best way to ensure a healthy marriage. Rather than writing a polemic on marriage, Grace shared a candid story of her struggle and doubt drawing upon readers' emotions to connect with her audience through her writing. She recalled that throughout her twenty-five years of married life she was responsible for repeatedly packing up the family as they moved and adjusted to a new city whenever her husband's company gave him a new assignment. As Grace and her husband neared retirement she found herself longing to be closer to her adult sons in Florida. The company, however, was moving them to Virginia. That was the final straw for Grace. She was tired of always following her husband's lead and having her dreams shattered, so she decided to "rebel." As she shared, "No longer did I willingly yield to God's sovereign direction and the leadership provided by my husband."\textsuperscript{76} Grace knew resisting her husband's promotion and transfer was also about resisting

\textsuperscript{75} Changing Roles of Women, 3-8.


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God's authority, but she was wearied by the entire process. In this Grace likened the practices of American corporate capitalism to those of God, further reflecting the distinctly contemporary and American view of God that WCEs embraced.77

Grace admitted that as she prayed with her husband and recited Scripture it was often done reluctantly and more out of form, which was not in line with her usual willingness to heed the words of 1 Peter 3:1: "Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of their wives." For months, Grace fought anger, depression, and frustration about what the "Lord was requiring" of her. Eventually, she said, she began to see that her resistance was harming her marriage and her relationship with God. Ultimately, this experience solidified her belief that there was a purpose for everything and it was safer to trust the providence of God for her life than her own dreams and desires even if it caused agonizing nights. As Grace wrote, "Through this experience I discovered that the type of work we do is not as important as being willing to trust the Lord wherever He places us."78 This notion is not constraining to people like Grace. Rather, it was and remains a way of creating order and certainty that ultimately provide a framework for understanding one's purpose in relation to God and one another. Because

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77 Gallagher, Evangelical Identity, 154-74.

Scripture is the final and supreme authority in the lives of evangelicals, naturally it is the place also that evangelicals turn for comfort in the midst of situations that they do not understand. Grace, for example, found portions of Psalm 37:3-5 to be a source of comfort (“Trust in the Lord...delight thyself also in the Lord; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart. Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass.”)\(^7\)\(^9\) She even referred to her depression less as a psychological or physiological matter, but a failure to rest in God’s will for her life.\(^8\)\(^0\) Thus as Grace understood it, by submitting to her husband’s leadership and authority as mediated through his employer’s demands. Grace ultimately ended up committing to God’s plan for her life. For Grace “joy comes from the Lord and is not dependent on the weather or location. There is no joy comparable to that experienced when we walk in the path of the Lord.”\(^8\)\(^1\) R. Marie Griffith remarks on a similar attitude among members of Women Aglow—the ministry to women in Pentecostal churches—who struggled to adjust to their husbands’ attitudes about leadership or unmet expectations.\(^8\)\(^2\)

Indeed, despite the sometimes-vocal hesitation of well-known male leaders, including Jerry Falwell and James Dobson, to embrace the twentieth century changes in the structure of the workforce and families, WCEs found

\(^7\) Psalm 37:3-5 quoted as Liddle referenced it (King James Version).

\(^8\)\(^0\) Ibid., 31.

\(^8\)\(^1\) Ibid.

\(^8\)\(^2\) Griffith, God’s Daughters, 179-80.
that glossing over such changes would do more harm than good. During the height of the recession in 1988, the evangelical publication *Home Life* published the essay "When Wife Becomes Provider." Unlike articles of the previous decade or even half-decade that sought to make the theology of authority and submission appealing, attitudes about gender in marriage focused on multiple (heterosexual) examples of the marriage relationship and their emotional outcomes. According to the article's author, Dean Clifford, the primary concern when a woman was the primary breadwinner of the family was the perceived drop in a husband's self-esteem, mood, and feelings toward his wife when she earned more money. Rather than offering a critique of a reversal of traditional white evangelical conservative structures, Clifford suggests that for some, economic realities have caused a shift in their positions in the workforce. For others, such "reversals" were a conscious choice of the couple. Rather than focusing on issues of evangelicalism's role in American nationalist identity as a beacon of morality and democracy, Clifford focuses on how a loving, Christian attitude towards one's spouse can assure a strong, happy family for the reader—not the nation. With this shift away from nationalist rhetoric and more toward therapeutic language, Clifford illustrates the tension that white evangelical conservatives faced in negotiating America's changing landscape. In claiming that gender

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relationships in marriage could be negotiated if necessary, Clifford indirectly declared that one's sex did not automatically dictate one's role in marriage.

That someone could have such beliefs was at the heart of a late 1980s national debate among white conservative evangelicals that led to the creation of the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW) in 1987 and a differentiation between complementarian and egalitarian marriages. Complementarians argued that while men and women were of equal value, God had ordained them with distinct roles that were ultimately performed better by each gender. In the preface to the Danvers Statement—the heart of CBMW's beliefs and a document written entirely by men—complementarians asserted that American society exhibited an "increasing promotion given to feminist egalitarianism with accompanying distortions or neglect of the glad harmony portrayed in Scripture between the loving, humble leadership of redeemed husbands and the intelligent, willing support of that leadership by redeemed wives." They went on to argue that "widespread ambivalence regarding the values of motherhood, vocational homemaking, and the many ministries historically performed by women" was a byproduct of egalitarianism in marriage. Egalitarians argued that while males and females may be better suited to different practices and duties in marriage, such distinctions were neither fixed nor circumscribed by ideas of authority and submission. When talking about marriage, egalitarians

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emphasized the language of respect, mutual support, and teamwork. More than twenty years later, the debate has not gone away.

However, by the early 1990s, white evangelical conservatives sought to shift the focus on gender and marriage to a psychologically based therapeutic model and practical matter of faith. Dr. James Dobson (a psychologist who found a calling through the evangelical appropriation of modern psychology) stood at the forefront of this growing wave even as he held on to ideas of submission and authority.

In 1979, Dobson founded Focus on the Family, a parachurch organization that produces audio tapes, videos, books, and conferences on family matters. Dobson understood gender to be a fixed, natural identity of God’s design. Invoking a combination of biblical scripture and psychological language, by 1990 Dobson was able to create an international media empire on family matters. For Dobson, the future of the nation’s longevity and international supremacy was at stake when so-called traditional families were in decline. However, Dobson recognized that using such language would not have the same broad appeal. According to sociologist Susan Gallagher, Dobson was “less interested in arguing about the nuances of biblical texts than in providing pragmatic advice that [would] help husbands and wives understand their unique needs” (italics mine).85 It was this uniqueness that enabled Dobson to retain his strict attitudes about gendered roles between

85 Gallagher, Evangelical Identity, 54.
husbands and wives while conveying them in a more hospitable and encouraging tone. To advocate for political change, Dobson created a lobbying arm of Focus on the Family whose focus was to legislate change. Dobson’s dual focus—calling to mind the grassroots mobilization of conservatives in the Sunbelt—enabled him to become a household name in Washington, D.C., and “Anytown, USA.”

By the middle of the 1990s, gender remained an important component of white conservative evangelicalism, but it manifested in a growing focus on the role of men. Gender as WCEs understood it also included a debate about shifting ideas of egalitarianism within marriages. For example, in Straight Talk to Men (1995), Dobson declared, “social engineers love to tamper..they’ve been tinkering with sex role definition since at least 1968. Everything understood to identify womanhood for thousands of years has been held up to ridicule and download.” From there Dobson related an eloquent memory of his relationship to his father as a model of godly masculinity in a period of social and legal change that Dobson claimed reframed the importance of gender distinctions as essential to the stability of the American family. Reaching beyond the role of men as authoritative and financially supporting husbands, Dobson also addressed the role of men as fathers, shifting the focus from a strict focus on men’s roles as “husbands” to those of parenting. According to Dobson, “children naturally look[ed] to

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fathers for their authority" and fathers must be sure of their own masculine authority to resist any testing from their adolescent children. Dobson believed that as feminism called into question traditional assumptions about the role and relationship of women in the home, a growing lack of expectations for children to live under the authority of their parents and a deep respect for their elders had contributed to a loss of men's authority in their homes by the 1990s.

Another means of addressing and expressing this need for men to claim their biblical authority manifested in the creation of the Promise Keepers (PK) in 1990. The Promise Keepers, founded by former University of Colorado football coach Bill McCartney, who also stressed the need for men to embrace their masculine duty to lead their families. At rallies attended by tens of thousands of predominantly heterosexual white males around the country, McCartney called on men to lament their failure, connect with other men for accountability, and commit to taking on a more active role as husbands and fathers. Like Dobson, Falwell, and the SBC, the men who attended Promise Keepers rallies were middle-class white men. Unique, however to the PK movement was an emphasis on displays of deep emotion and racial reconciliation, the latter of which white evangelicals had rarely addressed since the 1970s. Yet, despite attention to racial harmony,

87 Dobson, Straight Talk to Men, 93-6.

88 Ibid., 83-91.
conference attendees and leaders were predominantly white and rather than focusing on concrete solutions to inequality, PK stressed confession and repression—an approach that left many African American men disillusioned with the movement's lack of action. To historian Melanie Heath, the primary unconscious message coming from the Promise Keepers was an affirmation of white male authority within and outside of the home. For men who did not fit this mold, they were once again left standing in the margins, caught between their desire to belong and the reality of their lives that—according to the WEC attitude about gender in marriage—was an anomaly to the nation's moral fiber. In less than five years, the Promise Keepers' popularity waned as their cost of their conferences (for which they did not charge admission) depleted them financially. By 2000, they had laid off most of their staff, cancelled a "Hope for a New Millennium" March on the National Mall, and saw attendance at their conferences drop. With it, so too did their appeal and media attention. According to sociologist John Bartkowski, Promise Keepers' focus on keeping people "entertained at the conference" and no support for supporting relationships and faith after the conference led many people to discount its relevance.

While the Promise Keepers struggled to maintain relevance in the twenty-first century, books written and conferences led by women were on the

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89 Melanie Heath, "Soft-Boiled Masculinity: Renegotiating Gender and Racial Ideologies in the Promise Keepers Movement" Gender and Society, vol. 17, no. 3 (June 2003), 423-44

90 Ibid.
rise. Although people such as Dobson and Falwell continued to claim authority on the lives of women in marriage, white evangelically conservative woman began claiming their own space on the stage. There were two strands within this growing women's ministry movement that focused on empowering women to success and fulfillment and providing them with practical and sexual advice. For the purposes of this chapter, which focuses on gender in marriage and the predominant belief among white evangelical conservatives that women are not called to preach or pastor, I will focus on the latter group of women.91

These authors embraced women's role as a supportive helpmate for their spouses with fervor and candidness. They spoke to the daily activities of stay-at-home mothers and wives and gave spiritual meaning to “homemaking” activities and the reproductive labor engaged by women, such as laundry and caring for children, and assured women of their role in preparing future generations of believers. By 2000, teachers and authors discussed sexual intercourse and female anatomy as a way to embrace sex and the human body as a gift from God. Although the language of pleasing and caring for

91 Female preachers of the Prosperity Gospel continued to preach the same messages as their male counterparts and stressed marriage as the ultimate calling of a woman. Because of their similar messages, this chapter will focus more on the message rather than the preachers as individuals. For more on women in the Prosperity Gospel movement see Bowler, Blessed.
one's husband still remained, the focus shifted to women's attaining sexual satisfaction and pleasure as a right and necessity for a happy marriage.\textsuperscript{92} Although WCEs had an array of voices about gendered expectations within marriages, the explicit prescription was that men were to be the breadwinner and leader of the home and women were to stay at home and care for the children. Such beliefs were not merely an expression of biblical theology but a long-standing ideal among upper-class white people with that had existed since slavery and relied upon the export of black women's work outside of their homes to keep white woman free from any labor and a perpetuation of the myth that white women needed the authority of white men to protect them from men.

**Troubling the Water: Black Evangelical Conservatives, Marriage, and Gender**

Unlike white conservative evangelicals who sought to adapt and transform America's secular culture to its evangelical beliefs while at the same time adopting its therapeutic and technological approach to broaden its appeal, African American conservative evangelicals tried a different approach. For them, the last thirty years of the twentieth century combined an unending quest in the public sphere to defy prejudices and stereotypes about black

males and females through an embrace of cultural richness and uniqueness and by upholding and adopting of dominant white notions of masculine authority.

Most importantly, although BCEs sought to resist stereotypes and the subjugation of their sexuality, they nonetheless upheld ideas of masculine authority similar to white counterparts, rhetorically and practically. Moreover, although women made up a large percentage of black churches, their experiences as black women was subsumed under the broad umbrella of the black family. Between 1970 and 2010, conversations about family were less mandates to the nation for moral rectitude as much as they were part of an evolving dialogue on the church's social, economic, and civic responsibility to affirm and name the experience of being black in America in as much as a history of being denied full participation in American citizenship shaped their faith and communal identity. Out of these conversations emerged two dominant perspectives. One strain—especially among those who had working relationships with white evangelicals conservatives—prioritized evangelization as the foundation to a strong family and focused on the establishment of holistic ministries that addressed financial, physical, and spiritual concerns as a means of supporting the creation of strong families. While hoping to avoid language of "problem" and "solution" that mirrored government reports and politically conservative lingo, they instead used language such as "uplift, restore, and establish."
Black conservative evangelicals employed this rhetorical and theological approach throughout the 1970s, even starting as early as 1968. They were buoyed by a growing racial consciousness in the seminaries. Theologians such as James Cone began arguing against depictions of Jesus as a white man with blond hair and blue eyes, saying that such a Jesus could not empathize nor speak to the experience of oppressed peoples. On the heels of a growing racial consciousness and pride with the younger generations, black theology began addressing the experiences of blacks in a unique way and argued that this consciousness also prevented any unification and cooperation among black and white evangelical conservatives. The experience of African Americans and the way in which America's capitalistic system favored the wealthy effectively ignored the experience of so many African Americans.

Concurrently, black women began questioning not only the notion of gendered inequality, but the "double-bind" of being black and a woman. Social theorist bell hooks argued that while the Civil Rights Movement was racially liberating for blacks generally speaking, it elevated men as natural leaders at the expense of women's contributions.93 Black women were not only circumscribed by their gender, but also their race and expected to hold to white middle class understandings of femininity. Historically, however, they

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had been limited economically and socially from inhabiting lifestyles that afforded such privilege. As Patricia Hill Collins argued, and the lives black women illustrated, separating race and gender for African American women created a false distinction that did not capture the double-bind of their experience.94

“Stresses and Strains on Black Women,” *Ebony* magazine’s recap of a 1976 Washington, D.C., conference on the mental and physical health of black women, reflected some of these concerns. As one participant Eudora Pettigrew, a professor at Michigan State University, argued, “black women must carry twice the burden of the black man; We are systematically exploited—as black people, workers and as women—an issue which both the civil rights movement and women’s rights movement have failed to adequately consider.”95 Pettigrew’s argument was not an attempt to deny the experience of black men nor suggest that women’s exploitation was a result of a history of matriarchal leadership as Moynihan suggested. Instead, she was speaking to the broader issue of being a black women in America. Furthermore, the conference devoted attention to health matters, including depression, hypertension, and cancer as important variables affecting the “strength” of black women. They did not address issues of marriage, relationships, or other matters that had often stood in the public gaze of mainstream white

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media and politics—all of which reflects less of a concern about “fighting back” against negative claims as much as addressing, nurturing, and empowering black women and the concerns unique to them, and often ignored as challenges. Black women were clamoring to have their experiences heard within their own community just as society sought to demonize them.

Although black leaders were attempting to focus the conversation on the invisible economic and racial structures that circumscribed the lives of black men and women, conservative politicians sought to shift the conversation to the cultural and moral failings of black Americans. Collins argues the Moynihan Report reflected less concern about the state of black families than an attempt to label them as deviants for failing “conform to the culture of true womanhood” as understood by the dominant hierarchy of white men.96 At the same time, black women found themselves labeled as “welfare queens.” While on the campaign trail in 1976, Ronald Reagan recalled that “at nearly every stop [in Chicago] who ‘has 80 names, 30 address, 12 Social Security cards and is collecting veterans benefits on four nonexisting [sic] deceased husbands. And she is collecting Social Security on her cards. She’s got Medicaid, getting food stamps, and she is collecting welfare under each of her names. Her tax-free cash income is over $150,000.”97

96 Collins, Black Feminist Thought, 76-8.

In public, black men and women challenged these accusations and sought to bring clarity and historical insight to the experiences of black women. Behind the church’s closed doors, however, the black evangelical conservative tacitly contributed to gendered notions of leadership and authority by prohibiting women from preaching or pastoring, making male leadership normative. Although this chapter is concerned with gendered ideals in the family, it is worth keeping in mind this disparity between practice and rhetoric.

By the middle of the 1980s, the second strain of BCE’s attitudes around race emerged through a rhetoric of empowerment and celebration rooted in a spirit of black nationalism. Gone was language that suggested that such families were “ideal” or “traditional,” a rhetorical tactic that alluded to historically white interpretations of family life. Instead, they embraced the extended family as a normative embodiment of a home and began eliminating language indicating “problems” and “epidemics.”

While the audience of black evangelical conservatives often had converted members, it nonetheless produced a theology and practice that saw it straddling the line between both worlds.

John Perkins’ ministry, Voice of Calvary, reflects this tightrope walk as it existed during the 1970s. Following the momentum of the Civil Rights Movement and any potential hope that white evangelicals would give equal attention to their concerns, black evangelicals were divided on renewing an
activist spirit for social and economic change or focusing their energy on spreading the Gospel.

John Perkins, along with his wife Vera Mae, sought to address both sides of these emerging debates by establishing Voice of Calvary Ministries, a parachurch providing evangelism and social and economic outreach throughout rural Mississippi. Perkins, who married Vera Mae, in 1951, and with her became parents to seven children, became a Christian in 1957 at a Holiness Pentecostal church in California. Soon after, he moved his family from California to Mendenhall, Mississippi, as he sensed God calling him to serve as an evangelist to the rural Southerners. Early on, his family became active in the quest for Civil Rights throughout the next decade, organizing boycotts of white-owned businesses in Mendenhall businesses, leading efforts to register black citizens to vote, and supporting their two oldest children as they were among the first to integrate Mississippi public schools in 1967. Their primary work, however, was in providing Bible classes, youth rallies, and tent meetings to the Mendenhall community, where they quickly learned that their efforts would be limited unless they also addressed the needs of the community’s struggling families. It is their organizing efforts in this area that best reflect emerging attitudes about gender and the family for black evangelical conservatives.

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98 Introduction to File, John Perkins Collection Billy Graham Archives, Wheaton College (hereafter, BGA)
In a series of essays and speeches made in 1977, Perkins argued the root cause of struggling families in black communities was a lack of Christian faith and suggested how the church and parents could address it. According to Perkins: "[The problem was] the failure of Christian individuals and Christian churches to really reach out to our communities and our young people with the gospel of Christ. There will always be forces like racial oppression and the mass media leading our people to sin. Only one force is strong enough to counter this: the saving and transforming power of Jesus Christ." Although Perkins' stressed salvation as "the only one force" to overcome any form of oppression, his multi-faced ministry suggests that salvation did not preclude attention to the practicalities of everyday life.

Perkins' plan included establishing a black-owned bank to support the economic structure of Mendenhall as well as health care programs and after school community centers. Perkins' attitude about the role of the church and the need for Christian programming and outreach was rooted in his belief that churches in predominately African American communities were too focused on being gathering places for a variety of issues rather than introducing and nurturing people's faith in Jesus Christ as Savior. As he explained:

99 John M. Perkins, “Walk Your Talk 1,” Voice of Calvary Collection, BGA.
100 Ibid.
In the 1960s, the Civil Rights Movement developed out of the church. Its leaders...had strong anchors in the church of Jesus Christ. They gained their motivation and dynamism from church support. As the movement continued, however, others became involved who did not share this church base...They merely wanted to use the church for their civil rights activities...But the leadership of the Civil Rights Movement fell more and more into the hands of leaders with no Christian commitment...They lacked the wholistic [sic] approach to human need that only the church of Jesus Christ can offer...Young people began not looking to the church for salvation, but to ‘ism’s and ideologies, such as communism, socialism, and the Blank Panthers.”

For Perkins, the arrangement of gender within the home was largely irrelevant to salvation and economic stability and most of his writings reflect this lack of concern. As was the case with other leading black conservative evangelicals, the notion of submission or distinctive roles for men and women were secondary to ideas of family stability and unity vis-à-vie two-parent heterosexual families. Although not all black evangelical conservatives would hold such strong views, Perkins is an excellent example of the way in which a mix of spirituality, practical support, and inclusion and care of the entire community was a common approach in addressing the community’s needs and acknowledging its reality while still holding on to a goal of strength and vitality.

By the 1990s, Voice of Calvary began strengthening its outreach efforts, providing health care, a thrift store, farm, and after-school programs for children to low-income whites and blacks. As Randall Balmer

102 Ibid., 1-2.
asserts, at the heart of their understanding of the Gospel, Mendenhall Ministries and other black evangelicals see evangelism and social outreach as two parts of a broader embodiment of the Christian Gospel. One simply cannot exist without the other. To this end, Susanne Keys, who served as an attorney for the program throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, believed that her work was one of the ways to share the message of Christian salvation with clients. As she shared, "I'm going to be crying in heaven if I had an opportunity to share the Gospel with client and I didn't."\textsuperscript{103} Judy Adams, the director of Genesis One, the organization's private school for elementary-aged children believed that the primary gift and difference of their school from public nonsectarian private schools was their Christian foundation and emphasis on knowing Scripture and having a relationship with Jesus Christ. According to Adams, "You can be an Einstein academically and still not meet God's level of accomplishment," ultimately rendering education temporal and confining. According to pastor Dolphus Weary, the emphasis on social and economic outreach was critical to the Gospel's advancement in the black community because "white conservative evangelicals did not understand the problems plaguing us."\textsuperscript{104} For black evangelical conservatives, the church was not merely a place to go on Sundays. Instead—as was the case during the

\textsuperscript{103} Randall Balmer, \textit{Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory} DVD, 1992.

\textsuperscript{104} Ibid.
late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—black churches continued to see the community as the heart of its identity and ministry.

1987, Matthew Parker, a Detroit-based evangelist and his like-minded black colleagues around the country launched the Institute for Black Family Development (IBFD) hoping to reclaim the notion of the black church as the center of the black community rather than an extension or ministry outside of the church. IBFD wanted to confront images of the “black welfare queen” despite the fact that proportionately speaking, white women have been on welfare longer than black women. They got to work immediately by publishing a volume of essays addressing a issues perceived to be pertinent to black families, including, but not limited to: teenagers in urban areas, the role of the extended family, marriage counseling, sexual abuse, sexuality, and money management. Rather than admonishing them for what “they were doing wrong,” the materials provided practical advice as well as biblical support for the abstinence of sex and virtue of marriage.

Central to the Institute’s vision and purpose was a strong belief in the role of the church to serve as a central place for educating, empowering, and uplifting black families, not because they were deficient or deviated from the norm, but because of a belief that if they did not speak to the community no one else would and a desire to shift away from

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"problem-solving" rhetoric of the media. According to Parker, the church was not simply to serve as a place visited once a week for spiritual nourishment alone. Rather, it ought to exist as a hub for organization, collaboration, and growth in so far that it led not only to social change, but spiritual transformation as well.\textsuperscript{106} As he said, "If there is any hope for us as a people, it lies within the black church."\textsuperscript{107} Unlike CWEs who saw hope in America as a Christian, many black evangelicals saw the church as the true embodiment of their community and hope.

For the Institute and other black-led evangelically based organizations, social, political, and economic transformation would only succeed come through work of predominately black churches alone, not in any sense of institutional change on a political or social level. Those like the IBFD, who turned only to the church for change, many of them with ties to predominately white evangelical organizations including Wheaton College, gathered in 1986 to map out a plan for evangelization blacks in America. They believed that rather than relying solely on political and institutional change on a national level, the focus should be on spiritually transforming its communities. That is not to say that other black evangelicals wanted to rely solely on the government. For the Institute, which was closely aligned with conservative white evangelicals, the

\textsuperscript{106} Ibid.

message was the same: If one's faith is strong all else will fall into place. Yet many Black evangelical leaders, as discussed below, also felt that the church could challenge the government, hold them accountable to promises of equality, while continuing to build up its communities spiritually, socially, and economically through their churches. Out of the gathering in 1986, in which they formally began organizing their common beliefs and goals, came the impetus to launch a much larger conference. Thus “Atlanta '88: A Conference on Evangelizing Black America” was born.

Atlanta '88 brought over 1,000 participants to the Conference, including a handful of leaders from historically black denominations including the National Baptist Convention of America and the African American Episcopal Church. Seminars and workshops focusing on urban development, ministry to teens, and family growth were held, but the dominating theme was increasing the number of men and women who became “saved,” or converted to, Christianity through a personal, dramatic moment of conversion. Along with Parker, Dolphus Weary, who led Mendenhall Ministries for over twenty years following Perkins, used Atlanta '88 to focus on creating partnerships with already existing white-led evangelical organizations, such as Wheaton College, Moody Bible Institute, Jerry Falwell's Liberty University, and Bill Bright’s Campus Crusade for Christ, organizations that had historically made few inroads.
into the black community.\textsuperscript{108} People like Parker and Weary would continue to work on establishing partnerships with predominately white evangelical groups, stressing first spiritual salvation as the primary vehicle for equipping those African American families struggling in poverty. For example, although Voice of Calvary Ministries recognized Mississippi’s legacy of racism, they placed the ultimate blame and responsibility on the church and parents for failing to pass on Christian morals to their children. Rarely was responsibility attributed exclusively to mothers or fathers. Instead black evangelical conservatives viewed the family as a unit first, recognizing that an emphasis on gendered hierarchy was not of utmost importance for all.

By the end of the 1980s, BCEs added another dimension to their approach to the family: racial pride and a focus on the strength of the extended family. In 1991, Lee June, a member of the Institute and then a Vice-President at Michigan State University, edited a volume of essays on the black family in light of evangelical theology. At the heart of the book was the belief that alongside evangelistic efforts, churches need to place an emphasis on teaching a robust and rich heritage of black Americans, such that they not only would take pride in their history but also “anticipate

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid. Jerry Falwell prohibited black people from joining his church until 1971 and openly advocated against integration throughout the South.
\end{footnotesize}
and continually rejoice in God's goodness."\textsuperscript{109} The book also argued that "understanding [black] heritage helps [blacks] remember the ways God has blessed and disciplined [black American] families."\textsuperscript{110} Thus heritage and remembrance remained intrinsically tied to a robust Christian faith.

To confront and challenge negative assumptions in mainstream media, black evangelical professor Hank Allen argued that black families needed a renewed appreciation for the role of the extended family in the life, a deeper commitment to deepening one's faith and knowledge of Christianity, and a willingness to engage in sex only within heterosexual, monogamous marriages...Weak families suggest weak churches!\textsuperscript{111} Yet, later in the volume, one author, Sheila R. Staley, argued that the church needed to support single parent families and acknowledge their growing numbers. Her solution to some of the problems single-parent families uniquely faced was an admonishment to find strength in Christian scripture and not in the acquisition of goods or status. To support her argument she turned to Hebrews 11:1. ("Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.")) According to Staley, part of the so-called problem of a weak black family was not the lack of fathers present or even institutional racism. Rather, it was a lack of


\textsuperscript{110} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{111} Ibid., 26-7.
Christian faith on the part of single women, especially mothers.\textsuperscript{112} According to Staley, the unwillingness of some women to become a dedicated and disciplined Christian precluded the formation of healthy, lasting relationships. Interestingly, Staley devoted most of the attention toward mothers and offered just a few paragraphs on the role and work of single-parent fathers. In fact, there was little attention as to what fathers should do; women however were instructed to reduce negativity toward their children's fathers and to ensure that boundaries and custody rights were maintained, placing the onus on women to lead the family.\textsuperscript{113} All of this suggests that while Staley and other members of the Institute for Black Family Development questioned the assumptions of matriarchal dominance and a lack of a paternal presence, they continued to uphold them as aberrant. Although there were suggestions for programmatic support for families of all types, they were not explicit in supporting female-headed households, further implicating a theology rooted in right belief before one rooted in practical embodiment.\textsuperscript{114} Furthermore, one pastor's wife and social worker declared that any division between men


\textsuperscript{113} Ibid., 65-7.

\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., 67.
and women was the result first of spiritual disharmony and lack of Christian faith.  

While the voice of black evangelical conservatives—especially those who sought cooperation with their white counterparts—was vocal in the public arena, the approach to family relations vis a vis an emphasis on salvation first was not the only one—especially as it was lived among the laity. For example, Christian Stronghold Baptist Church in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, rooted their ministry to single-parent families on the following principles and expectations:

1. To establish within the church community a support system that would encourage and guide single parents in the establishment and maintenance of a family based on God’s principles.

2. To create a support cluster among women who have children whose fathers are absent from the home, for the purpose of edification and teaching.

3. To establish support families to function as extended families for the purpose of edification, according to Hebrews 10:24 [And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.]  

While Christian Stronghold was upfront in its support of single parents, there were many who felt doing so amounted to tacit approval of sex outside of marriage. Denise, a 33 year-old African American woman who grew up in an upper middle-class family in New Jersey recalled that

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116 As quoted in Staley, "Single Female Parenting," 68.
as a teenager she recalls a young woman in the congregation who became pregnant. Denise remembered that when the child was born the pastor refused to christen her during congregational worship; instead he blessed the child after the service in his office. Although both teenage parents were present, he only allowed one, stating that to invite both would amount to condoning a relationship born in sin.117

Other black men and women surveyed and interviewed—most of whom classified themselves as middle class—said any support to single parents came discreetly from the pastor and was understood to be a known, but unspoken matter, as such matters were “not to be discussed” openly.118 Two respondents who grew up in rural, low-income communities offered different experiences, saying that while not condoned, single parent families were acknowledged as realities and not subject to shaming. Moreover, another young black women who grew up in a conservative evangelical church said, that single parenthood was understood to be “taking place in other churches and communities, not theirs” as notions of middle class respectability appeared to be the predominant norm within the church.119 In Sexuality and the Black Church, womanist theologian Kelly Brown Douglas argues that many middle class black families who attend evangelically leaning black Protestant churches

117 Interview with Denise.

118 Ibid.

119 Interview with Kasey.
continued to look to white middle class families as the exemplar of success even as such notions had been the source for delegitimizing black families years earlier.\textsuperscript{120} As the predominant image of the so-called traditional American family, heteronormative white families reflected the full acceptance of society and the full embrace of the American dream as expressed through economic success and familial harmony. Moreover, it also captured the class distinctions within the black community. For middle-class black conservative evangelicals, heteronormativity, however, was not enough. They also sought to make clear their contempt for teenage pregnancy and single-parent families as a reflection of economic stagnation.

Although much of the 1980s were marked by a “problem-solving” approach to family life, by the 1990s, BCE joined white evangelical conservatives’ approach to marriage and expectations by adopting a therapeutic approach to the family. With the rise of the Prosperity Gospel’s crossover appeal among whites and blacks and the emphasis on personal fulfillment and confidence, BCE shifted their focus toward marriage empowerment and treated it as a source of strength not challenge. They also shifted their rhetoric to focus on the experiences of men and women uniquely. The shift of black evangelical conservatives mirrored thought of the wider black community.

\textsuperscript{120} Kelly Brown Douglas, \textit{Sexuality and the Black Church: A Womanist Perspective} (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1999), 100.
Over the course of the 1980s and 1990s, *Ebony*—then the flagship magazine for African Americans—stood alongside black evangelical conservatives and shifted its focus on black families away from attention on the so-called problem areas of matriarchal dominance and the absent black father to one that highlighted the changing trends and successes of middle-class black families. In 1990, for example, Alex Poinsett spent time with several middle-class black couples across the country, revealing that for this upwardly mobile group of people, concepts of authority and submission were not only archaic to them but inadequate to deal with the realities of their day-to-day living.  

Susan Carney (then 34 years old), a bank executive, was quick to share that she was “a working woman...I have my own credit rating. I have a credit history which I’m proud of.”  

This was important to Susan Carney’s self identity, independence and how she understood the dynamic between her and her husband. As her husband, Vaughan (then 42 years old), a lawyer, shared, “We share decisions about vacations, major acquisitions, the rearing of our seven-month-old son, Graham, finances, and other issues...We give each other a lot of freedom and latitude. After a spirited give and take, I’ll give into her or she’ll give into me. It’s not a situation where only one party consistently calls the shots.”  

Although Poinsett attributed the dynamic of their relationship to  

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122 Ibid. 64.  
123 Ibid.
relationship and others like it to the second wave of feminism in the 1970s, Vaughan Carney jokingly described it as "men's liberation."\textsuperscript{124} Not all Black evangelicals had similar views. By 2000, male pastors found a niche in the single-sex conferences and books and began preaching a message of gendered marriage, authority, and submission as they gained crossover appeal and a national spotlight. Thomas Dexter "T.D." Jakes, is a Dallas megachurch pastor and televangelist who got his start in West Virginia before moving to Dallas, Texas, in 1996. There he established The Potter's House. While Jakes ability to market and brand his Women Thou Art Loosed series nationwide for over twenty years is not representative of all conservative black evangelicals, womanist theologian Paula L. McGee argues that from an "ideological perspective" Jakes is an exemplary representative of one changing approach to ministry that has shaped the theology of gender among some evangelical black conservatives to an entrepreneurial, self-help message that had become a key aspect of the Prosperity Gospel.\textsuperscript{125} In The Lady, Her Lover, and Her Lord, one of his more than twenty New York Times bestsellers, Jakes furthered the notion of biblically based sharply-defined gender roles by asserting women as the emotional stabilizers and leaders in the home. As Jake stated in his introduction: "When we consider that many homes

\textsuperscript{124} Ibid.

received their temperament from the mother, we see it's imperative that
every women recognize and nurture the unique gifts that she naturally
possess—the calm, sincere milk of an enriched heart, a sedate confidence,
and an ability to gently influence those she loves."126 Moreover, in
suggesting why men should read his book, Jakes said, "The men who are
the lovers of these women will also benefit from these words, for it is the
duty of every man to help his lady achieve greatness."127 Indeed, "there
are moments when even the strongest woman can appreciate the
reinforcement of a man who is comfortable with who he is and who can be
her anchor in the storms of life."128 In writing The Lady, Her Lover, and
Her Lord, Jakes sought to empower women to have a strong love and
value for self in order to have a strong marriage and to lead the life they
are meant to lead. Jakes, recognizing that many women are working
outside of the home, marrying later, and taking on increased leadership
roles in the workforce, was able to creatively adapt his complementarian
beliefs about marriage into a book that appealed to a wide variety of
women while still enforcing notions of biblical hierarchy. By couching his
message in the guise of being personally happy, whole, and empowered,
he shifted the emphasis away from what men need alone to the needs of
women as well.

127 Ibid.
128 Ibid., 4.
Yet what made and continues to make Jakes so popular among women is not simply his empowerment of women, but his ability to appeal to their hurts. In 1992, Jakes held his first “Woman Thou Art Loosed” Conference. Seven years later, he would claim it was the largest gathering of women in America. At his conferences he called for women to get in touch with their pain, recalling stories that others had shared with him, and admonishing women to not let their past prevent them from claiming and embracing their call as daughters of God. Yet as sociologist Shayne Lee notes, despite his broad appeal to women and support of their pastoral leadership, Jakes has been keen to emphasize gendered difference between males and females, asserting that women are called to be emotionally soft as they were created from men and the “hidden, tender” part that was taken from him in creation. Lee says that Jakes has gone as far as to say that “it is sin for a man to ‘misrepresent himself’ by conducting himself as a woman.” When Jakes does acknowledge women as strong, his tone is that of an authority figure, he describes them as being “satin-like” and often refers to their bodies in sensuous language: “My advice for you, daughter, is to be prepared for change...There is no escaping it. The firm breasts that were once small


lumps will inflate with child-rearing and deflate in later years."\textsuperscript{131} Jakes ability to couch his beliefs in the strict distinction between the roles of husbands and wives in language of "destiny," "satin-like strength," and partnership and connect to women's pain has made him popular among white and blacks and even garnered him the title, "America's Best Preacher" in 2001 despite his perpetuation of women as Jezebels.\textsuperscript{132} When confronted with claims that his experience as a male rendered him ineffective as one so intimate with the experiences of women, Jakes responded that his close relationship with his mother when he was a child had granted him a spiritual authority from God that qualified him to make such judgments. Feminist and Womanist theologians have critiqued Jakes' language as patriarchal, misogynistic, and confining even as he claims they are free.\textsuperscript{133} Jake's insistence on his spiritual authority essentially invalidates the unique experiences of women and suggests that men's patriarchal leadership is central to the pastoral care of women. Womanist theologian Delores Williams' has argued that while Jakes encourages women not to stay in abusive situations, for example, he still prioritizes domesticity from women and relies upon a limited scriptural interpretation of women's roles.\textsuperscript{134} Yet, his popularity continues to remain high,


\textsuperscript{132} Cover, \textit{Time} September 17, 2001

\textsuperscript{133} Ibid., 136-7.

suggesting the elevated role many male pastors continue to inhabit regardless of their theology or attitudes about gender.

For middle-class African American men and women who came of age during Jakes' rise to prominence, notions of male authority was familiar and also a bit contradictory for them. One young woman, Karen, recalled her experience of growing up as an African American women in a predominantly white evangelical Church of Christ. Karen recalled that as a teenager her father imposed strict rules on her and her siblings, forbidding Karen to date as a teenager or attending her prom and exerting the final say in her family. While her mother often deferred to her father, she nonetheless told Karen and her sibling that she hoped they would not lose their outspoken nature. Today, Karen explains her mother's seemingly contradictory nature as an awareness that she could prevent her daughters from ending up in a relationship similar to hers.\textsuperscript{135} Karen believed that her conservative church only affirmed her father's dominating personality, leaving little room for questions.

As Jakes was calling on women to seize their destiny, Mike Singletary invited men to join "the ranks of America's emerging new fatherhood" by placing their familial relationships above everything else in life.\textsuperscript{136} Using his own childhood and troubled relationship with his father as

\textsuperscript{135} Author interview with Karen, December 10, 2011.

\textsuperscript{136} Mike Singletary, Daddy’s Home at Last: What It Takes for Dads to Put Families First (Grand Rapids, Mi: Zondervan, 1998), inside flap. Singletary repeatedly uses the phrase "real man" throughout his manuscript.
a starting point, Singletary presumes that the majority of black men have less than positive relationships with their fathers and as a result, fail to take their own roles as strong, present fathers and husbands seriously. Although Singletary’s example is personal, it nonetheless harkens back to notions of weakened families as a result of absentee fathers so prevalent in mainstream literature in the 1970s and within black evangelical conservative literature of the 1980s. Yet unlike those discourses of the previous decades Singletary offers a solution in the form of practical advice and personal examples of his success and mistakes that repeatedly uses the language of “empowered,” “American,” “real man,” “setting an example.” Singletary seeks to appeal directly to men by likening himself to someone going through the same thing they have gone through. Rather than being an ordained leader standing above them, Singletary stands beside them and removes the aura of distance that his celebrity status might have brought. Although Singletary insists that his Christian faith is fundamental to his success in marriage, he never offers direct biblical evidence to support his call for godly leadership support, and financial security for the family, reflecting the trend in the Christian therapeutic publishing industry to incorporate Christian ideals indirectly and subtlety by first appealing to notions of gendered power and authority as an American. Singletary’s ability to integrate his conservative Christian values, with patriotic duty as Americans reflects the careful appropriation
of language to appeal to a broad audience without forsaking the heart of their beliefs.\textsuperscript{137}

The association with American patriotism reflects an emerging shift within black conservative evangelicalism that while, still addressing predominantly black communities, black pastors were able to carefully use the public stage as an arena to a common identity as “faithful Christians” with white evangelical conservatives. Most of this emerging strain would eventually find a permanent and more suitable home as proponents of the Prosperity Gospel, but for the children who came of age under this unofficial and tenuous cross-racial two-step, such fellowship would become standard and more established by the late 1990s, as chapters 2 and 3 will illustrate. It also stands a reflection of what Benedict Anderson argued was the unifying force of cultural nationalism as black and white middle-class teens found themselves signing abstinence pledges together at purity conferences nationwide.\textsuperscript{138}

Conclusion

Black and white conservative evangelicals have long agreed on the centrality of the family as both a measure of the vitality of its communities and a means for transmitting its belief to future generations. Yet, both

\textsuperscript{137} Other examples of this crossover appeal include evangelists John Osteen, Joyce Meyer, and Tony Evans.

\textsuperscript{138} See Bowler \textit{Blessed}.
groups have yet to successfully establish long-term cooperatives in their work with American families. Instead, their differing priorities, rooted in their nationalist beliefs and the racial themes undergirding them, have led to diverging priorities and emphases.

Although both stressed the heteronormative family as the best model for family life, the modernization of American society has forced them to reconsider their hard-line stance. This has led to creation of specialized and single-sex ministries ministries to more directly minister to the experiences of single parents of both sexes, people who have divorced, and in some cases, multi-generational families. By the final decade of the twentieth century, gendered roles in marriage continued to attract attention for white and black conservative evangelicals and remained the idealized embodiment of love. However, rather than focusing on adults alone, conservative evangelicals would begin directing some of their energy to the faith, sexuality, and future of teenagers as the emerging context for the transmission of their gendered approach toward marriage and the family.
Chapter 2: “Sex That's Worth the Wait”: Purity Rituals and the Sex Education of White Evangelical Conservatives

On a blustery January morning in 1993, a group of Southern Baptist Church (SBC) leaders—all of whom were white males—gathered at their denomination’s national headquarters to craft a new sex education curriculum for Christian teens. Under the leadership of Richard Ross, now a faculty member at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, this group of youth ministry experts discussed what they perceived as the adverse emotional, spiritual, and moral fallout of premarital sex.139 Out of their conversations, True Love Waits (TLW) a ritually based program that includes worship, teaching workshops, and a marriage-like dedication ceremony, was born.

Less than a month after that Nashville collaboration, fifty-nine teenagers in nearby suburban Heritage, Tennessee, signed the first official True Love Waits pledge promising to remain virgins until their wedding night.140 In it they declared: “Believing that True Love Waits, I make a commitment to God, my family, my friends, my future spouse and my future children to live a lifetime of purity

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including sexual abstinence from this day until I enter a biblical marriage relationship.”141 Less than a year later, in 1994, 100,000 young people signed the TLW pledge at the SBC’s annual convention in Houston, Texas. Over the next twenty years True Love Waits would become the dominating force in the purity movement among Protestants in North America.

This chapter examines the cultural and social shifts in the United States fostering the creation of ritually based sex education programs and how such programs privileged heteronormative marriage and two-parent families as the bedrock of America’s moral vitality. I argue that the purity movement’s utilization of a 3-fold rhetoric of guilt, purpose, and destiny elevated sexual intercourse as a primarily religious matter and not one of biological or social consequence. By doing so, white conservative evangelical adults made teens partners co-partners in their quest for abstinence-only education and the spread of conservative Christianity across the United States.142

From 1970 to 1990, WCE shifted from perceiving themselves as a genial alternative to secular sex education to


142 For an excellent and thorough examination of the relationship between rhetoric and the abstinence movement see Christine Grader, Making Chastity Sex: The Rhetoric of Evangelical Abstinence Campaigns (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press).
believing themselves to be the essential political force of abstinence-only education. While white evangelical conservatives did not entirely abandon their political efforts in the 1990s, by 1993 they turned inward to create a program that marked adolescence as the key phase for establishing the purpose of adolescence as preparation for Christian marriage. This myopic focus on sexuality and marriage negated all other aspects of an adolescent's life, a tactic that black conservative evangelicals eschewed. The inclusion of ethnographic interviews with teenagers who participated in these programs explains how adolescents reconciled the tension between religious belief and religious practice through the idea of "second virginities."

Review of the Literature

While this dissertation is not the first to study evangelical sex education, it addresses an aspect of evangelical sex education that is often overlooked—race and economics. Christine Gardner's *Making Chastity Sexy* examines the rhetorical strategies that have made abstinence campaigns so popular in the United States in the last twenty years. While Gardner considers the impact of purity pledges in a small handful of African nations and acknowledges her exclusion of same-sex marriages, she does not examine race's
contribution to the idealized notions of purity and marriage or how the movement's rhetoric defines homosexuality. Nonetheless, Gardner's study remains a crucial addition to the study of purity movement rhetoric, including mine. The work of Heather Hendershot also illustrates the way in which the Christian therapeutic movement fostered the creation and spread of purity programs, especially True Love Waits; yet, she, too, neglects race.143

I have divided this chapter into five sections: a history of modern sex education in America; early evangelically conservative approaches to sex education in the 1970s and its politicization of abstinence in the early 1980s; the role of ritual theory in studying adolescent rites of passage; rhetorical, ethnographic, and theological analyses of True Love Waits and the Silver Ring; and, the political, theological, and psychological implications of re-virginization, which evangelicals was possible through a spiritual commitment to Christ.

**Sex Education & Adolescence in Modern United States History**

Thanks to the teenage experiences and writings of G. Stanley Hall and the emergence in the early twentieth century of

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psychology as a respected field of study, adolescence took on
greater significance as a unique stage of human development. Hall
came of age during the Victorian era and struggled most of his life
with the relationship between his unconscious sexual impulses as a
teenager and the prohibitive expectations placed on young people
in regards to sex, especially young men. Hall argued that the onset
of puberty was a distinct period in the life cycle, because it marked
the time during which young men did not yet have control or
understanding of their sexual impulses.

Along with Hall's writings, Jeffrey Moran argues there were
three essential shifts in society during the early twentieth century
that facilitated the "invention" and solidification of adolescence as a
distinct phase of life: 1) As the number of public schools grew, the
social separation between young people and adults became more
pronounced; 2) Men and women were delaying marriage, creating
a period that was neither seen as full adulthood nor childhood; 3)
Finally, puberty began occurring at a later age. Together, these
broader changes gave credence to Hall's assertion that
adolescence served as the critical junction for moral, emotional,
and biological formation.

144Jeffrey P. Moran, Teaching Sex: The Shaping of Adolescence in the 20th Century (Cambridge,
Although sex education in public schools did not become common until the 1920s, public debates about adolescent sex instruction stretched as far back as the end of the nineteenth century when Victorian sensibilities slowly gave way to the reform impulse of Progressive Americans. Rapid industrialization, immigration, and scientific inquiry at the turn of the twentieth century led to changing attitudes about sexuality and sex education, including the merit of educating women and the effect of one's sex on one's intellectual, moral, and physical development. 

Rather than simply a private matter of the home, discussions around sex education entered the public sphere as a matter of public health and and supported the spread of scientific racism.

As Siobhan Peterson asserts, the concurrent construction of race and sexuality as a social and ideological category explained and justified the desire to separate people into distinct groups as a means of social, political, and sexual control, a notion expressly revealed in the sexual stereotypes of black Americans. Gail Bederman echoes this sentiment arguing that race and gender were the common denominators in early twentieth century conversations on masculinity, civility, and authority. 

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and science undergirded theories around race, gender, and sexuality, public sex education took on national importance as a means of insuring the moral, physical, and social well being of white American civilization. This fostered the creation of Progressive era organizations, such as the American Social Hygiene Association.\textsuperscript{147}

Furthermore, fear that World War I was contributing to the spread of venereal diseases among young people bolstered the growing relationship between adolescence and sex education. Although Army physicians later reported that venereal diseases were more prevalent in civilian life than during active military duty, mounting pressure from congressional representatives and college educators forced the government to direct resources toward sex education. In 1918, the efforts of teachers and public health educators for federal support for sex education led to the passage of the Chamberlain-Kahn Act, creating the Venereal Disease Division of the United States Public Health Service and the U.S. Interdepartmental Social Hygiene Board. The 1918 Act also provided more funding to local agencies for sex education—especially at colleges—in turn creating and expanding already existing higher-ed hygiene departments. As Moran notes, while

college students did not have an excessively high proportion of venereal disease diagnoses, students' residential setting and liminal stage of development made them an ideal target for sex education. Even still, most sex education courses concentrated on the contraction, spread, and prevention of venereal diseases. Biology, sexuality, and ethics received scant attention.

Gradually, however, college administrators noticed a shift in the attitudes, dress and dance style of female students. For educators and other adults, these changes evidenced a hedonistic pleasure-driven society in need of taming. By the 1920s, some adults treated young adults evolving attitudes as acts of rebellion that devaluing white women's purity and threatening the future of the white race through the contraction of venereal diseases. Although men were expected to have but not to give into stronger sexual urges, white women were expected to remain chaste and pure and often faced blamed for the cultural shift.

Critics also cited the postponement of marriage among women as another threat to a chaste and healthy society despite underlying beliefs (later confirmed in Alfred Kinsey's 1953 report on female sexual behavior) that such females had long been engaging in intimate relationships that included masturbation and orgasms.149

148 Moran, Teaching Sex, 73-5.
149 Moran, Teaching Sex, 79-81; Cahn, Sexual Reckonings, 40-2.
Central to these conversations was the unstated, yet deeply ingrained belief that sex education was for white Americans alone. Much of white America had already rendered black sexuality deviant, arguing that weak black women were unable to "contain [the virile nature of] male sexuality,"\(^{150}\) (The following chapter will explore attitudes of black Americans toward sex education at this time.) As such, talks about sexuality transitioned from an emphasis on social hygiene to one focused on moral purity. Rather than denying what was occurring, educators finally began acknowledging the reality of petting and heavy kissing while still suggesting that excessive behavior would only confuse young adults into thinking they were participating in a rich and full sexual life. Thus, in less than fifty years the public conversation regarding sexuality and sex education shifted from education for the prevention of venereal diseases and curbing sexual appetites to an integration of biology and physiology in the name of moral and emotional health. Sex education theories were no longer passed down from a centralized voice, such as the America Social Hygiene Association or the National Education Association.\(^{151}\) Instead, the movement was decentralized and the onus of sex education fell to local school districts, and more importantly, individual teachers.

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\(^{150}\) Cahn, *Sexual Reckonings*, 72.

Most teachers, however, felt that teaching sex education distracted from other important lessons, drew little interest from students, and increased the level of parental controversy.\textsuperscript{152} Parents often disagreed on the level of moral instruction present in sex education and the extent to which sex education raised adolescents' interests in sexual experimentation. With the medical emphasis on sex education declining and government efforts to support it waning, there was little impetus for educators in the late 1920s and 1930s to provide sex education.\textsuperscript{153}

By the eve of the second World War, social hygienists shifted away from a biological and physiological approach to sex education to one focused on the psychological and social impact of sexual intercourse. They stressed that sex education ought to focus on strengthening and preserving the American family through a program that addressed sexual intercourse only in the context of the family. The changing emphasis on sex education appealed to a growing white middle class (a number that would increase dramatically following the war with the development of suburbs) and reflected a slow change in how social scientists and Americans more broadly perceived dating and marriage. Less the dominance of the well-to-do, Americans began approaching marriage as a

\textsuperscript{152} Moran, \textit{Teaching Sex}, 108-111.

\textsuperscript{153} Ibid., 109-110.
state available to all classes and one that provided more choices and opportunities for success. With an emphasis on the family, sex education lost some of its controversial image and was instead viewed as a stabilizing force in American society. By the 1950s, classes in secondary school on family life not only focused on the biology of sex, they also stressed dating, courting, and the importance of nurturing a strong marriage.\textsuperscript{154} Placing the white, middle-class family unit at the center of sex education and America's Cold War politics made white families—especially wives—critical agents in the fight against communism and fostered an ideology of nostalgia, perfection, and consumerism.\textsuperscript{155}

By 1960, however, a growing chorus of voices challenged these views, including Lester Kirkendall. Focusing on the psychological effects of sex, Kirkendall challenged the idea of sex as the provenance of marriage for the sole purpose reproduction. Instead, he argued that sex had a strong psychological component that contributed to intercourse's capacity for physical and emotional pleasure. Over time, as historian Jeffrey Moran notes, Kirkendall questioned resistance to premarital sex and stressed psychological well-being over abstinence among sexual partners.\textsuperscript{156}

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\textsuperscript{154} Luhr, \textit{Witnessing Suburbia}, 4-5; Moran, \textit{Teaching Sex}, 153.

\textsuperscript{155} See Eileen Tyler May, \textit{Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era}, 20\textsuperscript{th} Anniversary ed. (New York: Basic Books).

\textsuperscript{156} Moran, \textit{Teaching Sex}, 156-9.
like Kirkendall's would later give ammunition to some conservative evangelicals' belief that America's sexual mores had become too lax.

**Conservative Evangelicals’ Initial Foray into the Sex Education Debate**

In 1964, Mary Calderone, Planned Parenthood’s Medical Director, founded the Sex Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS). SIECUS wanted to shift away from teaching specific values or standards of behavior to providing comprehensive information enabling young people to make independent, informed decisions. SIECUS provided information on contraception, the biological make-up of males and females, the nature of physical pleasure, and the establishment of a system of *personal values.*\(^{157}\) One contemporary journalist noted: "[w]hat makes Dr. Calderone and her colleagues so compelling is not simply that they dare to talk about the variety and color and excitement of sex, but that they push right past the old dilemmas (Biological approach? Negative approach? Moral approach?) to place the burden squarely where, in fact, it is—on the individual."\(^{158}\)

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\(^{158}\) Gross, "Education Comes of Age," 23.
It wasn't long before a small, but significant number of public school systems began adopting SIECUS's approach, including districts in Chicago, Washington, D.C., and suburban New Jersey.

Despite SIECUS's growing popularity, not everyone was happy, and it was into this unrest that a small handful of white conservative evangelicals haphazardly entered the national debate. Critics of SIECUS—regardless of their religious beliefs—argued that the organization promoted a laissez-faire attitude toward sex and encouraged promiscuous behavior among young people. SIECUS contended that since teenagers were already engaging in sex, they ought to do so informed.

One Baptist leader at the time argued that SIECUS encouraged young people to consider their parents as outmoded and undereducated—a direct defiance of tone of the Bible's Ten Commandments.\(^{159}\) Another conservative pastor claimed that the issue was an example of a much larger spiritual battle against good and evil in which premarital sex reflected Satan's growing influence and America's waning moral influence.\(^{160}\)

In 1969, Five years after SIECUS' founding, Gordon Drake, a member of the Tulsa-based Christian Crusade published *Is the Schoolhouse the Proper Place to Teach Raw Sex?* Although the

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document contained many falsities—including the assertion that current sex education programs denounced gender roles in the home and encouraged sexual rebellion—it nonetheless forced school boards across the country to reconsider their sex education curriculums. As sociologist Janice Irvine has noted, many of the pamphlets’ opposed to SEICUS were rooted in the Cold War hysteria of the period, including the belief that “if the new morality is affirmed, our children will become easy targets for Marxism and other amoral, nihilistic philosophies—as well as V.D. [venereal disease]” Drake’s little red book was not the first time Christians had questioned SIECUS, but he was among the first to gain nationwide attention thanks in part to the radio ministry of Bill Hargis (Christian Crusade’s founder) and a growing alliance among conservative grassroots organizations. Irvine notes that along with fears of communism and feelings of “racial anxiety” played upon centuries-old ideas of black sexual deviance and virility, conflating the relationship between race, sexuality, and America’s identity. If Americans (understood as white Americans) were left

161 Christian Crusade, Is the Schoolhouse the Proper Place to Teach About Sex? (Tulsa: Christian Crusade Publications, 1968) in SBLA, CLC, 23-1; Moran, Teaching Sex, 180-3;


163 Ibid., 52-3.

164 Ibid., 55.
physically and intellectually weak, how would the nation come ahead in the Cold War?

Alongside Christian Crusade, other grassroots organizations began emerging around the nation, such as Motorede (Movement to Restore Decency) and MOMS (Mothers Organized for Moral Stability). Based in Anaheim, California, MOMS—one of several groups supported by the conservative John Birch Society—led a visceral campaign there to end public sex education. They argued that fifty percent of graduating girls were pregnant, and “one teacher became so carried away while conducting a course that she completely disrobed in front of the class.”

MOMS also cited more than twenty reasons why sex education was “wrong,” including the belief that: 1) sex education usurped the authority of the parent and undermines natural parental-child relationships at home; 2) it led kids to become “proxy ‘peeping toms’” of their parents and “encourage[d] sexual exhibitionism;” 3) it gave young people an unhealthy level of curiosity and interest in sex, and; 4) it violated “the commandment to ‘honor thy father and thy mother’ because it placed the parents in judgment before classmates.”

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Teen sex and pregnancy, however, were not just about parents losing authority. Both Susan Cahn and Rickie Solinger have written how middle class whites in the early and middle twentieth century viewed single pregnancy as a moral failing and reflection of a society's tainted values. Unlike the pregnancies of single black females, which politicians and the medical establishment regarded as symptomatic of black sexual deficiency, the pregnancies of white single women were seen as incidental moral aberrations.¹⁶⁷ That white suburban middle-class mothers believed teenage sexual activity and pregnancy to have reached troubling proportions illustrates the unstated, yet implicit fear that white teens were modeling the deviance of African Americans.

In actuality, only 37 of the more than 10,000 students in the southern California school district were pregnant at graduation. Arguing that young children's lives and the future of the nation were at stake, right-wing groups fought against sex education in public schools. Through their Joseph McCarthy-like vigilantism and language, many of these extremely conservative groups forced school districts across the country to shift away from curriculums that fell in line with SIECUS's recommendations for comprehensive education.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁸ Goodman, "Controversy," 79.
A Moderate Evangelical Response

However (as noted in chapter 1), white evangelicals in the late 1960s and early 1970s had not yet solidified a platform on social issues nor did they have a uniform perspective on how to engage politics and society on a national level. Some white evangelicals took a rather cautious and at times balanced approach to the issue of sex education. This is perhaps one of the most interesting and enlightening facets on the relationship and public image of evangelicals and sex. One could be white, conservative, and evangelical and still believe that public sex education was not a detriment to society. In fact, some saw it as a benefit and aid to the work of church leaders and parents.

Harry Hollis, the 1969-1970 student body president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, urged the director of the SBC’s Christian Life Commission—the committee charged with addressing social issues—to support public school sex education, because as he explained, the real issue at hand was the problem of “sex misinformation.” Hollis felt Christians should engage in the conversation so as to ensure a thorough discussion based on evidence rather than emotion. Hollis also argued that the church did not benefit from taking a radical
stance in opposition to sex education as some right-wing organizations had done.169

A year later, in a speech at the annual Southern Baptist Convention meeting, David Mace went even further than Hollis. Mace, a sociology professor at Baptist-affiliated Wake Forest University, claimed that to understand the sex education controversy, people needed to situate their discussions in a broader historical context. Mace maintained this included recognizing Christianity’s longstanding contempt toward sex, so much so that he blamed the Church for “present[ing] Christianity as an anti-sexual religion.”170 Turning to the early church fathers, Mace rightly noted that Augustine and Thomas Aquinas understood sex as something one must endure, even in marriage, where it could cloud a couple’s spirituality and holiness.171 Mace argued these attitudes continued through the medieval period and were cemented in the eighteenth century by Puritan theology and later by Victorian ideology in the nineteenth century.

For Mace, the church’s historical relationship with sexuality was the very reason young people celebrated the arrival of the


171 Mace, “Sex Education,” 2.
"Sexual Revolution" of the 1960s.\textsuperscript{172} (I refer to the term sexual revolution in quotes in line with the author's use.) For Mace, the "Sexual Revolution," along with growing scientific intelligence, a culture of individualism, and the gaining tractions women's rights, fostered the idea controversy of sex education. However, sex was not the problem; it was the issues tangentially related to it.\textsuperscript{173}

In 1973, evangelical pastors Paul Simmons, Kenneth Crawford, and Paul Lester published \textit{Sex is More than a Word} and \textit{Growing Up with Sex}.\textsuperscript{174} Although both books devoted attention to the biological and psychological changes of adolescence, they also addressed Americans' changing attitudes about sex and noted the church's ironic and complicated history as a taboo subject locked in "Victorian bondage."\textsuperscript{175}

In \textit{Growing Up with Sex}, Paul Simmons and Kenneth Crawford, claimed that the church's new "sexual morality" of the 1960s emerged upon a deeper reading of the Bible, not the sexual revolution; as a result, people had come to embrace the idea that sex was "not dirty or shameful or sinful. It [was] the good gift of

\textsuperscript{172} Ibid., 3.

\textsuperscript{173} Ibid., 3-4.


\textsuperscript{175} Lester, \textit{Sex is More Than a Word}, 5.
God."\textsuperscript{176} This insight purportedly opened the way to more open discussions around sex without feelings of guilt. The problem, however, they said, was a lack of boundaries on the conversation, leading people to have a casual attitude about sex that promoted instant self-gratification.\textsuperscript{177}

On the other hand, in \textit{Sex is More Than a Word}, Paul Lester argued that it was not a re-reading of the Bible that led to a new attitude about sex but a combination of factors: 1) increasing forms of contraception, 2) decrease in censorship, 3) greater availability of recreational time, which "[gave] people more opportunity to involve themselves in situations which stimulate sexual interest and to participate in sexual activities," 4) a push for women's equality, and; 5) long-held values in flux.\textsuperscript{178} Like Simmons and Crawford, Lester noted that "the sexual revolution" erased the attitude of secrecy surrounding sex and led people to engage in it on a whim, depreciating it's role in a marriage.\textsuperscript{179}

Despite their desire to foster a greater sensitivity to the nature of sexual activity, \textit{Growing Up with Sex} and \textit{Sex is More Than a Word} did not take on the polemical tone that would be

\textsuperscript{176} Simmons and Crawford, \textit{Growing Up with Sex}, 7.

\textsuperscript{177} Ibid., 7.

\textsuperscript{178} Lester, \textit{Sex is More Than a Word}, 2-3.

\textsuperscript{179}Ibid., 5-6.
evident in many evangelical sex ed publications in the following decade. In *Sex is More Than a Word*, Lester did not call for young people to completely rid their minds of sexual thoughts; nor did he write them off as abnormal. Instead, he acknowledged them as an essential part of adolescence that the church in the early 1970s had failed to acknowledge.\(^\text{180}\) He even went so far to say that young people ought to be careful of reading individual scriptures literally without paying attention to the context and the idea. He also reminded readers that Jesus did not come "to bring more rules" but to empower people to learn to be in better relationship one another\(^\text{181}\). (However, as Chapter 1 illustrated, by the middle of the 1970s as debates over biblical interpretation and evangelical feminism heated, the tenuous cooperation among black and white liberal evangelicals paved the way for literalists to become the dominate voice of evangelicalism in America.)

Instead, Lester argued three components were central to Christian sex ethic: 1) a basic understanding of creation as the root of human existence and sexuality, 2) a thorough knowledge and appreciation of the human body, sexual intercourse, and the emotional and physical responsibility of engaging in sex, and 3) being able to express a mature understanding of love rooted in

\(^{180}\) Ibid., 13.

\(^{181}\) Ibid., 16.
trust, consistency, growth, and forgiveness. Sex was not just for procreation and mutual enjoyment in marriage, as Beverly and Tim LaHaye, James Dobson and others conservative evangelical authors of the late 1970s and early 1980s would soon argue. Nor did Lester insist that a divine order was the root of all relationships. Although Lester’s book appears contradictory to evangelical attitudes of the 1980-2010s, they are in fact a reflection of the gradual, and at times haphazard, solidification of evangelical values in the 1970s and the extent to which still-emerging debates around women’s rights had yet to dominate white conservative evangelicals’ conversations. *Sex is More Than a Word* did not emphasize religious morality in but discussed sex’s impact on one’s emotional state. In other words, one’s state of salvation (or that of the nation) was not at stake, as would be the case for most white conservative evangelicals in the next two decades.

By 1976, white conservative evangelicalism’s moderate approach eventually died under the takeover of conservative leaders and the growing political alignment between grassroots conservatism and white evangelicalism’s fundamentalist leaders. By then, the conflation of homosexuality and women’s equality

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182 Ibid., 45-9.

183 Irvine, *Talk About Sex*, 82-3.
helped WCEs embody a defensive posture against secular sex education and a proactive and unified stance.184

The Politics of Abstinence Education

In 1980, after garnering the support of white conservative evangelicals and promising to limit federal funding for social aid programs and improve America's economy, Ronald Reagan soundly won his bid for president. Although was not not the only factor in his landslide victory, the emergence of a politically driven coalition of white evangelical conservatives between 1978 and 1980 signaled the influential role that the newly created Religious Right would hold throughout for the next twenty years. Within months of his inauguration, President Reagan signed into law the Adolescent Family Life Act (AFLA), which intended to decrease teenage pregnancy through financial support for abstinence-based sex education programs in America's public school. Central to the passage of the AFLA was the rhetoric of the bill's authors, Republican senators Orrin Hatch of Utah and Jeremiah Denton of Alabama. Denton and Hatch argued that unless sex education shifted away from a focus on contraceptives toward one rooted in abstinence, the breakdown of the American family and the number


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of abortions would continue. Other supporters of the bill blamed the problem on the number of women (white women) entering the workforce, teenage pregnancy, and federal support of social aid programs, including welfare and food stamps. Martin Gilens notes that at the heart of these fears was a racialized understanding of sexuality that castigated black women as matriarchs or lazy single parents sapping the government's resources and contributing to a culture of moral indifference and entitlement. Throughout his campaign for presidency, Ronald Reagan and the growing neoconservatism of the Republican party capitalized on this sentiment and bemoaned the rise of the "black welfare queen." They argued that such women contributed to the breakdown of the family and were encumbrance on America's economic and social state because of their lack of employment and so-called willingness to have children outside of marriage. Yet, for generations, economic and social oppression forced black women

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185 Sarah Moslener, "By God's Design?," 4-5.

186 In The New Jim Crow, Michelle Alexander aptly demonstrates that much of the hype surrounding crime rates and increased drug use was part of a large publicity campaign of the Reagan Administration and their desire to present themselves as the enforcers of law and order. See Michelle Alexander, The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness, rev. Edition (New York: New Press, 2010). Around the same time, Bill Moyers produced his controversial television documentary, The Vanishing Family: Crisis in Black America, in which he interviewed a number of poor black families in Newark, suggesting that they represented the state of the urban African American family. Many of the families interviewed did not complete high school or were on welfare. When it was aired it became the source of numerous editorials about the government's support and sanction of immorality and teenage parenthood.

to work outside the home. As such, rather than being an active part of the discourse on America's social state, African Americans became the standard by which conservative white Americans measured its decline.

Janice Irvine argues that white evangelical conservatives also rallied around AFLA in hopes of sealing their longterm political coalition with the Republican party. This alliance created and fostered the myth of America as a Christian nation, paving the way for WCEs to anoint themselves as the nation's moral authority. Religious overtones also pervaded AFLA's provisions. In order to qualify for funding organizations had to have religious affiliation, an absence of conversations around abortion, and an emphasis on adoption, which, as Irvine concludes, led to most of the funding going to religious groups. These groups in turn created curriculums based on their abstinence-only beliefs.

In 1987, Josh McDowell, a prominent Christian author and advocate for abstinence-only education, wrote an open letter to religious broadcasters on the "adolescent sexuality crisis." For

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189 Irvine, Talk About Sex, 92-5.

McDowell the primary problem was no longer a perceived sexual revolution or growing call for women's rights, but an increase in premarital sex, teenage pregnancy, and a growing disconnect between teenagers and their parents. Fear dominated McDowell's messages, as well as a sense that America was losing its moral acuity. It was not just an issue of sex, but an issue of personal and communal salvation. McDowell and James Dobson—leader of Focus on the Family, a conservatively evangelical advocacy organization—understood that it was not simply about teaching abstinence only education, but stressing how a seemingly private act of sexual intercourse could affect the larger body—specifically the United States. They urged adolescents to see themselves as part of a larger war against vice and decay. They called on radio and television stations to air messages supporting the benefits of abstinence before marriage. They also cautioned parents on the growing trends of adolescent rebellion and sought to "equip" them with tools to be able to confront the trends of secular society. 191 For McDowell and Dobson, a proper sex education was rooted in the home and in churches because it required to place sex in the context of marriage as the only form of sexual expression in which Christians should engage. By linking the political, cultural, and

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social state of society with the adolescent development of young people, WCEs effectively politicized the psychological and biological changes taking place in teens in order to preach their message of change across the nation. In the eyes of WCEs, teens (and kids, indirectly) became both the problem and the solution to the nation’s moral crisis, making them crucial, yet vocally important partners in their fight for political and moral authority. While national politics dominated many WCEs’ conservations around sex education, at the same time, they also realized the importance of addressing the issue within their community. Just as concurrent conversations around marriage employed therapeutic and practical language (see chapter 1), so too did matters of sex education by the 1980s. Throughout the decade, two major themes emerged in evangelically conservative sex education: 1) one ought to fear sex and one’s body because they could lead to the loss of self-control and diseases 2) Parents and other adults in church want the best for teens and are emissaries of God’s desire for them. As such, teens have no need to wonder if their parents have their best interests at heart.

In 1985, the Southern Baptist Church’s publishing arm (now called LifeWay) published a four-week Bible study series on sex education for teenagers. “Who Created Sex” was the topic for the
first week. Taking a therapeutic approach to the question that focused on a young peoples' emotions, the study asked teens to select one of a series of characters from a given tory who most reflected their feelings about sex and share with their classmates why they chose that particular character. Students then chose the places where questions of sex most arise through a personal story (home, work, school, with friends, and at church).

Having drawn participants in through personal reflection, the study then shifted to biblical literature and asked them to imagine themselves as Eve announcing the birth of her first son.\textsuperscript{192} As noted in chapter 2, evangelicals have longed understood Eve to be humankind's first mother and a validation of the role of women as wives and mothers. By connecting teenagers to Eve and the work of a wife and mother, the study invariably elevated teens' lives to a level of prominence and grafted them into a biblical narrative of divine order. At the same time, it affirmed the belief that a woman's primary role as one of a wife and mother. At the end of the study, students wrote their own philosophy on sex and gender using only the book of Genesis as their guide. While the statement was in their own words, the only source they could use was one book of the Bible, affirming the evangelical belief in the Bible as the unflappable

\textsuperscript{192} "Who Created Sex" January 5, 1985, Southern Baptist Church (SBLA-CLC)
and timeless authority for all areas of life. Many other bible studies also employed this model. They started with a therapeutic and personal appeal to teenagers before shifting and ending with a tightly defined moral base. Christine Gardner contends this method was key to their message of purity and abstinence, which sought to incorporate of teenagers into a larger narrative that guaranteed a secure and promising future.¹⁹³

One Sunday School lesson focused on the relationship between sex and sin. The opening cartoon illustrated two male teens relaxing on a set of bunk beds. Above the head of the teen on the bottom bunk has a caption with the words “X-Rated” inside. Left unstated is the association of two males with the words “X-Rated,” a tacit reminder of the dangers of homosexual ideations. Based on the study’s opening dialogue, the teen on the top bunk is purportedly reading a pornographic magazine. The kid on the top bunk has a smile on his face, is reading a Bible, and has a bubble caption with a blond woman in an ankle-length dress. The study tells readers to associate her with the wisdom referred to in Proverbs 4:7-9: “Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding. Esteem her, and she will exalt you; embrace her, and she will honor you. She will set

¹⁹³ Gardner, Making Chastity Sexy, 73-6.
a garland of grace on your head and present you with a crown of splendor." The lesson challenged young people to listen to the advice of godly, older people and remain mindful of the amount of time they gave to "pop music"—aspects of worldly relationships of which young people should be wary.194 The authors also instruct teenagers to fear sexuality and establish a body-spirit polemic, as: "human sexuality does have its scary side. When the natural sex drive is allowed to run out-of-control, it become selfish and does not care whom it hurts or what consequences lie ahead."195 Other warnings about sin include the potential for sexually transmitted diseases, pregnancy, abortion, and the loss of goals and dreams. Another example recalled the biblical character King Solomon at the moment he imparted sexual wisdom to his sons. The lesson thus likened Solomon to all parents who sough to impart similar sexual wisdom to their children just in case teens were feeling angst toward their parents. Again, the message that the lesson sent to teenagers suggested that because God created them, they needed to understand and honor their bodies as not belonging to themselves but to God and those whom God has given control over their lives—their parents. Concurrently, the writers stress that

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parents and teens are on a team were in the same fight against sexual immorality.

By 1990, the primary changes within sex instruction emerged: 1) any sex outside of marriage was destined to lead to a life of regret and lost opportunities; 2) God had a plan for each and every person as long as they sought to follow God’s plan for their lives—a plan found in following the words of Scriptures and resisting the temptation of the wider culture, and; 3) by abstaining from premarital sex, God granted teenagers spiritual authority. No longer a matter for the bedroom alone, sex (and it’s always heterosexual sex within marriage), was the sum of an adolescence and one’s purpose in life. Resist sex as an unmarried person and you will have a glorious marriage and life; “give in to sex” and you risk a life of vice, trouble, and sorrow. In line with the evangelical idea of a pursuing faithfulness and obedience in hopes of receiving a “crown of righteousness” via eternal life, saying “no” now, one will get “more” later. By 1993, white evangelical conservatives turned to live concert-like shows and rites of passage rituals for an interactive approach to learning.
Rhetoric & Ritual

Despite the rise in sex education publications, white conservative evangelicals’ most distinctive and influential contribution to sex education and the abstinence movement was the creation of ritual-based programs. Earlier in this chapter I explained how theorists in the early twentieth century began understanding adolescence as a life stage apart from childhood and adulthood and the extent to which it shaped sex education. But as Amy Frances Davis argues in her study of rituals in the evangelical community, evangelicals have historically had few, if any, ways of acknowledging the psychological, biological, social, or spiritual transitions of adolescents.196 Judaism employs bat and bar mitzvahs to mark the transition; Episcopalians, Lutherans, Roman Catholics, and Methodists practice confirmation. Even still, for Christians, confirmation—while most experienced as a teen—is not limited to adolescence. Furthermore, its focus remains on one’s conscious commitment to practice the faith and not any physiological or psychological transition. With the creation of True Love Waits in 1993 and subsequent programs, such as Silver Ring Thing and Father-Daughter Proms, adolescence for WCEs became a period in which biological, social, and spiritual changes were

196 Amy Frances Davis, "Rites of Passage for Women in Evangelical Christianity: A Theological and Ritual Analysis," (PhD diss., Drew University, 2010), 73.
marked and viewed through the lens of abstinence. No longer a transitory phase, adolescence became the time when teens were able to respond and ultimately control sexual urges through a commitment to refrain from sexual intercourse until marriage. This active commitment signified the Christian adolescent's purpose and fostered the emphasis on heteronormative marriage as the nexus of one's teenage pledge and entry into adulthood. At the heart of this initiation and transformation stands a ritual of separation, initiation, and transformation, the three essential components of rites of passage rituals.

Over the course of the twentieth century, the field of ritual studies and rites of passage in particular—shifted from primarily focusing on theory and definitions to the practice or rituals in community. In the 1940s and 1950s, Émile Durkheim first argued that rituals served to yoke people together in a community around sacred objects and symbols reflecting their beliefs. In doing so, they provided practitioners with a common language, identity, and means of securing the community’s well-being.\(^{197}\) For Durkheim, rituals formed the basis of a community’s connection to one another, the sacred, and the profane.

Around the same time that Durkheim proposed his theories of religion and ritual, historian of religion Mircea Eliade focused more closely on rites of passage rituals, which he described as “trials that mark the passage of a person through the life cycle, from one stage to another over time, from one role or social position to another, integrating the human and cultural experiences with biological destiny: birth, reproduction, death.” For both Durkheim and Eliade, who wrote their most seminal works on religion during the 1960s and 1970s, community was essential for a ritual to have lasting meaning.

Looking solely at rites of passages, Arnold van Gennep argued that along with a community, rites of passage rituals involved a three-stage process of preliminal rites, liminal rites, and postliminal rites. Preliminary rites reflect the process of separating from one’s group of origin; liminal rites embody the process of learning and transformation, and postliminal rites are the process for being incorporated into the community in a new state of being. Amy Davis makes the important observation that while


van Gennep's three-stage process provides a theory congruent to many rites of passage experiences, his singular focus on women requires an additional framework for application.\textsuperscript{201} And as Ronald Grimes noted in 1972, the lack of initiation rites in North America and its individualistic spirit further demands that van Gennep's theory be expanded upon to include concepts of "invented rites."\textsuperscript{202} For Grimes, invented rites are not arbitrary creations, but rites emerging from the tension of the needs of a community and a sense of divine or sacred wisdom that ensures rites of passages remain grounded in reality while still seeking and honoring the sacred.\textsuperscript{203}

According to Grimes, the success of rites of passage programs and the rituals that are at the heart of them demand a significant commitment of one's self to the process in order to fully establish a new framework for viewing the world and engaging in human relationships.\textsuperscript{204} True Love Waits, and less formally, Silver

\textsuperscript{201} Davis, "Rites of Passage," 85-6. Davis goes on to offer a feminist critic of Grimes, suggesting that the experience of women demands a new analytical framework that acknowledges the three-stage process as well as the structural and cultural limitations that affect the meaning and outcome of rites of passage rituals. She suggests that these rites for women must be made by women or have a three-stage process that reflects the implications of their changes as females. Davis, "Rites of Passage, 102-15.


\textsuperscript{203} Ronald Grimes, \textit{Deeply into the Bone: Re-inventing Rites of Passage} (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 114-8, 144-8.

\textsuperscript{204} Grimes, \textit{Deeply into the Bone}, 6-9.
Ring Thing call teenagers to separate from their peers who engage in sexual activity, before undertaking a transformation that includes an awareness of one's sin and limitations, confession, and a dedication to sexual purity. Teens could then sign the pledge and participate in a wedding-like ceremony marking their postliminal incorporation into a community of righteous American Christians.

While this ritual in itself was important, what made their program so popular and transformative among WCE teens was the combination of psychological and theological rhetoric that gave meaning to the period of adolescence, acknowledged a teen's desire to distinguish themselves from their parents and allowed them to seek and attain a life of purpose and promise.

Christine Gardner and Heather Hendershot both note how the movement has creatively employed therapeutic rhetoric that, in Gardner's words, "makes chastity sexy."²⁰⁵ As Hendershot argues, although evangelicalism has not strayed from its core beliefs about gender and sexuality—especially premarital abstinence—it has recognized that by adopting the language of contemporary psychology it has broadened via a rhetorical style familiar to non-Christians. Speaking of the rise of the therapeutic language among white conservative evangelical Christianity in the late 1990s,

Hendershot acknowledges that "[o]ne is likely to hear evangelical sermons that speak not only of sin but also of anxiety, sickness and low-self-esteem. God 'understands your feelings.'" As chapter 1 illustrated, the rise of the therapeutic movement in Christianity gave spiritual meaning to the desire for self-improvement, success, and happiness, such that the "Jesus way" became the best way.

Although True Love Waits created an extensive network of Bible studies and other programs to keep young people connected to one another after they have made their pledge, the key component of TLW was not the pledge, but the commitment ceremony. Open to both males and females, TLW as a rites of passage ritual for teenagers mediated the transition from spiritual and physical immaturity to mature Christianity and emotional intelligence. The ceremony, which was a combination of Christian worship and a mockup of a Protestant wedding was open to teenagers and their parents, all of whom were expected to don their best clothing as an acknowledgement of the seriousness of the matter.

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206 Hendershot, *Shaking the World for Jesus*, 89.
True Love Waits

The central ritual of True Love Waits is a worship service similar to a typical Sunday worship experience familiar to many white conservative evangelical teens.\(^{207}\) The service is carefully constructed in the leader's manual and allows little room for deviation. Thus, following a musical prelude, the gathered congregation sings one of two hymns: "Take My Life Lord" or "We are An Offering."\(^{208}\) Although the former is commonly referred to as a traditional selection and the latter a contemporary one, both selections draw attention to a life of total dependence on God. "We Are an Offering" allows the worshipper to give herself in faith and service to God and receive God's blessing in return. This give and take relationship not only reflects the melding of Christian psychology and theology, it makes dependence on God a sign of commitment and selflessness, not weakness.\(^{209}\)

After the hymn, a worship leader invites a teen from the congregation to read Luke 11:11-13: "Which of you fathers, if you

207 I use present tense to refer to TLW as it is ongoing program to this day.

208 A portion of "Take My Life" reads: Take my life, and let it be consecrated, Lord, to Thee./Take my moments and my days; let them flow in ceaseless praise./ Take my hands, and let them move at the impulse of Thy love./ Take my feet, and let them be swift and beautiful for Thee./...Take my love, my Lord, I pour at Thy feet its treasure store./Take myself, and I will be ever, only, all of Thee." http://www.cyberhymnal.org/htm/t/mlalib.htm; Some of "We Are an Offering" reads: We lift our voice, we lift our hands; we lift our lives up to You/We are an offering/Lord use our voices, Lord use our hands/Lord use our lives, they are Yours/We are an offering/All that we have, al that we are/All that we hope to be/We give to You, we give to You. http://www.higherpraise.com/lyrics/cool/w/4269.htm.

209 Hendershot, *Shaking the World for Jesus*, 89.
son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your childcare, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"  

Now oriented toward a posture of spiritual and emotional dependence, congregants then hear words stressing that the one on whom they depend—God—is a gracious and generous God. None of this is a departure from what many TLW supporters have been taught to believe, which allows for a measure of familiarity for TLW teens at the very moment they are beginning their journey of being set apart spiritually and emotionally from their peers and their parents—the latter group having already achieved adulthood and engaged sexual intercourse.

Following the reading of scripture, a youth minister leads them in the following prayer: “Thank you Lord for the good gifts God has given us. Thank the Lord for the gift of virginity, which is a priceless treasure to be protected and honored.”  

This prayer invites teens to prize virginity above all other things. It is not something for which one should shy away from or be embarrassed.

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210 The New International Version (NIV) of the Bible is one of the most popular translation among white and black evangelical conservatives.

211 True Love Waits Seize the Net Manual 2001-2002 (Nashville, TN: LifeWay, 2000), 12. The prayer was specifically led by a youth minister as not only were they and remain extremely popular among evangelicals (and mainliners), but also because it further instills the notion that they are set apart from the rest of the community and congregation.
In surrendering one's will to God, a teen receives a gift or prize in return—virginity. As Christine Gardner notes, exalting virginity as an irreplaceable reward has always been part of the rhetorical strategy of TLW, which gives teens a common identity apart from the secular world.212

Another song—either the traditional "Great is Thy Faithfulness" or the contemporary "Prepare Me to Be a Sanctuary"—follows the prayer of dedication. The first hymn focuses on God's providence and wisdom, keeping with the theme of TLW's theology of sexuality as a gift from God and humankind in total depravity upon God, a reflection of evangelicalism's Calvinist strain. "Lord Prepare Me" also stresses the idea that one's sense of purpose and destiny is not her own, but God's—a notion that aligns with the idea that being set apart as a virgin ensures one will have a happy, contented life. Inversely, it also suggests that without God, a teenager is incapable of creating a meaningful life on their own.

As the song pleads: Lord prepare me/to be a sanctuary/pure and holy, tried and true./And with thanksgiving/I will be a living/sanctuary for you."213 As is the case for this hymn, the entire ceremony places a premium on offering one's self to God as a sort


of trade in which the person promises to remain abstinent until marriage and in return they expect God to order his/her life in such a way so as to ensure that they will in fact find the perfect mate and have a life close to perfect. Gardner notes that this rhetorical shift away from negative language toward a more positive message ("No to sex, but "yes to sex within marriage") has made sexual purity a coveted choice.214

As a rites of passage ritual, these initial acts of worship are the initial separation process. Teenagers are both detaching from their parents and their peers, the latter of whom may be close friends. Detaching from their peers is not an entirely new concept for evangelical teenagers, as their membership in their faith community has already marked them different. However, what makes this differentiation unique is that it adds a direct contrast to teenagers who do not intend to remain chaste until marriage. At a time when young people were establishing an identity apart from their parents, TLW’s message claims that one’s identity is best formed in relationship with God—another figure of authority.

The TLW dedication ceremony, which follows the opening worship, diverges slightly from a traditional worship service as it includes student and parent testimony. Testimonies include

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reflections from students expressing regret over having had sex. These students often cite feelings of guilt, shame, and a "ruined" future" as the reason others should pledge themselves to a life of premarital abstinence.\textsuperscript{215} They insist that their pride and self will is what led to their sin. For them, attempting to be strong is actually a weakness to God. Instead, teens ought to surrender their will to God. The rhetoric of surrender rhetoric provides little alternative or choice for participants and redefines agency as a partnership with the divine.

Through these testimonies, TLW is careful to present abstinence before marriage not as a mandate or inevitable for a righteous Christian, but a life-changing choice that gives teenagers a say in the future of their lives. Gardner argues that the language of personal choice mimics that of the abortion rights movement by prioritizing the importance of one's personal decision.\textsuperscript{216} What she fails to note, however, that this personal decision is made in tandem with God, placing individual choice within the confines of God's will.

After student testimonies and letters, TLW allows parents to share testimonies and letters from their perspective. These letters insist the idea that parents want the best for their children and that is found only through sexual purity. This moment in the service

\textsuperscript{215} "True Love Waits Makes a Difference," Living with Teenagers (October 1994), 16.

\textsuperscript{216} Gardner, Making Chastity Sexy, 28.
provides a non-confrontational way of talking about a parent’s desire for their child as yearning for them to have the best life possible not a rule for perfect behavior.

A skit immediately follows the testimonial letters and express a stark contrast between the fortunes of sexually abstinent and sexually active teens. The sexually abstinent teens display excessive joy and excitement and look at their future with great anticipation. Sexually active teens, however, walk downcast, complain of “missing something” in their lives, and despair that their “mistake” will follow them the rest of their lives.217 Noticeably absent from the skit or letters before it, are any hints of ambiguity or doubt, a seemingly natural aspect of coming of age.

At the end of the skit, worship leaders invite teens to reflect on the skit as the church pastor preaches a sermon from themes already outline in the Seize the Net manual. One sermon, “Escaping Satan’s Web of Deception,” frames good and evil as a battle between Satan and God—the source of peace and assurance.218 This dichotomy is a hallmark of evangelicalism for it not only offers an explanation for the course of events in the world, it sets evangelicals apart from society. It also makes evangelical teens who sign the pledge partners with God on a mission to

218 “Sermon Outline,” True Love Waits Seize the Net, 15.
transform world. Not only do teens become partners, but as the sermon suggests, they are true embodiments of what it means to be countercultural.\textsuperscript{219} In using language of rebellion, the program gives teens a chance to any image of being chaste as the equivalent of being straight laced and prim à la the \textit{Little House on the Prairie} (even though they nonetheless expected to behave as though they are in fact modern replications of Laura Ingalls Wilder's virtuous, obedient, and meekly adventurous American youth).

Historically, evangelicals have not viewed their separateness or exclusion from the rest of society as a negative and unjustified. Instead, it has nurtured their sense of being embattled against the world, in turn renewing their call to evangelism, and for late twentieth century evangelical conservatives, America. As Gardner contends: "[The] rhetoric of abstinence goes beyond trying to convince teenagers not to have sex. It also shapes the identity of the evangelical community as a whole. The evangelical abstinence campaigns function to both control liminality of teenagers and underscore the symbolic boundaries between evangelicals and secular society."\textsuperscript{220}

More specifically, within the "Escaping Satan" sermon there are six sections that are further divided into three parts: "God's

\textsuperscript{219} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{220} Gardner, Making Chastity Sexy, 24.
Word," "God's Direction," and "Satan's Web." "God's Word" offers a behavioral or intellectual prescription for good behavior. The second part, "God's Direction," expands on biblical scripture through contemporary examples and colloquialisms. "Satan's Web," the third section, suggests how society makes such behavior appealing and/or the consequences of giving into such actions.

The admonition in the first section articulates the importance of humility and patience (Ephesians 4:1-2) for people committed to trusting God and waiting on God's plan for their lives (a plan that many young people acknowledge they do not know, yet entrust their lives to).\(^{221}\) Second, the preached message calls for young people to follow God's will and thereby secure a life of peace (Ephesians 4:3). Not doing so would leave room for "conflicts in the future" as well as spiritual and social unrest. The third point, rooted in Ephesians 4:4-6, challenged young people to remain sexually abstinent in order to be of one mind with God. Giving in to physical desires would only leave room for feelings of guilt and unworthiness about one's relationship to God.\(^{222}\)

Fourth, using Ephesians 4:14 as a benchmark, TWL asks teenagers to mature in their faith ("Then we will no longer be

\(^{221}\) True Love Waits Seizes the Net, 15.

\(^{222}\) Ibid. Ephesians 4:4-6 (NIV) reads: There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.
infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming"). By doing so, young people would not only be following God's will for their lives, but they could also become better disciples for God's kingdom. Having firmly established the need for utter dependence on God in the beginning of the service, the letters, skit, and sermon initiate young people into the expectations of the purity, as well as its benefits, including a partnership with God. Next, the sermon continues in Ephesians, moving to the fifth chapter (vv.3-4) and calling young people to a life of thanksgiving in accordance with God's will. Giving in to sexual immorality and impurity would give Satan a foothold to destroy their worth, relationships, and future. Moreover, when people are filled with the attitudes of the world (and thus Satan) they leave no room for a life of praise, which is understood as the basis for a life filled with God's Holy Spirit. This in turn leads to the sixth and final point of the sermon, which calls for young people to be filled with God's Spirit, the ultimate source of satisfaction, even “knock[ing] your socks off when you finally reach the marriage alter.” Satan's Web, however, is a “very, very old one...Keg parties, pornography, sexual sin, music contrary to the truth of the Gospel. Whatever works.
Together, these six main points called young people to see that there was really one safe option—to follow the teachings of the Bible or risk a life of regret, deception, and uncertainty.

Having presented participants with choices as well as the rewards of abstaining from sex until marriage, adolescents must now make a choice to complete their initiation. To do so, the congregation participates in a responsive reading allowing young people, parents, and leaders, to declare their commitment to following God's sexual design for their lives and the lives of those they love. Although the tone of the entire worship service up to this point has been laced in a sense of total dependence on God and solemnity, the responsive reading suggests that at the heart of the program is a celebration of the pledge teenagers would soon be making. The language of the reading is worth noting as it reflects the tenor, theology, and aim of the True Love Waits program, which has stressed God's sovereignty, human depravity, and the promise of having a future beyond comparison.

The language throughout the Responsive Reading claims certainty and freedom, redefining freedom not as the ability to be able to do what someone wants or even to choose, but as no

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\[\text{Ibid., 17.}\]
longer being overwhelmed with the desire to give into sin or Satan.

It speaks with certain about a future of joy and fulfillment in marriage. The sense of a bountiful future echoes the Prosperity Movement's emphasis on "sowing seeds" of faith in the present in the assurance of yielding a great reward (often material) in the future. Most critically, this responsive reading escalates the wedding ceremony as the penultimate event in a person's life, with everything prior to it as a stepping stone to that event. Singleness therefore becomes not only a transitory phase, but also an abnormal one for an adult.

After the responsive reading, the TWL ritual invites teenagers to participate in a ring ceremony based upon a heterosexual marriage ceremony. The idea behind the ring ceremony is that it provides adolescents with a visual reminder of their commitment as well as creates a memorable moment understood as a monumental "milestone" in their lives.\textsuperscript{224} Interestingly, TWL encourages parents to purchase the rings that their children will exchange during the ceremony. Yet by doing so, the message contributes to the notion that the teenagers are still not yet independent enough to be free from their parent's direct

\textsuperscript{224} \textit{True Love Waits Seizes the Net}, 16.
involvement in something that is supposed to be a sign of physical, intellectual and spiritual maturity.

As the ring ceremony begins, the minister reads Mark 1:16-19, describing Jesus' call to his first disciples, who were originally fishermen, to become "fishers of men." The minister likens the commitment young people present are preparing to make to Jesus calling his disciples to spread the message of Jesus' Gospel.

Following the Scripture, the pastor instructs parents: "Adults, face your students and repeat after me. Because I love you...and believe in the work that God is doing...in your life...I give you this ring...May it be a constant reminder...of your commitment of purity...before God....before this church...and if God wills...before your future marriage partner." After that, youth leaders—who are ostensibly not the pastors—call on students to say the following: "Believing that true love waits...I make this commitment...and pray God will empower me...to be a person of truth and wisdom...I make this commitment to God...my family...my friends...and if God wills...to my future mate and children." Finally, the pastor returns to the stage to tell the teens: "On your wedding night you are to give this ring to your spouse. You will no doubt remember this night and celebrate your accomplishment, which will stand as a holy act of
worship and commitment to God's perfect and incredible plan."^{225}

As Gardner notes, one's future wedding becomes important in the present because it empowers a teenager to preserve one's virginity until marriage when she can give it as a "gift" to one's spouse. Since TWL bases its ring dedication on the exchange of rings in a marriage ceremony it discredits the longevity and viability of any other form of romantic relationship and excludes same-gender relationships.

The ring ceremony culminates the initiation of an adolescent into this new way of being. Now, they must live out this lifestyle. Following the skit, newly pledged teenagers act out a skit on the imagined and ideal future life of someone who has made the True Love Waits pledge. According to TLW, the ideal and destined life of someone who waits to have sex until marriage is a husband and wife who quickly resolve disagreements and expressive constant affection. The husband in the skit is a hard-working business executive and the wife is dedicated to her children and husband, reflecting the gendered expectations of marriage that white conservative evangelicals have historically held up as both the ideal and the norm throughout the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The esteem of heteronormative marriage suggests that

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^{225} Ibid.

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divorce and same-sex marriages are not even in the equation of happiness.

The service concludes with one of the main hallmarks of evangelical Christianity: an invitation to salvation. Although many churches extended the opportunity for people to "give their life to Christ" during weekly worship services, the call to conversion at a TLW service not only reinforces the evangelical foundation of the ceremony, it makes room for those who have not been "saved," completing the final step toward being set apart.

By mixing active participation with passive listening, TLW has been able to create a new form of sex education that has relied on ritual and fantasy to engage participants visually, spiritually, socially, and culturally. The rhetoric of purpose, future, and marriage has created a level of certainty during a period associated with uncertainty.

For example, one Florida high school senior declared that in signing the TLW pledge, he made a de facto pledge to his current girlfriend that he would remain abstinent. His words: "By signing the card, I'm saying to my girlfriend that as long as I'm going out with her I won't try anything."226 Along with the sense of certitude that this pledge afforded his relationship, it elevated his relationship as a

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marriage-in-waiting. Rather than pledging to consummate their relationship through marriage and sex, they pledged to consummate their desires and longings with a refusal to have sex.

Moreover, TLW has provided young people with a chance to engage in evangelization through a message that is ostensibly less about a particular belief practice and more about a way of life. Rather than preaching the genial of the Jesus Christ à la a Billy Graham crusade, TLW equips teens to talk about their faith indirectly through their commitment to sexual abstinence, wherein they become a subset within a the community of evangelical Christians who understand themselves as existing for the unique purpose of being Jesus’ “ambassadors” to a dying world (2 Corinthians 5:20). At the 1993 True Love Waits rally on the National Mall mentioned in this chapter’s introduction, many teens expressed a deep sense of camaraderie in signing to the pledge and having a new personal and public identity. One teen shared: “I like being around people that are exactly like me and believe what I believe.”

Having a unique voice of Christian testimony also empowers TLW pledgers to publicly profess their commitment with confidence and pride. For Alabama’s 1996 Junior Miss pageant winner,

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227 Beth Keller quoted in Laurie Goodstein, “Saying No to Teen Sex in No Uncertain Terms.”
Summer Newman, her coronation was an opportunity to share her commitment to remaining sexually pure until marriage as statewide platform for change among Alabama's youth. As she declared, "God gave me the opportunity to talk about something I feel so strongly about...This is who I am."\textsuperscript{228} Although she attributed her mother and the Bible for providing the foundation for her beliefs and the Bible as the most important reason for remaining pure, she relied heavily on her personal experience and knowledge as the thrust of her message. Newman viewed her abstinence as a privilege and source of pride rather than a detriment to her social standing among peers who were not Christian.\textsuperscript{229} Indeed, she saw herself as favored by God. As she explained, "My main strength comes from God. He has blessed me in so many ways, and he has a plan for my life. I don't want to hinder that by having sex before marriage."\textsuperscript{230}

True Love Wait pledgers are not only saviors of their own lives, but of the world. According to TLW leaders there is indeed "power in the blood" of TLW virgins. At a True Love Waits rally in Brazil in 1995, nearly 8,000 teenagers and young adults donated their blood. Upon hearing that there was a rally, the local blood

\textsuperscript{228} Summer Newman quoted in Ann Freeman, "Standing Out from the Crowd," \textit{Living with Teenagers}, October 1996, 22.

\textsuperscript{229} Ibid., 23.

\textsuperscript{230} Ibid., 23.
bank arrived to collect the blood of TLW pledgers and claimed that more than 98% of the blood collected was able to be stored for future use. To TLW leaders it was a chance to not only provide missional support in Brazil, but a way to assert the blood of pledgers was more clean and pure than the blood of anyone else. As one teenager said in response, “Not only has Christ made our hearts clean, but he has cleansed our blood as well!” Do evangelical Christians who sign the True Love Waits pledge have cleaner blood? Absolutely not. No scientific study has been done to corroborate such theories and the idea is presumptuous at best, but the rhetoric of “clean blood” gives pledgers a distinct Christian witness and the sense that they have a special mission and purpose. It also indirectly suggests that if the blood of sexually abstinent teens is “cleaner” then the blood of others must dirty; this further reflects the dichotomy inherent in TLW of good versus evil they rely upon to convince teens of their importance and the world of evangelical Christianity’s essential value.

Nevertheless, according to Protestant evangelical theology, the blood of Jesus Christ is the redeeming factor in the salvation of the world. Does this make TLW teenager co-redemptors in the salvation of the world? Not at all, although the language they use

might suggest otherwise. Rather than the traditional evangelization via international missionaries, TLW leaders instead re-fashion the soteriological work of Jesus’ blood in the name of sexual purity and TLW participants as recipients and messengers of this good news.

At the same time, the notion of “better blood” challenges the widely-held evangelical view of communion as an act of remembrance. Traditionally, North American evangelical Protestants have taken a symbolic view toward communion, viewing it strictly as an act of remembrance and recollection. They do not believe that the bread and wine take on the human properties of Jesus Christ in communion. Nor do evangelicals subscribe to the Anglican notion that while the physical properties of the bread and wine remain the same, they express the real presence of Christ in the midst of the people. Although the body and blood that conservative evangelicals are called to remember during Holy Communion is purely symbolic, TLW rhetoric suggests that their chaste bodies take on near-mystical qualities and are a source of healing for those who are ill. Moreover, the idea that Christ has “cleansed their blood and their hearts,” indirectly casts moral judgement on all others’ who either do not sign the pledge or who have signed the pledge but still harbor hematologic illnesses. Are they somehow less redeemed than others? Are they being
punished for someone unknown sin in their past? TLW does not address such questions; it’s not their point. The point, instead, is to stress sexual abstinence as the only avenue of a righteous nation.

Second Virginity

As more churches adopted True Love Waits programs in their churches in the 1990s and early 2000s, program leaders had to confront how they would address teenagers who had already had intercourse. Could teenagers who had sex be offered the same promise of an awesome, dream-like marriage? If there was no chance of the redemption for the sexually active then the Christian belief in redemption and second chances carried little weight.

TLW response’s to this quandary led to the publication of When True Love Doesn’t Wait, a pocket-sized publication on how to start anew. God not only forgives sexually active teenagers, God “re-virginizes” with a clean slate. In order to understand the concept of re-virginization, one must discard any understanding of virginity as a physical quality. For TWL proponents, virginity is as much about emotional righteousness as it is physical purity. Rankin and Ross have acknowledged that a second physical virginity is

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232 Fundamentalist Christians often turn to Exodus 20:5 and Lamentations 5:7 to suggest that patterns of history continue to repeat itself because of the actions of humankind. Liberal Protestant scholars often refute this passage with Jeremiah 31:29-34. Nevertheless, the idea permeates communities who read the Bible literally.

impossible, but they claim one can receive a second "emotional virginity, [which] is even more precious and important to have when you marry." An emotional or second virginity is the commitment to abstain from sexual intercourse until marriage and must be preceded by confession to a pastor or youth minister. In assigning virginity a strictly emotional definition, TLW continues to enforce a stark polarity between the body and the spirit that ultimately creates more ambiguity and confusion despite their strong language on right and wrong, good and bad, just and unjust.

When True Love Doesn't Wait focuses less on describing what an emotional virginity is in favor of explaining the how-to of living a second virginity. Rather than considering the physiological aspects of sexual activity, the emphasis lies on the spiritual and psychological consequences of pre-marital sex. For TLW leaders, the consequences of sexual activity are akin to a natural disaster: "Once a person has been through a tornado, fire, shooting, or sexual experience, a memory is created...Your sin feels like an echo in a canyon; it always comes back to you." One need not be able to understand the nature of their sexual activity or how it has changed them. They just need to recognize that something is wrong, thereby something with catastrophic consequences.

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234 Ibid., 12. Emphasis in original text.

235 Ibid., 3.
However, when a person realizes his sin, he may then confess the sin to God and receive God's forgiveness—the key to a proper relationship with God. While TWL leaders occasionally cited pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections as reasons to avoid having sex, they are never presented again as reasons to become "re-virginized." Nor did the authors suggest pregnancy of STIs as the ultimate consequence of sexual intercourse. Instead, alienation from God has remained the tantamount consequence of their actions. Moreover, the language used to address the emotional fallout of teenage sexual intercourse is drastic, suggesting that losing one's virginity is a matter of life and death with consequences akin to a terminal disease or a chemical addiction: "More than likely the person who gave you this book [When True Love Doesn't Wait] can help you survive the repercussions of your sexual mistake."\(^{236}\)

Although proponents of TLW argue claim one's relationship with God as the greatest potential loss, the expectation remains that teenagers will also confess to an adult, ideally their parent or youth leader.\(^{237}\) Failing to do placed one at a greater risk of lingering guilt and shame. The irony of confessing to an adult as a necessary prerequisite even though one's relationship to God is

\(^{236}\) Ibid., 10. Emphasis in original text.

\(^{237}\) Ibid., 7.
considered paramount subtly suggests that premarital sex requires the mediation of a parent or other adult to guide teens to purity. It also briefly mention of seeing a doctor in order to test for STIs, pregnancy, or address any other concerns. This is less important, however, than one’s spiritual state, noting, “You cannot go straight to a ‘and they lied happily ever after’ way of life. Admit to yourself the reality; you’ve had sex and feel bad about it. You must deal with your guilt.”\textsuperscript{238} There is no room for someone who has no guilt. In fact, guilt and shame are the only supposed responses to teenage sex. Rankin and Ross have asserted that there are only two options to dealing with guilt—either ignoring the feeling, which leads to “escapes,” like “drugs, alcohol, or self-imposed social isolation,” or “figuring] out some way to heal which [means] dealign with the pain of admitting fault, feeling release by forgiveness, and accepting God’s gift of grace.”\textsuperscript{239}

For one 32 year old white women raised in the conservative Church of Christ signing the pledge as a thirteen year-old was out of deference to pressure from church leaders and her parents.\textsuperscript{240}

\textsuperscript{238} Ibid., 10.

\textsuperscript{239} Ibid., 11.

\textsuperscript{240} GRSEA Survey, #175. The respondent is now apart of the mainline United Methodist church.
However, as the young woman got older she found that signing the pledge made her feel guilty once she had sexual intercourse, which was not until she was 29 years old. She also conceded that she originally did not have sex because she was afraid of what it would be like and what others would say. Three years later, her family and friends still believe that she is a virgin and the young woman plans on keeping it that way.

TWL supporters have argued that they do not use guilt as a means of conversion. Rather, the guilt simply stems from knowing that a person has made a "sexual mistake." Distinguishing premarital sexual intercourse as a "sexual mistake" and not simply a "mistake" suggests that premarital sex is a calamity distinct from all others.

Another woman, a 31 year-old white woman raised in a Pentecostal church in Pennsylvania, signed the pledged when she was 15 years old. She said "the emphasis on premarital sex as sinful helped me avoid it, particularly when coupled with an overall message of trying to live a life pleasing to God." Yet, she also believed "there was a lot of fear instilled around sex--a huge

241 According to their website, True Love Waits, " utilizes positive peer pressure by encouraging those who make a commitment to refrain from pre-marital sex to challenge their peers to do the same." “True Love Waits Overview,” http://www.lifeway.com/Article/true-love-waits-overview.

242 Ross and Rankin, When True Love Doesn't Wait, 11.
emphasis on how destructive it would be outside of marriage."\textsuperscript{243} The only time she had sex before she was married was with her fiancé several months before their nuptials. Although she felt like it wasn't "that big of a deal" because they ended up getting married, she also felt a measure of guilt about nonetheless.\textsuperscript{244} Despite feeling guilty and believing that the negative messages she heard about sex as a teenager created struggle and conflict early on in her marriage because it, she feels that the messages she heard had an "overall positive" impact on her. In our interview, however, she was quick to acknowledge her frustration with the idea of sex within marriage as a "perfect, glorious experience." To her, it was at times "awkward and boring."\textsuperscript{245} This young women's experience mirrors that of several young women who completed the survey and/or were interviewed. Many of them felt that waiting to have sex until they were married would make sex a transforming, exhilarating experience when in fact they found that it not nearly as exciting as they imagined. (I never spoke to any young man who grew up evangelical and waited until he was married to engage in sexual intercourse for the first time. That does not mean, however, that they are not out there.)

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\textsuperscript{243} GRSEA Survey, #76. The respondent is now Episcopalian.
\textsuperscript{244} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{245} Ibid.
\end{flushright}
TLW's revirginization theory left no place for confusion, pleasure, or ambiguity, a not-so subtle suggestion that any sex before marriage is devoid of any pleasure. Further, it swiftly dismiss any pretensions of sexual exploration under the belief that sexual fulfillment of any sort before marriage will lead to sexual intercourse. Instead, they urge pledgers to remember their sexual past as a negative one because to have enjoyed it would go against the idea that sex is only good in marriage. Again, the focus is not on the physical notion of pleasure, but on the spiritual and psychological concept of "being good" and "doing what is right."

Christine Gardner notes that because of the constant refrain that sex is "awesome in marriage," many evangelical teenagers who signed the pledge want to experience that greatness without having intercourse, leading them to engage in as much intimate, sexual activity without actually engaging in intercourse. As a result, many of these teens engage in oral sex, anal sex, and mutual masturbation.\textsuperscript{246} Research by Peter Bearman and Hannah Brücker in the \textit{Journal of Adolescent Health} supports Gardner's argument, nothing that TLW pledgers often engaged in oral and anal sex at

\textsuperscript{246} Gardner, \textit{Making Chastity Sexy}, 187-8. Gardner also argues that as a result of evangelical teens sexual experimentation, the abstinence movement adopted the language of purity with the attention that the focus would shift from vaginal intercourse to all forms of sexual activity.
proportionally higher numbers than those who had not yet engaged in sex and did not sign a purity pledge.\textsuperscript{247}

Furthermore, not only is premarital sex a mistake or problem, so too are contraceptives and the sexual partner and friends who have had sex or do not oppose premarital sex. Evangelicals view condoms not as a means of STD prevention and protection but a "tool of promiscuity" that only encourage sexual intercourse, a sentiment echoed by proponents of abstinence education in public schools.\textsuperscript{248} One ought to view such people as detriments to one's eventual happiness and purpose. TLW leaders suggest that those seeking a second virginity disassociate entirely from their partners and others who have had sex. The strong sense of dualism and lack of ambiguity about the consequences of teenage sex is a hallmark of late twentieth century American evangelicalism. It first emerged with the rise of fundamentalism in the early twentieth century, as fundamentalists sought to separate themselves from the rest of the world in preparation for the return of Christ and felt a strong need to distinguish themselves from those who could potentially compromise their community. Although evangelicals of the late twentieth century insisted they were not like their fundamentalist brethren, Rankin and Ross suggest that the

\textsuperscript{247} Moslener, "By God's Design," 71.

\textsuperscript{248} Gardner, \textit{Making Chastity Sexy}, 167.
there is incidental application of this notion. The only difference for TLW leaders was the belief that even as they were called not to be like the world, they must remain engaged in it in order to “reach the lost” and remain relevant to them.

Once a person confesses to God, seeks the counsel of others, and disassociates with their sexual partner, re-virginizers are on the path to righteousness through strict physical boundaries and a regularly scheduled meetings with a mentor to help them maintain their promise. The revirginized do not participate in commitment ceremony or exchange rings. Yet, despite their lack of formal participation in the rites of passage ceremony, revirginized teens are not precluded from having the same mission and purpose as the sexually pure. As Ross and Rankin claim, “You [the revirginzed] will be linking arms with millions of True Love Waits students around the world who have chosen God’s very best. Now hold your head high as you reenter life.” Although the revirginzed’s experience falls short of the communal celebration that signifies rites of passage rituals, the invitation to integrate into the community as one committed to abstinence suggests that True Love Waits as a rites of passage ritual is deeply circumstantial and

249 I use the term brethren rather than “brothers and sisters” because it is the same language many evangelicals use, often ignoring women when speaking of their faith communities.

250 Rankin and Ross, When True Love Doesn’t Wait, 21. Emphasis in original text.
malleable according to the community's need—a factor crucial to the universality of an "invented" rites of passage ritual Ronald Grimes argues.\textsuperscript{251}

One crucial question remains: how many times can someone be revirginized? For subscribers of the TLW philosophy, as many times as one needs. Leaders and participants do not see this as an invalidation of the pledge's power or the commitment of young people. Rather, it is a reflection of the God's grace and an affirmation of their trust in God. One area worth noting is how purity programs, including True Love Waits respond to matters of rape (which will be discussed in the next section).

Taking the pledge to remain abstinent until married suggests that those who fail to seek a second virginity have predisposed themselves to a life of guilt, shame, and meaninglessness.\textsuperscript{252} What white middle-class church-going evangelical teenager seeking to go to college, find a spouse, and live a "good life" would have want to risk that dream? Since 1993, TLW has found a way to market teenage uncertainty, vulnerability, and the desire to establish a sense of self by connecting sexual abstinence with future happiness. For teens who accepted the challenge, they were also given the immediate gratification of being able to establish

\textsuperscript{251} Grimes, \textit{Deeply Into the Bone}, 135-8.

\textsuperscript{252} Rankin and Ross, \textit{When True Love Doesn't Wait}, 12.
themselves apart from their and morally astute and responsible examples for others.

"Rolling the Dice" Silver Ring Thing's High Stakes Tour

Two years after True Love Waits began its purity program, Arizona pastor Denny Pattyn and his team of youth ministers, evangelists, and media-savvy promoters at Silver Ring Thing (SRT) have preached an equally conservative approach to sex education. In Pattyn’s words, “The only safe sex is sex in marriage.”253 Patton first launched his teen abstinence program in response to the growing number of teen pregnancies Patton noticed his hometown of Yuma, Arizona. Pattyn and his wife believed that the cause of these pregnancies was a direct result of an American culture that focused less on evangelical Christian principles of chastity and modesty and more on hedonistic pleasure and individual gratification.254 In an interview with 60 Minutes correspondent Ed Bradley, Pattyn described SRT’s mission this way: “Our goal actually is to create a culture shift in America. We want to see the culture of abstinence be the norm rather than the exception.”255


Concurrently, Pattyn and his team wanted to erase what they believed was an outmoded fear and shame of sex. Instead they wanted to celebrate it as a beautiful, joyous encounter in the context of marriage, a message he has continued to preach to the present day. Like True Love Waits, Silver Ring Thing challenged the notion among earlier generations of American conservative evangelicals of sex as a taboo subject. According to Pattyn, not only should Christians feel comfortable talking about sex, they must talk about it. As the Silver Ring Thing team first asserted upon its founding: "The Silver Ring Thing leadership recognizes that the practice of 'safe-sex' will not ensure protection from the physical, emotional and spiritual problems resulting from sexual activity among teens. The only way to reverse the moral decay of any youth culture is to inspire a change in the conduct and behavior from those within the culture. Therefore, every program and activity at SRT has been designed to both inform, inspire, educate, and follow-up students and parents in this battle for purity within their families."\textsuperscript{256}

Believing in a relationship between sexual purity and America's national identity the Silver Ring Thing sought and received more than $1 million in federal funding in the first 9 years.

of they existence despite lawsuits from the ACLU challenging their religious message. Ultimately, SRT won by removing any religious language from its program until the end when they invite people into a relationship with Jesus. At that point, students were given the option to leave the room.  

At the heart of the SRT message to teens was the importance of a life of purity now for the sake of their future, their families, and their relationship to God. In order to make this message appealing to hundreds of thousands of adolescents across the United States, SRT, like TLW, capitalized on emphasizing a strong insider/outsider message between SRT participants and secular society through the language of purity. As Heather Hendershot has argued, “Christian culture also offers resistance to young consumers. Not having sex, for example, can be presented as a way to radically resist the norms of mainstream culture. In this way, not having sex is made hip, and teens can revolt, but not against their parents.”  

I attended Silver Ring Thing’s “High Stakes” Fall 2010 Tour at a suburban Washington, D.C., church in 2010. Although the church was United Methodist—falling into the traditional subtype of a liberal mainline congregation—the church more closely  

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257 For more details on SRT’s receipt of federal funding, see Moslener, “By God’s Design,” 8-13.

258 Hendershot, Shaking the World of Jesus, 35.
resembled a fast-growing evangelical mega-church. It continually referred to its buildings as “their campus” and held a electronic display of upcoming events, including aerobic, dance, and parenting classes, basketball practice, and giant lobby resembling a hotel lobby sans the bar. There were also no crosses visibly displayed and church publications lacked any designation that it was a United Methodist Church. One might think they were at a convention center or mall.259

According to Kimon Howland Sargeant, churches like this shy away from traditional church architecture and symbols in deference to those people for whom such creations would invoke negative feelings about Christianity and church. In his study of Willow Creek Church (a nondenominational predominately white evangelical church in suburban Chicago) Sargeant argues that white evangelical conservatives have succeeded in their appeals to a wider audience with physical and musical accoutrements familiar to unchurched people and sermons focused on practical needs. These churches draw people in and secure their allegiance to the church by speaking to issues relevant to their daily life first before broaching theological matters (often discussed in small groups).260

259 For more details on megachurches are their setting, see Kate Bowler, Blessed.

As Sargeant contends, many of these churches’ success lies in their focus on making people “feel better” and giving them what they want, which is often a reassurance of their worth and middle-class desire lifestyle. Although Silver Ring Thing’s mission has been to delegitimize premarital sex, its methods harbor the same tendencies of seeker-friendly churches. Unlike True Love Waits, SRT, does not rely on ordained ministers, nor does it sing decades old hymns. Their program does not resemble any traditional rites of passage. There are adults are not present and there is formal celebration of any decision to remain sexually abstinent. Yet, it does call participants to forsake the standards of the “world,” learn, absorb, and abide by the teachings of biblical scripture, and ultimately share their beliefs and commitment to others. SRT employs a rather subversive initiation without any institutionalized ritual resembling a contract or covenant.

When I arrived at the church I was bombarded with tables of merchandise, 8-foot tall cutouts and posters, as well as a handful of twenty-something men and women in Silver Ring Thing t-shirts and caps milling around the merchandise. Before I could walk a few feet, a SRT crew member stopped me to ask where my bracelet was. I quickly learned that just as one might receive at a club, every person at a SRT event is given a color coded entrance bracelet
depending on whether they are parents, students, or church leaders. Parents were sent upstairs for a session on following up with their teens after the program. The rest of us were ushered into dark auditorium to wait for the show to begin. The only light in the room came from the glow sticks that each teen was given upon entering the auditorium and was a source of great excitement for the teens. The auditorium reportedly seats nearly 1,500 people, but less than a tenth of the space was occupied. According to one SRT team member I spoke with, these low numbers were rare and were due to poor publicity on the church’s part not a general lack of interest in the matter.

At 7:00, the program began with a bang—literally. Without any warning, the dark cavernous space came alive with flashing lights, ear-pounding music, mist-like fog, and the team of SRT rally leaders: Vanessa, Adam, Nick, Tabatha, Paco, Anna, Jack, Missy, Danielle, and Tarah. Unlike True Love Waits, these people were not youth ministers; nor did any of them resemble anyone over 30. They dressed in jeans and t-shirts, giving the audience the impression that they were “just like one of them.” The only thing setting these twenty-somethings apart—and if the SRT had their way, would set every person apart in the auditorium by the end of

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261 Because Silver Ring Thing leaders are public figures I am using their real names.
the night—were the silver rings on their left hand’s ring finger. To
top it off, loud music and special effects gave the program the feel
of a rock concert, and SRT leaders encouraged the audience to get
on their feet and sway to the music. Next to me, a teenage boy
nudged his friend playing a game on his cell phone and yelled over
the music: “Dude, come. Stop. This is awesome.”

SRT designated 2010 the year of the “The High Stakes
Tour,” the graphics of which mimicked the eponymous Las Vegas
“What Happens Here Stays Here” slogan. For the SRT, it’s not
simply one’s virginity that was at stake, but one’s future and soul.
Although there was a brief mention of STDs as a potential
consequence of sex, SRT preached that premarital sex ultimately
threatened a person’s psychological well being and their
relationship to God and their community—as was the case for True
Love Waits. But SRT’s program was different from True Love Waits
in that it eschewed a traditional worship in favor of an appeal to
teen’s cultural sensibilities through clever skits, commercials, and
messages.

Following a brief introduction in which two of the SRT team
members introduced the “High Stakes” theme and stressed to
those in the audience what they would learn that night was not just
about them, but about their future spouse. Like TLW, SRT,
implicated unwitting teenagers in the future of someone they must likely have yet to meet. In doing so, their decision to remain abstinent would grant them control of their destiny. At this moment, SRT briefly departed from its evangelical Calvinist origins, suggesting instead that it is not merely God who orders creation, but average middle-class teenagers just like the ones sitting before them. The night shifted from merely gaining information about the dangers of premarital sex to learning how to control one’s future in the name of purity. In shifting away from the language of abstinence to one of purity, Silver Ring Thing conflated sexual intercourse as a matter of sexual and emotional consequence.

With everyone attentive to the actions on stage, two massive screens displaying a commercial spoof of the popular dating website eHarmony unfurled from the ceiling. Instead of focusing on finding the right mate, “STDHarmony” warned what could happen if one found the “wrong” mate, who was anyone with whom one engaged with in sexual activity. In less than one minute, SRT had essentially discarded the entire relationship of any sexually active teenager as meaningless. The entire relationship—both its joys and struggles—were deemed irrelevant and “wrong.” As noted above in the study on True Love Waits, WCEs have long eschewed any sort of middle ground, favoring instead clean cut explanations and
categorizations that reflect the war between God and Satan, evangelical Christians and non-Christians. These commercials also displayed the savvy way in which evangelical Christianity had been able to use the very thing they decried as immoral—contemporary, secular media—and fashion it according to their purpose. Heather Hendershot argues that Christian leaders in the late twentieth century found success targeting young people because they believed that they were “they are the most vulnerable” and easily influenced.262 Sarah Moslener echoes this sentiment, arguing that “SRT’s use of popular culture gained them immediate trust among their media-saturated audiences....[and] intentional.”263

After the STDHarmony commercial, the program shifted to SRT’s first live skit, “Risk vs. Reward.” Based on the popular 2004 movie Mean Girls, in which a young girl joined the fashionable and popular “in-crowd” despite her inclination for scholarly pursuits, “Risk vs. Reward” featured Nick (the sole black male on the SRT staff) and a group of fellow teen friends. Nick—he designated “bad guy” was dressed in well worn jeans, a t-shirt, and Converse sneakers bragged to his friends “how good sex can be.” He claimed that sex was not a bad thing and what is expected of manly men.264

262 Hendershot, Shaking the World for Jesus, 34-5.
264 Author observation.
By using a supposedly socially hip young man as the one whom we are to question and oppose, the SRT attempted to debunk the idea that just because someone is in the "in-crowd" they knew what is best. While perhaps unintentional, the one black person in the group is rendered deviant and made him an outsider to supposedly "good crowd." It mimicked negative sexual stereotypes toward black men. SRT’s executive team was and still is entirely white, as have been most of their audiences. This might have have been negligible were it not for the fact their portrayal of black males reflects their lack of attention to the perpetuation of negative ideations around sex. Were their audience to include African Americans might the casting shift? The only attempt at racial diversity was TLW and SRT's ongoing relationship with AIDS prevention in Africa. However, WCEs were not seeking racial reconciliation; they were just living into their long-standing dedication to international missions.  

The skit closed with a group of socially awkward and soft-spoken young men and women discussing the pitfalls of sexual intercourse before marriage. One young woman, a petite blonde, said having sex before marriage was like opening a Christmas present early. Although it is there for the taking, premarital sex

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265 For more the missionary impulse, see Johnson, *The Gospel of Freedom and Power*. 167
meant that on Christmas morning one will have nothing new to surprise his or her spouse. According to the young lady, "you’re going to have to fake your reaction all over again." In having sex early, SRT insinuated that one’s wedding night would be nothing more than a disappointment and their marriage a potential failure. It also insinuates that one already failed his/her spouse before even getting married, rendering themselves as an undesirable potential spouse.

Following that skit another commercial appeared on the large screens. Based on the popular e*trade commercials featuring a talking baby, this commercial featured two infant discussing the outcomes of having sex before marriage: sexually transmitted diseases, a broken heart, confusion about one’s sexuality, and a break in one’s relationship to God. Although SRT did not elaborate on what it meant to be confused about one’s sexuality, the association between sexuality and heterosexual premarital sex intimated that premarital sex led one to be uncertain about their attraction to males or females; and, such was questioning was abnormal, perhaps even wrong.

Once the commercial ended, the SRT staff invited three audience members to the stage. Steve, Colleen, and Eileen, were

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266 Author observation.
local teens attending a nearby high school who came to the Silver Ring Thing with their youth group from nearby church. In this particular role playing, the SRT team gave Steven two halves of a plastic heart and instructed him to invite Colleen on a date. As narrators, the SRT teams interrupted the skit to explain that Colleen and Steve’s date turned into a relationship that included sexual intercourse. Adam, one of the SRT leaders, then took one half of Steven’s plastic heart and tossed it backstage. Steven then went on a date with Eileen—a date that ended with sexual intercourse. Adam returned to take the other half of the heart away and toss it aside. Because Steve engaged in sex with two women it was understood that he had given pieces of his heart away and had nothing left to give his future wife on their wedding night. Adam interrupted the skit and told the audience that he would forever compare his wife with previous partners and remain perpetually unsatisfied. If Steve had made a commitment to be sexually abstinent and worn a purity ring—as the rest of the SRT team wore that night—he would have remembered that he has promised himself for his future marriage. To SRT, the silver ring is more than a reminder, it is a prophylactic more reliable than a condom.

According to SRT, condoms could fail, but rings do not because

\[267 \text{ I changed the names of all participants who did not maintain a public role.}\]
they remind the wearer of his/her commitment to God. Again, 
spirituality trumps physiology and science, a belief inscribed in the 
hearts of evangelicals since Darwin published *Origins of Species.* 
As Hendershot again argues, "secular therapeutic discourse 
'provides a ready-made and familiar narrative trajectory: the 
eruption of a problem leads to confession and diagnosis and then 
to a solution or cure.'"268 SRT adapted these secular forms into their 
material in a way that is familiar to its audience. The language was 
different, but the method and manner were the same. Rather than a 
condom as a prophylactic for genitalia, the ring was as a 
prophylactic for one's heart.

Following the skit, another e*trade-themed commercial 
played, this time featuring a conversation between two babies who 
were conceived by teenage parents. This was the only time SRT 
broached the topic of teenage pregnancy. The two babies talked 
about how immature their parents were for having sex and their 
inability to manage the responsibilities of parenthood and 
adulthood. The babies dismissed their teenage parents as useless 
and inconsequential because of their age sexually active status. 
SRT's commercial suggested that only married older couples were 
worthy of pregnancy and parenting. With images familiar to most

268 Mimi White quoted in Hendershot, Shaking the World of Jesus, 88.
media savvy teenagers, SRT diminished the legitimacy of single parents, teenage parents, and all who fall outside the bounds of heteronormative marriage in less than five minutes. Children, once a gift from God, were a nuisance, consequence, and social burden outside of heteronormative marriage. Nearly an hour into the SRT event, the emphasis lay only the negative consequences of premarital intercourse, entirely omitting the possibility of physical pleasure.

Once the SRT team completed its presentation of the negatives of premarital sex—including teenage pregnancy (of which no good is presumed to come), ostracism, a broken heart, and a damaged marriage—the program transitioned to the positive rewards of committing to abstinence. A young black woman named Tarah jumped on stage to talk about her commitment to a life of purity and how young men and women could maintain a similar life. According to Tarah, who hailed from Knoxville, Tennessee, the process was less esoteric than it seemed. Simply put, girls needed to remain cautious of what they wore and needed to cover themselves so that they would not draw unwanted attention to their breasts and genitals. It appears that the onus was upon females to ensure that they did not lead men into temptation and thus violate

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their vow of chastity. As Tarah emphatically stated, guys are visual and women must be mindful of the ways their appearance can tempt men. Tarah reminded young women that because "God does not make mistakes," God made them beautiful, and there no need to adorn themselves in revealing clothes or excessive make-up. In this instance, the body, which was previously the origin of the burdensome baby was now the tempter and cause of vice for men. Rather than fighting the media's sexualization of women, SRT made women responsible for their innate physical and biological characteristics. In one sense, this was attempt at giving individuals control of their lives; on the other hand it let men off the hook for their behavior and placed it onto the bodies and choices of women.

To the men, Tarah declared: "guys can sleep around; but men wait. It takes a real mean to respect a girl."270 This language suggested that men who engaged in premarital intercourse were not only immature, but somehow lacking in heteronormative characteristics of white masculinity that supposedly made them impervious to sexual temptation. Tarah also claimed that while men are hardwired for visual stimulation, women are stimulated by touch. She urged young men to responsible for establishing boundaries at the beginning of dating, including refusing to be

270 Author observation.
alone without an adult present. When young men and women agreed to these limits and behaviors, Tara joyfully shared, they will ensure a magical and perfect wedding night.

After Tarah's presentation, a *Saturday Night Live*-like sketch debuted. One could hear a father's voice as he read a letter written to his daughter's potential suitors. With imagery reminiscent of a Disney fairytale, the young man was likened to a king and his young daughter—a lady in waiting for her prince charming to complete her life. In a tenor's regal voice the father stressed that any young man who wanted to date his daughter had to first be a Christian who would value both his daughter and him as the supreme authority in her—and eventually the young man's—life. As the father continued, he expressed consternation on how a relationship with his daughter might only make him more protective of her. The daughter, however, remained faceless and took on an image of innocence and naiveté through her father's words. Her father maintained control over the young woman's life with the expectation that he would give control in the future to her mate. The father not only rendered the young woman voiceless but also passive, as though her job was to prepare herself for the future by remaining chaste and waiting for a mate to come her way. But we
were to understand that this was appropriate because "fathers know best."

This message was no different from the one white evangelical conservatives expressed throughout the 1970s and early 1980s, but by casting the commercial in the vein of a *Saturday Night Live* skit, SRT was able to adapt mainstream secular media to their message with a hipster edge while maintaining its evangelically conservative values.

Following the commercial the night's "great moments" began. Through the course of the night leaders had introduced skits with an allusion to a "second chance" and a great story," but always stopped before giving away too much information. Thus by the time we reach the "great apex" of the night everyone was in anticipation.

According to the SRT, this "great moment" was the "second chance" that so many people needed. This was the first time all evening Silver Ring Thing directly confronted the reality that some people in the audience had already engaged in sex, an aspect that TLW's ritual had originally ignored. The onstage scene, "One Who Went to Far" was a chance for SRT team member Missy to share her experience of pre-marital sex and how she became revirginized and committed to premarital abstinence. Missy exclaimed she was "never really a Christian" prior to having sex and only casually
attended church with her family. Her downward spiral began when she started hanging out with the “wrong crowd.” At first she joined this crowd because she was lonely and wanted to be popular. These folks hung out late after football games, drank alcohol, and at times engaged in recreational drug use, such as smoking weed. Missy said that her new circle of friends led to numerous fights with her parents. Her grades slipped and many of her longtime friends no longer associated with her. Doing whatever she wanted whenever gave Missy a strong sense that she was in control of her life and didn’t need anyone else’s wisdom. However, Missy hit rock bottom when she snuck out with a friend and was raped later that evening. She did not tell anyone what happened and soon found herself disengaged from her family and new friends. She started drinking heavily and abusing cocaine and heroine in an attempt to numb the shame and pain of the rape. She also had more sex with a variety of men and even engaged in a threesome with another young woman, but none of it made her feel any better about herself. One night, however, in the privacy of her room, she found herself at wit’s end contemplating suicide. She pleaded with God—with whom she had little relationship until this point—to get her “out of this mess.” At this point, she realized she

\footnote{Author observation.}
could not save herself from self-destruction; she needed something greater than herself to give her hope. In the clutches of sorrow, Missy found there was “no sin that [was] too big for God.” She also realized that the times she felt in control using drugs and having sex she was really “out of control.” Her dating relationships were all fruitless attempts to fill the “aching and empty hole” in her heart. With this, Missy told the crowd that seeking fulfillment in the opposite sex is the second sign of a life out of control (the first being finding a new group of finds and rebelling against your parents).272

Upon giving up her sense of control to God and establishing a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, Missy found freedom as well as a “new” virginity. Because she was raped and did not willingly give up her virginity the first time, she never really lost it or gave it away. Rather, it was “stolen” from her. She never addressed the sexual encounters that followed her rape. While SRT provides a chance for a second virginity if one did not want to have sex, TLW provided a second virginity for all, couching rape along the same line as consenting sexual intercourse. In fact, TLW questioned the brutality and abuse of rape by telling teens that they ought to report what happened to them quickly because it “[would] increase your

272 Author observation.
believability." Despite their ambiguous language, TWL creators Rankin and Ross denounced any concept of "damaged goods," a popular rhetoric at the High Stakes Tour.273

Nevertheless, this was the only example of someone who has engaged in premarital sex, and it was extreme one. Missy was not Christian, she drank, abused drugs, was raped, and had more consensual sexual partners than she could remember. There was no example of someone who was Christian who may have had sex. It was as though by becoming a Christian one became immune from falling victim to any sexual desires.

Moreover, SRT did not ask young women to take responsibility for engaging in sex in instances of consensual intercourse, instead blaming it on psychological weakness, recalling Rickie Sollinger's study of unwed pregnant teens in the 1950s and 1960 that argued white women had occasional—not systematic—lapses of good behavior.274 Like True Love Waits, SRT transformed virginity from a physical experience to a strictly psychological one, similar to True Love Waits.

Missy's public confession—similar to those of twenty-first century politicians—held the entire audience in rapture. A few young men sitting near me who had looked painfully bored all

273 Rankin and Ross, When True Love Doesn't Wait, 17.
274 See Rickie Solinger, Wake up Little Susie.
evening and constantly resorted to playing on the cell phones to
pass the time were even caught up in Missy's dramatic story.
Clearly, SRT knew the dramatic effect of a candid confession, a
perfect segue into the next skit in which a sexually active couple
argues constantly. The narrator claimed that before having sex the
couple get along nicely, even playfully teasing one another and
showing great tenderness and care. Now, however, sex has torn
them apart because “they are not united in marriage.” SRT did not
explain why sex led to fighting other than to say that their hearts are
divided and out of the will of God, one of the greatest fears of an
evangelical Christian, for God’s will is what gives them purpose and
serves as a compass for their lives.

To draw the night to a close, SRT took a subdued tone done
that felt out of place and jarring after 90 minutes of fireworks, bright
lights, catchy commercials, and incessant marketing of their
products and services, including the ring, which was inscribed with
the words from 1 Thessalonians 4:3-4 (God wants you to be holy,
so you should keep clear of all sexual sin. Then each of you will
control your body and live in holiness and honor). “Tonight is your
night,” they said. One by one the different hipster young adults who
have served as emcees, skit actors, and confessors, now come on
stage to tell the young people that they hold their fate in their
hands. Although the message the entire night had focused on the way that being pure fulfilled God's will for their life, the culmination of the night was a talk that shifted the power from God's work in their lives to their ability to make a choice.

At this time, Adam returned to the stage to offer a biblical story from Luke 15:11-32. Often referred to as the story of the Prodigal Son, in which a young man asks for an advance on his inheritance only to squander it and end up destitute. The son eventually returned home and begged for his father's mercy. His father is delighted to see him and orders a celebratory banquet to be held in his honor. The father's older son, however, became enraged with jealousy and disgust. The father attempted to quell his unrest by reminding him that although he feels slighted the father has never stopped loving and caring for his older son, who has dutifully fulfilled his obligations at home. Most Christians (liberal and conservative) widely view this story as a metaphor for the way in which God lavishes love on God's children who have wandered away from their faith and yearn to return to God.

The SRT team interpreted and applied this story to their call for sexual purity. Rather than seeking to have his inheritance early and striking out on his own, they understood the prodigal son as one trying to take his father's place and live a life without authority or
direction. The wasteful son then “squanders his wealth” by losing his virginity. SRT thus made virginity one’s greatest asset and marriage the one thing on which they staked their life. The telling of this story lasted about thirty minutes, longer than any of the previous skits or talks. Adam soon transitioned to the hallmark of many evangelical worship services—the altar call. With a graphic description of Jesus’ crucifixion, Adam invited people to think about the weight of their failures and fears. Most of the audience, however, looked dazed or bored. Some were sending text messages or whispering with one another. Three people went to the front for prayer as the church’s standard-issue fluorescent lights come on in the auditorium. Gone were the fireworks, the loud music, the call to stand up wave one’s end. SRT ended its program by reminding people that although virginity is important, the most important thing is one’s relationship to God. SRT had invited teens into a story not of their own making.

At this point, however, people were milling about the large room. Entering the church’s lobby again, I was bombarded with several tables of SRT merchandise, including T-shirts, posters, rings, necklaces and books. Unlike True Love Waits there was no official recitation of the pledge at the gathering. Instead, the program came to an abrupt end and students met up with their
parents who—in another room—learned how to talk to their children about sexual intercourse and STIs, a topic scarcely mentioned in the teen session. There was no ritual of transition; rather the purchase of a ring and a once-and-for-all commitment to Christianity.

Conclusion

Silver Ring Thing’s “High Stakes Tour” and True Love Waits’ commitment ceremonies illustrate the growing emphasis on purity as a reflection of one’s spiritual state popular by the middle of the 1990s and how spirituality, especially among evangelical teenagers, become commercialized for the sake of the Gospel. When True Love Waits began its crusade of obtaining over a million pledge cards in 1994, they hoped they were laying the foundation for a sex education revolution. Yet as SRT has demonstrated, by shifting the emphasis from abstinence education to purity it has steered the conversation away from matters of biology to one of spirituality despite wanting to erase the stigma of discussing sex in the church. As numerous conversations revealed, the predominately white evangelically conservative community was not more comfortable talking about the physical nature of sexual intercourse in 2010 than it was in 1970. By redefining the notion of virginity as an emotional
and spiritual matter effectively rendered the body not only secondary, but incidental. That Jesus Christ is believed to be the bodily incarnation of God on earth, rendering the body as something not only worth inhabiting, but something with the power to save seems to be lost on evangelical leaders of the purity movement.

Moreover, True Love Waits' ritualization of adolescence through its rites of passage service of worship invited people to establish an identity apart from their non-Christian friends, learn and embrace the teachings of abstinence and heteronormative marriage as the penultimate expression of human love, and cross the threshold to marriage through a commitment ceremony. It formalized the importance of adolescence in front of the entire church community and ensures that parents maintain an authoritative presence despite the newfound identity of their teenage children.

Further, the marketization of purity by both SRT and TWL has rendered sexual abstinence and virginity a negotiable commodity depending on the social and economic circumstances of one's situation. For example, if one is raped, it "doesn't count." If one was not "saved" it doesn't count. And if none of these cases applied, well, then you can just "start over." The purity movement of
the 1990s prized perfection more than the reality of being human and finding beauty in the ashes of human life. At the same time, its impulse toward consumerism validated the characteristics of middle class, heteronormative families while indirectly rendering any other expression of family nonexistent. It is their experience to which we now turn our attention.
Chapter 4: "I Am Because You Are": Rites of Passage Rituals and the Adolescent Formation of Black Evangelical Conservatives

In 2011, Cleveland community activist Paul Hill, Jr., stood in front of an audience of his peers at a local TedX conferences and declared: "We are here today because of others who have come before us. Too many of us think, 'I am because I am' as opposed to 'I am because we are.'" For Hill, these words summed up the foundation of the National Rites of Passage Institute (NROPI)—a mentoring and teenage rites of passage program supporting Cleveland's black youth. By 1987, Hill—whose Afrocentrism developed in college in the early 1970s—feared that black young men in Cleveland were coming of age without a sense of purpose or connection to their community and African ancestry. Hill argued that an adolescent rites of passage program based on West African traditions would not only teach young people about their African legacy, it would shift their focus outward to their community through a message of interdependence and sacrifice. With mentoring, education, and ceremonies marking their various transitions into adulthood, Hill maintained that teens “acquire[d] a new language” reflective of their changing consciousness. This language in turn provided the foundation for a growing sense of purpose and responsibility to the community.


276 Ibid.
Moreover, as Hill explained: "Rituals reflect seasons of life. Rites of passage rituals are part of transitions and help us understand who we are and we are going...Are we born men and women? No. We are born males and females...We have to be developed into manhood and womanhood."277

By 2010, Hill's program, which he had adapted for public schools, community centers, and to a lesser extent religious groups, also expanded to include girls. Over the course of twenty-five years, NROPI trained more than 900 adults as mentors and program leaders and served more than 10,000 teenage boys and girls.278

Although an intentionally nonsectarian program, many black evangelical churches throughout the 1990s and into the first decade of the twenty-first century used Hill's NROPI as a basis for creating their own adolescent rites of passage rituals. Through the lens of conservative evangelical sexual ethics, West African traditions, and African American history, these adolescent-to-adulthood initiation rituals become the primary means of addressing the transitions of adolescence.

Although predominately African American conservative evangelicals (BCE) embodied the similar theology toward premarital sex as predominately white conservative churches who utilized True Love Waits (TLW) and the Silver Ring Thing (SRT), CBE looked beyond sex education

277 Ibid.
278 Ibid.
and romantic relationships as sex education became one of several components of adolescent formation inextricably tied to African American history and culture.279

Argument

In this chapter, I analyze the creation, role, and message of rites of passage rituals among black conservative evangelicals as a means for understanding changing attitudes BCE held regarding sex education and adolescence. I assess the broader shifts regarding sex education among African Americans between 1970 and 2010 and examine three different rites of passage programs used most widely used in conservatively evangelical black churches between 1990 and 2010—one for boys and two for girls—to explain how middle class black evangelical conservatives understood the relationship between sex education, nationalism, and adolescence as a life stage. I contend that unlike white evangelical conservatives’ emphasis on purity and abstinence-only sex education, black evangelical conservatives approached adolescence more broadly, taking into account a history of struggle and oppression among African Americans, a long-held embrace for the extended family, and the role of black churches as the community’s civic and religious cornerstone.

Consequently, even though both white and black conservative evangelicals understood heterosexual marriage as normative, black evangelicals approached preparation for adulthood as a matter of biblical obedience and the key for social and economic stability (rather than an investment in the nation’s moral future). Moreover, whereas white conservative evangelicals understood abstinence as a spiritual badge of authority and honor, black conservative evangelicals traditionally placed greater emphasis on abstinence as a matter of public health and social welfare. As sociologist Mark Regnerus explains, between 2000-2010 many evangelical African American teens viewed sex primarily as matter of biological consequence with moral implications while white teens learned to treat it as a moral struggle with biological consequences.280 These differences, as well as each community’s approach to adolescent ritualization finds roots in each community’s historical embodiment of American citizenship, which were often in tension with one another. For BCE, black nationalism was not a counterpart to American exceptionalism; it was the embodiment of American citizenship as a circumscribed and unequal group of people who demanded an “imagined” identity as a nation whose boundaries extended to the African diaspora. 281


281 Anderson, “Imagined Communities: Nationalism’s Cultural Roots,” 254-6
Importance

In 1994, sociologists Roger H. Rubin, Andrew Billingsley, and Cleopatra Howard Caldwell published *Black Church Family Project*, an analysis of 635 Midwestern and Northern predominately black churches and their leadership and ministry practices. They found that of the 1,804 community outreach programs among the 635 churches, 566 (31%) of the programs directly addressed churches' youth population. Although their analysis shed light on the kinds of ministries within many BCE churches, it did not attend to the content of these programs. Nor did it speak to why only 15% of these churches addressed sex education despite a nationwide increase in STIs and teen pregnancy in the 1970s and 1980s and the centrality of black evangelically conservative churches in African American communities (Billingsley and Caldwell’s study found that more than 70% of black Americans were affiliated with a church in 1991). This study explores one part of this gap and the gradual emergence of programs considering the subject.

One key aspect of this chapter—as was the case in the previous one—is the role of rites of passage rituals among evangelical Christians beginning in the mid-1990s and extending through the next decade.

Ritual theorists Nsenga Warfield-Coppock and Ronald Grimes have both

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studied adolescent initiation rituals in African American communities and their importance in “imagining” a nation of African identity beyond geographic boundaries. Both works, however, do not consider the growth of these programs in Christian churches and the symbiotic relationship between evangelical theology and West African culture.

What began as a rites of passage ritual in a handful of urban churches in Texas and New York in the mid-1990s spread as far as Anchorage, Alaska; Oakland, California; Washington, D.C.; North Charleston, South Carolina; Dallas, Texas; and, Nashville, Tennessee by 2010. American Baptist Theological Seminary now even includes resources for rites of passage rituals for predominately black churches and cite rituals as a critical method for incorporating youth into the church community. Studying the context, form, and substance of adolescent initiation rituals sheds light on the impact that politics, history, and contemporary events had on the priorities of BCE’s approach to sex education and adolescent belonging in the final third of the twentieth century and first decade of the twenty-first century.

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Limitations

As noted in the previous two chapters this study primarily focuses on the middle class communities within evangelicalism. Consequently, this study largely ignores lower-class African Americans, which as Susan Cahn and Robert Staples have both noted, often expressed different attitudes about premarital sex than their middle and upper class peers. Although this study is not universal in its applicability, it nonetheless examines a segment of the black population that saw rapid growth following the long Civil Rights Movement.286

One additional and important limitation are my sources. As a population rich in the oral tradition, evidence of black evangelical religious literature for teens was rare in the 1970s and 1980s. Contributing to this dearth of published material was the popularity of the “kinship model” of religious formation, which Billingsley, Caldwell, and Rubin argued focused on “integrating” youth into the church more broadly rather than distinguishing them apart from the rest of the church’s work.287 Moreover, the reticence of many BCE churches to address sexuality publicly also lends to a paucity of early sources on the matter. Consequently, my sources on sexuality and religion in the 1970s and early 1980s rely on a


combination of interviews, articles from black newspapers and black secular magazines, including *Ebony*—which addressed matters of religion and sexuality on a regular basis (and a publication many middle-class blacks viewed as "the magazine" of black life). The use of these materials as sources, however, is not an entirely distant stretch. In a collection of essays published in 1991 on the black family, Lee June, a minister and professor of psychology at Michigan State, encouraged parents and church leaders to use *Ebony* and *Essence* as a reliable starting point for Christian sex education because of the lack of material on black sexuality from a Christian perspective.288

Organization

This chapter is divided into 5 parts: 1) African Americans treatment of sexuality and sex education since 1970; 2) the context and substance of black liberation theology in BCE communities; 3) the emergence of rites of passage rituals from liberation theology; 4 & 5) analyses of two rites of passage programs for girls and one program for boys.

Black Attitudes toward Sex Education and Sexuality

In the 1970s, black conservative evangelicals did not vocally address adolescent sexuality with the same unified and public urgency that their white counterparts did. Instead, it was communities beyond the church that provided some of the initial and most well-known conversations around the matter.

As the first chapter explained, for more than 300 years racialized mythologies used to justify segregation, violence, and social welfare legislation also served to demonize the sexuality of black Americans. Briefly speaking, some of these stereotypes included the supposedly uncontrollable nature of male virility, sexless women, or women as seductive Jezebel-types. Michael Eric Dyson argues that these stereotypes led to an unwillingness among historically black churches to discuss sexuality because of the belief that such matters were outside the bounds of socially acceptable conversation.\(^\text{289}\) In a study released in 1972, Robert Staples, then a sociology professor at Howard University, argued that reticence around sexuality stemmed from middle-class aspirations toward respectability extending as far back the 1870s and were largely absent from the experience of working class and poor blacks, who viewed sex as a mere "human function that people engage[d] in because of its natural functions." According to Staples, middle class blacks approached sex with a "rigidly puritanical" attitude and stress on its role as an

\(^{289}\) Dyson, 223-5.
"expression of love." rather than its biological role.\textsuperscript{290} Despite the apparent straight-laced nature of middle-class African Americans, the fluid and nearly imperceptible social, religious, and geographical divisions between lower and middle class blacks precluded the middle class from entirely disavowing sexuality as a taboo topic. Even still, both Staples, Billingsley, Caldwell, and Rubin acknowledge the paucity of studies addressing black sexuality exclusively in comparison to those treating white sexuality.\textsuperscript{291}

While there may not have been religious attention to the sexuality of African Americans up to the 1990s, popular magazines and scholarly discourses suggest that by 1970, sexuality, while perhaps not freely discussed in conservative religious communities was nonetheless perceived by the African American community-at-large as an essential component of public health and social vitality. Just two years earlier, in 1968, students at Howard University stormed the school's administration building in protest to perceived limitations on their burgeoning sexuality, including specified hours for visitation.\textsuperscript{292} Furthermore, in her analysis of letters to the \textit{Chicago Defender} and articles in \textit{Tan Confessions} during the 1950s, Leisa Meyer illustrates that sexuality was often contested field among black Americans as women expressed competing ideas of sexual


\textsuperscript{291} Robert Stapes, "Has the Sexual Revolution Bypassed Blacks?" \textit{Ebony} (April 1979), 112.

Thus, by the 1970s, conversations among African Americans about sex education were not uncommon. Nevertheless, the discourse focused primarily on three areas: 1) the emotional and physiological components of sexual intercourse and the myths surrounding them; 2) providing adults with tools and resources for discussing sexuality with their children; and 3) sex education as a required tool for the physical and social welfare of adults in the black community. Less attention was given to teens' sexual relationships.

In 1972, sociologist Robert Staples proposed that rather than singularly focusing on sex's biological role in reproduction, contemporary sex education in the black community needed to consider its physiological, social, and emotional components as well. Doing so, he argued, ensured that black men and women had a better understanding of the relationship between their bodies, their choices, and public policy decisions, especially in regards to contraception and abortion. For Staples, sex education was not merely an intellectual pursuit, but a legal, racial, and social one as well.

That same year, Harvard psychologist Alvin F. Poussaint wrote "How to Tell the Difference Between Sex and Love" and encouraged women to dispel notions of sex and their bodies as embarrassing.

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troublesome or deviant. Poussaint urged black women to avoid defining themselves against white standards of beauty and instead consider the unique psychological and social nature of their sexuality.\(^{295}\) Sex therapists Richard and Joanne Tyson claimed that as young black women came of age they needed to explore their sexuality more without the secrecy their parents had attached to it. According to the Tysons, black women felt the burden of making relationships work and affirming their male partners' masculinity by appearing eager for intercourse and producing children even when they did not have a desire to do so. At the same time, they also claimed that the greatest problem for black women (again, the assumption was that they are referring to middle class women) was the lack of similarly educated black men in the dating pool, a problem the Tysons argued opened the doors to interracial relationships and more frank discussions among black women on sex and dating.\(^{296}\) Women were encouraged to embrace these changes and not see them as a threat or problem. Writing as a young adult in 1982, the late novelist Bebe Moore Campbell affirmed these sentiments, arguing that despite growing up with limited freedom to openly address questions around sexuality, young black middle-class women in the late 1970s had already begun openly challenging expectations of sexual passivity, premarital abstinence, and

\(^{295}\) Alvin F. Poussaint, "How to Tell the Difference Between Sex and Love," *Ebony* (July 1972), 34

apathy toward sexual pleasure, a change lasting well into the next decade. This "sexual revolution" was different from the openness of the 1960s that many white conservatives feared, because rather than a social shift that led to perceptions of casual sex, the post-Civil Rights Era empowered black women to speak up for themselves, take greater sexual initiative, and challenge stigmas around non-marital sexual relations.\(^{297}\)

As women's experiences now took on a more prominent role in sexuality discourses in the 1970s, popular magazines and newspapers began suggesting that adolescent sex education lacked the same certitude and popularity as it did for adults. In 1974, Yale University researcher Wendy Russell Glasgow noted that despite the rise in public conversations around black sexuality, residual anxiety and dis-ease with stereotypes surrounding it left many black parents reticent to discuss it with their children in a developmentally appropriate manner.\(^{298}\) An advice columnist in the *Norfolk Journal and Guide* reflected this pattern in her advice to parents, encouraging them: 1) to be proactive in addressing sexuality with teens, 2) address questions and fears honestly and with an open spirit, and 3) encourage teen’s to have familiarity and comfort with one’s body.\(^{299}\) African American psychiatrists, including June Dobbs-Butts,


\(^{299}\) James Royall, Jr., "Don't Lose Your Kool!" *Norfolk Journal and Guide* October 1, 1977.
Phyllis Harrison-Ross and Alvin Poussaint, sought to facilitate sex education in the home through manuals and popular articles. In 1977, Dobbs-Butts argued that the shift in American culture around gender equality, contraception, abortion, and a greater exposure to pop culture, made teenage sex education a necessity, not a luxury.\(^{300}\) The following year, G.E.A. Toote, a black physician, echoed Dobbs-Butt's sentiments. According to Toote, America's "contraceptive culture" and permissive attitudes toward teenage sex demanded that black teenagers understand sex education as the critical foundation for their emotional, economic, and social stability. As Toote explained: "[ Teens] must be counselled [sic] that the price of transitory sex is costly. Family emotions, economic stability and social pride are at stake in the behavioral patterns of our young." \(^{301}\) Dobbs-Butts and Toote's sentiments, as well as an increasing number of conversations around women's sexuality marked a transition within the African American community in the late 1970s around sex education as a topic only for adults into a gradual focus on how to have engage teenagers in sex education and the consequences of sexual intercourse.

Although dispelling myths around black sexuality continued into the 1980s, broader conversations around sex education expanded to include


\(^{301}\) G.E.A. Toote, "Sexual Responsibility for Teen Girls," *The Baltimore Afro-American*, April 22, 1978. It is worth noting that although Toote never specified whether he was specifically referring to girls or boys, the article's title suggests that that the responsibility for sexual behavior falls upon young women, not men.
disease and infection prevention and a reduction in teen pregnancy rates. In a series of articles on family life over the course of the decade, *Ebony*, for example, approached sex education as a preventative against sexually transmitted infections, teenage pregnancy, and—by the end of the decade—AIDS. The lynchpin of this thread was a desire to empower and strengthen the public health of black people and families.

For example, in 1984, the Milwaukee, Wisconsin, chapter of the historically black fraternity Alpha Phi Alpha hosted "Project Alpha," a workshop for teenage boys on "pregnancy, child support laws, and the 'real world' consequences of sexuality." According to one member: "We want to tell them when you get mired down in the underclass, when you're 18 and you're saddled with a baby, you'll never get out of the poverty situation."

That same year, Pamela Noel framed her essay on the importance of education around a report on the number of teenage pregnancies in the United States (including the decrease in children born to unwed black teenage mothers) and the story of a 23-year-old women who had her first of three children at 15. For her, teen pregnancy stood as the primary motivator for having adolescent sex education. To Noel, sex education extended beyond the home and the purview of parents and required the leadership of teenagers and civic leaders. Noel claimed that conferences

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303 Ibid.
by the NAACP, NCNW, and National Urban League on “teen-age sexual activity and resulting pregnancies” reflected the extent to which the matter had become an indicator of the “crisis of the Black family” and the need for entire community’s efforts. Yet, few agreed on the parameters of sex education. Noel claimed that along with teaching adolescents how to respond to peer pressure, parents needed to ensure that their teens knew their parents’ expectations, values, and beliefs. The year before, the popular sex educator and Syracuse University professor Sol Gordon focused on it as a matter of social and moral formation. He said that despite criticism that sex education promoted promiscuity and immorality, sex education was key to instilling values, mutual, and a reduction in teen pregnancy. In one of the rare published accounts of conservative black evangelicals’ thoughts on sex education in the early 1980s, Dr. Mary Ross, president of the National Baptist Women’s Convention, USA, Inc., called upon fellow Baptists to provide better resources for sex education and teenage parents, including classes at church that would educate parents and teens on sex and biblical theology. Ross claimed that her parents and community’s commitment to the wellbeing of its young people was essential in her own Christian formation. However, it had failed to actively

304 Pamela Noel, “Teaching Your Kids How to Say ‘No’ to Sex,” Ebony (June 1984), 90-1.
305 Ibid., 94.
address for a younger generation in the 1980s, she argued.\textsuperscript{307} Although Ross was more emphatic on the need for the church to address teenage sexuality, it remains unclear whether it effected immediate change in how churches addressed the matter in the early 1980s.

Another challenge confronting sex education advocates in the 1980s, especially in conservative evangelical churches, were matters of contraception; and in the cases of Noel, Ross, and Gordon mentioned above, contraception education remained noticeably absent. In 1986, when more than 30 programs in Chicago’s public schools provided contraceptives to students, controversy erupted among political and religious leaders who felt the programs condoned teenage sexual activity. As National Baptist Convention USA president T. J. Jemison explained, “I believe in teaching sex education in the public schools. However I am opposed to providing contraceptives in school clinics. It is against our Biblical teaching, which is against fornication and premarital sex. I believe the public schools would be giving license to premarital sex by providing contraceptives.”\textsuperscript{308} AME bishop Philip R. Cousin, president of the predominately white and theologically moderate National Council of Churches, agreed with Jemison. Advocates of Chicago’s program—and the more than 65 programs like it nationwide—including Congressman


\textsuperscript{308} “Birth Control at School: Pass or Fail?” \textit{Ebony} (October 1986), 42.
Harold Ford, Sr., and Planned Parenthood president Faye Wattleton, argued that it was better to inform teenagers of their options and make them accessible rather than to simply rely on abstinence or the belief that teens would freely engage in conversations with their parents if they were sexually active.309 The predominant response was similar to that of WCE.

Two years later, Wattleton echoed her beliefs in an *Ebony* article encouraging parents to talk about sex with their kids at an early age.310 Wattleton not only alluded to teenage pregnancy as a reason for conversations, she also stressed the importance of open communication between children and parents. The goal, she said, was reducing stigma and shame around one's body and the rise of STIs. Wattleton also said people needed to embrace the reality of single parent families and not rely on males to speak to males and females to speak to females alone. Instead, parents needed to adapt to the changing make up of families and broaden sexuality education’s topics to include not only intercourse, but sexuality as “the makeup and personality of every human being...[that] lets us know which gender we belong to...and [helps] us define our role in society and influence our feelings about our relationships with others. It makes it possible for us to feel love, compassion, joy and sorrow.” In short, Wattleton said, “sexuality basically determines the way we lead our

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309 Ibid.

everyday lives." While Wattleton's approach to sex education may seem radical in light of the opinions of many of her contemporaries in years priors, her holistic perspective on the social, psychological, and physiological nature of sexuality would be one of two central approaches to sex education (the other being a sex education as a way of learning how to avoid and say "no" to sexual activity) within conservative black evangelical churches starting in the 1990s and continuing well into the next decade.

By the 1990s, concerns around AIDS, pregnancy, and other STIs remained an important aspect and motivation for sex education. Abstinence, however, which was often addressed in passing gained more attention in secular magazines. In 1998, NBA champion A.C. Green wrote a reflection for *Ebony* explaining that despite perceptions of NBA players as promiscuous, he was committed to remaining a virgin until he was married. According to Green, he chose to remain a virgin because, "that what's God has designed for [him] at [the] time, being a single man." As he further explained, "I have committed my life to let Him make the decisions, not me. I'm following His rules."

College student Pamela Hardman also cited her Christian upbringing as a central reason in her choice to practice premarital

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311 Ibid., 62.


313 Ibid., 38.
abstinence. For her, teenage pregnancy and STIs were an important reason for practicing abstinence, but not as significant as her Christian faith. Although secular sources now addressed religion’s role in abstinence, it was associated as a motivation rather than a singular cause for it. The main causes continued to coalesce around social concerns of single parenthood, teenage pregnancy, and STIs. For Lee June, this association was not surprising; he contended that many black conservative evangelical churches struggled to reconcile faith and sexuality, had little understanding of the sexuality’s physiological nature, and how to have conversations about in their churches.

Since the mid 1990s that pattern began changing as more conservative black evangelicals began addressing sex education in their churches and often in a stark, radical way similar to TLW and SRT. In 1996, the Reverend Harold Davis, a black Baptist pastor and professor of education in Champaign, Illinois, published *Talks My Father Never Had with Me.* For Davis, who created these Christian based programs, sexuality was an intellectual and spiritual matter. There was little talk about safe sex practices or teenage males as parents. Instead, Davis claimed that young men were in a war against temptation in their mind and soul. Tips included to fight sexual temptation including placing blame on others.

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314 Pamela Hardman, "I'm a 22-Year-Old Virgin and Proud of It," *Ebony* (June 1998), 156-7.


Davis warned men to be careful of the motives of women, some of whom he claimed would lead young men astray with their dress or ulterior motives. As he claimed: "Consider that although she is pretty, she may have medical problems; realize that the personality and real character of the woman may not match her pretty face." Davis even asserted that beautiful women were more prone to using their looks to deceive men.

Davis' theory of black female sexuality objectifies and stereotypes women as Jezebels—the same kind of Jezebel whites historically utilized to render black female sexuality abnormal—and denies the agency of young black over their bodies.

David's second tool for avoiding sexual temptation was knowing biblical scripture and admonitions against desire and lust. He did not distinguish between the two, instead arguing that both "are bad." As Davis explained, you can "please God or self. One, however, can not do both... Please note that some people have the gift of singleness, God has made them to not need sex...If you don't have the gift then you should plan to someday get married have a wonderful sex life." Marriage, therefore, became the place where young men could unleash all their passions. What were they to do in the meantime? David never addressed that question. If young men could hold out until marriage then they would be

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318 Ibid., 127.
able fulfill all their desires. Like True Love Waits and the Silver Ring Thing, Davis elevated marriage as the penultimate event in a Christian’s life, which was a way to “internalize” gendered expectations for marriage in people at a young age. For Davis, this included defining men as emotionally restrained and woman as emotionally volatile. As he explained, “a woman needs for a man to be consistent and stable.” Davis’ theology not only rendered women dependent and needy, but also perpetuated images of women as unreliable and unable to constructively contribute to intimate relationships. In a quiz at the end of his unit on lust and desire, Davis asked young males: “Are you consistent when she fluctuates?” Did they “know an older spiritual man who can help you understand women?” In castigating women, Davis contributed to the masculinization of black men based upon the denigration of women, an approach that Patricia Hill Collins has argued has contributed to the abuse and burdens of black feminization.

Harold Davis’ wife, Ollie Davis, created a similar guide for teen girls in 1996. Ollie Davis’ *Talks My Mother Never Had with Me* approached sexuality through the rhetoric of passion and purpose. Like TWL, SRT, and her husband’s curricula, God has destined women to (heterosexual)

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320 Davis, *Talks*, 145.
321 Ibid., 148.
marriage. Since such a fate was preordained, young women, therefore, should not let their passions run rampant or lose control of their thoughts, but instead trust and wait for the person whom God has destined for a godly young woman. While the Davises’ curricula was one of the earliest devoted entirely to sexuality directed toward black evangelical churches, it was not their only means of addressing sex education.

By 1991, conservative black evangelical churches had begun creating rituals of initiation for black teenagers that provided sex education instruction alongside life skills, black history, and spiritual formation. These adolescent initiation rituals were a part of a growing integration of adolescence, the community, and Christian salvation as integral components to the identity of black Americans. These rites of passage rituals became a way for BCE to integrate theology, racial consciousness, and social concerns into a unified celebration of the unique experience of African Americans. I will return to these rituals after examining the emergence of black liberation theology and secular rituals in the 1970s and 1980s, both of which provided rituals in black evangelical churches.

The Emergence of Black Liberation Theology

By the end of the 1960s, calls for racial consciousness from groups such as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the

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Nation of Islam led to declarations of Christianity as a Eurocentric religion unable to speak to the experiences of black Americans. They also questioned the motives of African Americans who practiced it. While this abiding sense of black power and consciousness did not entirely delegitimize African American churches, it led to the creation and growth of a new theological hermeneutic for understanding the experiences of African Americans: black liberation theology. Jones Cone, a professor of religion at Union Theological Seminary and one of the first theologians to articulate the nature of black liberation theology, turned to the Exodus stories of the Old Testament and Jesus’ compassion for the “poor and the weak in society” and argued that black theology gave a “voice to the voiceless.” Cone saw justice for the poor as the heart of the Christian Gospel and what God is doing in the world.”324 According to Cone, black theology was about being “unapologetically black and Christian at the same time,” which for Cone gave space for both the nonviolent Christian theology of Martin Luther King, Jr., and Malcolm X’s emphasis on racial consciousness and pride in the name of justice and self-love.325 Although Cone later faced criticism for failing to adequately address the experiences of black women—a critique he later acknowledged—Cone’s interpretation of the Bible through the lens of racism and oppression gave


325 “Black Liberation Theology.”
black churches a theological hermeneutic to interpret their experiences and a language to confront charges of Eurocentrism.

Despite these theological shifts, BCE churches continued to maintain their centrality in the community as a religious and civic institution. In subscribing to a theology of black liberation, they did not abandon the foundation of their conservative theology, which emphasized biblical inerrancy, conversion, and mission or evangelization. Black liberation theology become one of the historical and contextual lens shaping their values.

As noted in chapter 2, John Perkins' Voice of Calvary ministry exemplifies this discourse as Perkins' sought to minister to racially segregated and financial impoverished Mendenhall, Mississippi, through direct evangelization and practical support that included tutoring, financial planning, and health care. This kind of intertwined relationship shaped BCEs civic and social focus throughout the 1970s. C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence Mamiya's 1990 groundbreaking study on black churches noted that in 1979, 71% of churches had engaged in or created a program of social support for the community outside of the church.326

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326 Andrew Billingsley and Cleopatra Howard Caldwell, "The Church, the Family, and the School in the African American Community," The Journal of Negro Education 60, no. 3 (1991), 431.
Origins of the Rites of Passage Movement in the African American Community

Long before black evangelical churches adopted rites of passage rituals, local community organizers and advocates sought ways to integrate a deeper appreciation of black history in the lives of teenagers.\footnote{Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, “Plenty Good Room: Adaptation in a Changing Black Church,” Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science 558 (1998), 102.} The emphasis on black beauty, African heritage, and black consciousness at the end of the 1960s and throughout the 1970s led to a demand for African American Studies departments at colleges across the country and the rising popularity of such sayings as “Black is Beautiful.”

It also made its way to educational programs for children and teens. According to Nsenga Warfield-Coppock, during the latter third of the 1960s and into the first half of the 1970s, black Americans created “alternative schools” and enrichment programs that gave them an additional lens to learn their history and culture apart from “the potentially detrimental effects of a Eurocentrically oriented society.”\footnote{Nsenga Warfield-Coppock, “The Rites of Passage Movement: A Resurgence of African-Centered Practices for Socializing African American Youth,” The Journal of Negro Education 61, no. 4 (1992), 472.} At the heart of these programs, Warfield-Coppock argues, was a focus on holistic education that instilled intellectual knowledge, positive self image, ancestral and cultural pride, and an appreciation for one’s community. Part of the stress on one’s ancestral heritage included an adaptation of West African initiation rites and life stages, including adolescence, a seminal moment marking one’s
entrance into adulthood and the privileges and responsibilities therein. Modeled after West African rites of passage ceremonies, African American rites of passage programs intended to facilitate the transmission of culture, history and a sense of responsibility and identity in African American teenagers. Although rites of passages were and are not limited to Africans or African Americans, their growth following the rise of black consciousness in the late 1960s and early 1970s was an empowering force in the lives of black American youths in the face of "cultural, physical, economic, political, and social genocide." Warfield-Coppock contends that although community based programs were originally the most popular, there are 6 different types of adolescent rites of passage programs in many African American community: 1) family based programs passed on to future generations, 2) therapeutic programs, which focus on improving the psychological and social health of people in institutional settings, 3) community based programs, which are rooted in the needs of local communities, 4) agency or organizational programs, which focus on specific groups of people, such as fraternities and sororities, 5) school based programs, which are usually enrichment programs alongside the standardized school curriculum, and; 6) church based programs, which

329 Ibid.

330 Black Child Development Institute quoted in Warfield-Coppock, "The Rites of Passage Movement," 474.
integrate religious theology, history, and ritual in a celebration of adolescence.331

These early rites of passage rituals also embraced theories of gender promoting men's leadership in the community and at home. Patricia Hill Collins has argued this model ultimately excludes other embodiments of the family and illustrates the challenge of studying non-dominant groups whose existence is profoundly shaped by the intersection of many social factors, including economics, race, gender, and class.332 Even when celebrating the home and advocating a holistic embrace and appreciation of one's personhood, African American rites of passage rituals often turned to single sex programs to accentuate what they believed to be specific needs and responsibilities of each sex. This separation suggests that expectations of men and women are embedded in their sex.

As explained in this chapter's introduction, in 1988 community activist Paul E. Hill, Jr., created a rites of passage program for local Cleveland public schools. Although Hill's program was not the first adolescent initiation program in a public school, it marked the beginning of Hill's National Rites of Passage Institute (NROPI) as a leader in adolescent rites of passage programs in the United States.333 Although

331 Ibid., 474-5.
332 See Collins, "It's All in the Family."
333 Paul Hill, Jr. "Rituals and Community Regeneration."
NROPI programs were community and secular based, they still asserted a distinct sense of African spirituality, which they understood to be "belief in a power, a power operating in the universe than [sic] is greater than oneself, a sense of connectively with all living creatures, an awareness of the purpose of and meaning of life and the development of personal, absolute values." As such, ROPI never endorsed or addressed one religion exclusively, but claimed that one could appropriate its program and spirituality to one's religion because of the program's fundamental belief in the value of all creation and the importance of ritual in marking life's developmental stages.

“I'm Every Woman”: Rites of Passage of Passage for African American Teenage Girls

By the 1990s, two of the most widely used evangelical Christian adolescent ritual programs include Transformation: Rites of Passage and Daughters of Imani. In the spring of 1991, Dr. Madeline Wright, an African American psychologist and lay leader in her upper middle-class Baptist church in Houston, Texas, saw a dearth in the appreciation that adolescent girls had for their West African heritage as well a lack of spiritual and communal resources to address the biological and social


changes they faced. Wright argued that since the denouement of the Black Power Movement in the 1970s, black Americans had failed to embrace and embody their African "pride and dignity." This, along with violence, teenage pregnancy, ineffective political and government programs, and an eroding sense of purpose and community demanded a re-imagining of the black adolescent experience. By adapting secular rites of passage programs with Christian theology, Transformation: Rites of Passage (ROP) was born. By 2010, the program had expanded to churches in suburban Washington, D.C., Dallas, Chicago, and Nashville. Drawing upon West African traditions honoring the passage from childhood to adulthood, the program stressed the beauty of one's West African ancestral background, the importance of relying on and contributing to one's community, and a literal reading and application of biblical scripture to address contemporary situations. A nine-month program mimicking the traditional school year calendar, ROP combined ritual celebrations with monthly teachings, congregational worship, and service-learning projects to giving African American young women a holistic understanding of the role of Christianity and black history in their formation. These nine months were bookended by a separation and integration ceremony in the presence of the entire congregation, which

336 Madeleine Wright, Sisters Helping Sisters: The Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church Girls Rites of Passage Program (Chicago: African American Images, 1997), vi.

337 Author interview with Madeleine Wright, September 19, 2013.
allowed the community to bestow a blessing on their impending journey and later welcoming their transition to responsible adulthood at the end of the separation period. Although the two celebrations were crucial for establishing the relationship between the initiates and their community, the program's nine-month liminal stage carried the most transformative power, and not simply because of its length. Rather, the liminal stage was where initiates learned how and why their role in the community was important.

Victor Turner, who expounded upon Arnold van Gennep's three stages of rites of passage rituals, argued that the liminal phase is the most transformative stage in the rites of passage process for it is the "generative, creative principle of ritual in particular and culture in general... [and] because it is a crucible in which culture is reduced to its fundamental elements." In other words, the liminal phase provided the space in which initiates learned assumptions and practices of the community into which they were entering as an adult. Moreover, as Turner explained, the liminal stage's creative energy resulted from the need to present new values to initiates as distinctive and adaptable to the lives of those entering into it. Transformation's nine-month one-on-one mentoring emblematizes Turner's theory, for it was the period in which initiates were inculcated into the community's values bookended by the separation and integration ceremonies, which asks for a blessing and celebrates the

338 Some churches utilized a two-year program with a break for the summer months.
339 Grimes, Deeply Into the Bone, 122.
learning that will and has taken place. Transformation's goal, therefore was to create a program that would integrate the vitality of the black community and the richness of evangelical Christian theology to form young women to become strong, respectful, and contributing members of society. Like SRT and True Love Waits leaders, ROP teachers and mentors wanted to instill teen women with a respect for themselves and their bodies and a deeper personal relationship to God.

However, Transformation and programs similar to it, including Daughters of Imani, differed from the purity rituals of predominately white conservative evangelical communities in that they stressed the role of adult mentors in establishing bonds with other adults outside one's family and sexuality—one aspect of a larger goal to shape young women into committed and educated members of society. The program also elevated the role of the local church community to a place of importance that it superseded any other form of belonging and made one's racial and religious identity definitive. The Transformation pledge, which the young women—initiates—recited at every monthly meeting drew upon communal memory and Christian interdependence and shaped the content and form of all meetings and activities and reflected. As it declared:

From my ancestors I willfully seek the 'Rites of Passage,' that will carry me from adolescence to adulthood.
I seek from my elders, wisdom, and I will learn from their experiences.

Everyday I will expand my mind with the history of my people, and the land in which I live.

I will work on my social skills and grace, so that once I have completed the passage, I will not only be a woman, but an ebony queen.

I will seek to be a leader and learn to believe in the gifts and talents that God has blessed me with.

I will daily exercise and take care of my body, for if my body is weak, I limit my own possibilities.

I will seek instruction in how to manage my time; do little things everyday that will keep my living area neat and my calendar balance.

I pray that God will direct my elders as they lead me on the path of transformation that I may become the young woman He wants me to be.

I recognize that I am in a protective state, and I will do my best to learn (while I have the opportunity), so when I emerge the very sight of me will testify to TRANSFORMATION.  

Along with a deep value for one’s elders, this pledge also reflects the program’s rhetoric of responsibility to God and one’s community. This not only aimed to instill a sense of purpose and meaning but also as a justification for the expectations placed upon the girls during the program’s journey, including regular volunteering in the community.  

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341 Some churches have adopted 9-month programs, while others have used two-year programs with a 3-month summer break.
conservative evangelicals, the African American woman of the Rites of Passage program used language that insinuated that a young women’s intentions were at best secondary compared to God’s desires for them. As the Transformation prayer—which intimates and mentors recited every meaning—says: “We recognize that we can only be transformed by Your Heavenly Spirit. Holy Spirit, come into our lives and recreate us according to Your purpose and will.”342 Participants understood abdication of control not as a loss of power, but as an asset to their lives, providing mercy and boundaries. Rather than simply losing control or power, they just took on a different form of it. Indeed, the heart of evangelical theology is a belief that in giving up one’s need for control and will, believers will receive the wisdom of God’s Holy Spirit and assurance of eternal life.

Central to learning how to embody this spiritual change was the hierarchy of relationships and responsibilities, which included the cluster leader, the preceptor, and the initiate. Initiate was the name given to the adolescent girls participating in the program. Mentors, known as Preceptors, were assigned to a specific initiate and expected to serve as an adult model of practical, spiritual, and social wisdom. This included meeting with one’s initiate on a monthly basis outside of regular cluster meetings. Cluster leaders, who were women who had previously served as preceptors, organized the monthly small group meetings of initiates and

preceptors. Both the concept of cluster leaders and preceptors reflect the program's emphasis on relying on and being informed by the wisdom of elder members of the community. Like the initiates, mentors or preceptors also recited a pledge each month. Their pledge, however, reflected their identity as "elders" and teachers for the adolescent girls: "In the tradition of my ancestors, I ask God to strengthen and encourage me as I accept the responsibility to act as an elder and role model for the girls' rites of passage program."\textsuperscript{343} Although parents could serve in the program, they could not serve as mentors to their daughters, as part of the process of becoming an adult was taking on an identity of apart from their parents that still demanded respect for their authority and an awareness of being a crucial member of the community.

Unlike SRT and TLW, their authority came not from being something their parents were not—virgins—but from practicing a general sense of care and respect for their community, which could include matters of purity, education, self-care, or financial responsibility. Although Rites of Passage did not stress the call to be national leaders of moral purity as SRT and TLW, it asked them to see take on an identity rooted in the idea of being a nation within a nation.

A typical year in the Rites of Passage program began with an initiation ceremony with the entire church community. The pastor or

\textsuperscript{343} Wright, \textit{Sisters Helping Sisters}, 30.
another clergy member offered his or her blessing to the young women as they prepared to begin their journey. Following the presentation, the congregation sang the Black National Anthem, (It is listed this way in the program) "Lift Every Voice and Sing," as leaders offered prayers and blessings for the young girls. Before they have undergone the thrust of the ritual initiation, initiates are already oriented to see that as African Americans they are citizens of a distinct community a part of the wider United States. According to Creets, this understanding of black nationalism first emerged in the 1970s alongside black nationalism as black Americans increasingly lost faith in the American government as a guarantor of equality.344

After the initiation ceremony Transformation continued with nine monthly large and small group (cluster) meetings, scheduled activities, and independent projects in the community. Proponents of the program argued that the program's explicit framework provided consistency and instilled in the young women the idea that what they did each month carried sacred value in shaping their collective identity as young women in community together. As Grimes notes, while rituals are often born out of a re-imagination process, they must be counterbalanced by a sense of timelessness and hesitancy for quick change. Lest they lose weight and the community loses a steady source of purpose.345

344 Creets, American Crucible, 372.
345 Grimes, Deeply Into the Bone, 84-5.
Thus at the monthly large group meetings, all participants gathered to sing "Lift Every Voice and Sing," pray their "Transformation Prayer," and engage in a pre-scheduled activity, ranging from community service to a craft project or an outing to a museum. After the given activity there was a requisite lesson in African American history followed by time for the initiates to reflect in their journals on what they learned.346 Cluster meetings, which followed the large group meeting, employed a similar pattern, except they devoted a considerable portion of time to physical exercise and reflection on the large group meeting. The reasoning behind the monthly exercise was a belief in the importance of instilling young women with a sense of physical care rooted in modern science and the timelessness of biblical scripture, which elevated the body as "a temple of the Lord's."347

When I spoke with three Transformation graduates who participated in the program between 1996-1999, there was strong consensus that the emphasis on exercising was as much about caring for one's body in light of their Christian faith as it was about stemming the tide of obesity, diabetes, and other weight related health conditions.348 Like purity rituals, Transformation ROP seamlessly wove together the sacred word of biblical scripture with the secular sphere of science, which not only justified their

346 Wright, Sisters, 33.
347 Wright, Sisters, 29; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20.
348 Author interview with Janice, Summer, and Imani, December 20, 2011.
goals, it made science and theology partners in God's plan—a departure from the traditional hesitation of evangelicals toward science.

Nine fields of learning served as the standard lessons for each large and small group meeting: spirituality; women's history; relationships and self-esteem; Kwanzaa and African Dance & Clothing; Health, Etiquette and Social Graces; Financial Management; Leadership and Careers, Housekeeping, and; preparing for program graduation. The array of programs reflects ROP's emphasis on providing a holistic approach to adolescence and adulthood and the belief that each lesson, and each aspect of being a teenager cannot be separated from anything else. I have chosen to focus on four of the nine learning modules, illustrating how sexuality, adulthood, gender, and the family deeply intertwined to shape the spiritual, social, and sexual identity of young evangelical African American women and the extent to which cultural, historical, and class expectations shaped the message and embodiment of these ideals.

Christian spirituality served as the focus on the first lesson, which also occurred on the same weekend as the initiation ceremony. Christian spirituality as Transformation understood it was about "having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ" and treating the Bible as the first and primary source for life's complexities. As each monthly learning module

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349 Wright, Sisters, 25-6.
350 Ibid., 35.
opened with Scripture, the Scripture's for this lesson are Romans 10:9 ("If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved") and John 14:15-16 ("If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I [Jesus] will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with your forever"). The selection from Romans supported the evangelical emphasis on making a public profession of faith as the first step toward salvation.

Along with stressing faith as the primary and essential expectation for successful initiation into the community, the first module taught young women how to use the Bible as an infallible resource for struggles, doubts, and temptations. One of the activities for the module invited initiates and leaders to "brainstorm problems or situations," then use a Bible and concordance to look up the "answers." Mentors then shared stories of how the Bible and/or prayer to God helped them through a problem before encouraging initiates to do the same sharing with others.

Cicely, an initiate who participated in the program from 1993-1994, explained that in the weeks following the induction ceremony and first lesson, she felt a deepening sense of faith and desire to share her own faith testimony with her friends. Since she was concerned that doing so at school might render her a laughing stock, she limited her sharing to other ROP participants and her family (all of whom attended church on a weekly

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Wright, Sisters, 35.
basis). Cicely’s struggle reflected the deepening sense of faith most of the program’s graduates felt. Many of these young women felt that their behavior at home and church did not always align with the pressures they felt in school—pressures common to many teens, such as light jockeying with friends, gossiping, developing romantic crushes, and “appearing cool.” Supporters of the program, including mentors and pastors, stated that despite the tension that some teen girls felt, which they acknowledged as normal of any American teen, recitation of Bible verses and development of “Christian practices” would help teens attain freedom and independence from peer pressure and the need to fit in. Unlike purity rituals dominant in white evangelical conservative churches, which stressed purity as a way to be a “cool” witness for Jesus—a spiritual insider of sorts—Transformation was less concerned with instilling a sense of social hipness or relevancy among its participants. This notion is clearly reflected in importance placed upon the group’s monthly singing of “Lift Every Voice and Sing.” As Wright argued: “Our ignorance of our cultural heritage and traditions is never more shameful than when we are asked to sing our national anthem, but we can’t...We use constant repetition to make sure that our sisters know the song.” Transformation viewed elements such as hymnody and biblical memorization essential for

352 Author Interview with Cicely, November 1, 2011.
353 Interview with Cecily, July 20, 2012.
354 Wright, Sisters, 36.
cultural and spiritual transformation, embodying Turner's theory that the liminal phase of rites of passage rituals could be its "definitive" moment and could stand alone as its own ritual because of its role in instilling the change necessary for integration into the community in a radically different way than before.\textsuperscript{355} In this case, it is from young girls with little knowledge and external expectations to young adults who have taken on a new identity rooted in their Christian faith and ancestral knowledge.

In the second monthly meeting Transformation called for a focus on African American history and one's family history. To support this idea, the lesson turns to Exodus 20:12 and Psalm 7:1. The first passage states: "Honor your father and mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you." This passage reflects one of the main goals of the program, which is to engender deep respect for one's elders, heritage, and community. The second passage reflects the feelings of black oppression the program claims led to the destruction of black culture and pride: "O Lord my God, in your I take refuge: save me from all my pursuers and deliver me."\textsuperscript{356} To stress these ideals to young women the program activities for the week included making a family tree, learning a set of vocabulary words (e.g., genealogy, community, oppressors, colonizers, extended family), viewing a selection of films (\textit{Roots, Rosewood, Miss Jane Pitman}), and beginning a scrapbook that each girl

\begin{itemize}
\item Grimes, \textit{Deeply Into the Bone}, 121-2.
\item Wright, \textit{Sisters}, 37.
\end{itemize}
would present to their families upon their graduation/integration
ceremony. All three films touch on a different aspect of black history and
reflect the program's ethos of maintaining a sense of community and
solidarity in the face of oppression and challenge. In forming an identity
beyond one's individual experiences, the Transformation program sought
to establish a collective identity among teen girls around a history of
oppression, solidarity, and overcoming. According to Taylor and Whittier,
this form of identity is key of marginalized and circumscribed groups in a
community as "building an oppositional consciousness to define the
challenging group's interests and negotiating and politicize[e] everyday
actions." Linking one's immediate and extended family to a longer
ancestral history both augments one's family to a level of historical
importance while at the same time integrating the past into the present.
As I illustrated in chapter one, the history of the black family in America
has been inextricably tied to attempts at delegitimizing black families
through sexual and gendered oppression and accusations of pathology. To
understand black history is to understand how white privilege has labeled
the cultural differences between white and black families and the ongoing
journey to triumph and over such labels. And as Toilette M. Eugene

357 Ibid., 37-8.
358 Verta Taylor and Nancy Whittier, "Collective Identity in Social Movement Communities,"
Frontiers in Social Movement Theory, Alden D. Morris and Carol McClurg Mueller, eds. (New
359 See Hill Collins, Black Feminist Thought.
notes, one cannot achieve a thorough study of black families without historical and contemporary context.360

By the third module, mentors and initiates gained insight into the experiences of women in the community and those of generations past. Again, history and biblical Scripture become an amalgamated lens to express type of women young the initiates should seek to become. Transformation situated a study of Proverbs 31, which many biblical scholars and preachers—evangelical and non-evangelical alike—refer to as the story of the “Virtuous Wife,” alongside histories of well known black women. Using a psycho-social framework developed by Cherry Ross Gooden, the lesson asked initiates to match a historical figure with each of the six characteristics of a Proverbs 31 “true woman”: truth, justice, propriety, harmony, balance, righteousness, and order.

For example, ROP linked Sojourner Truth with truth, Rosa Parks with justice, righteousness with Ida B. Wells, and Coretta Scott King with harmony. Shirley Chisholm is tied to balance, Osceola McCarthy symbolizes propriety, and former U.S. Treasurer Azie Taylor Morton reflects order.361 This unit sought to strengthen girls’ awareness of their racial heritage and provide a model of what they should strive for as they


361 Osceola McCarthy became famous in the early 1990s for the way that she saved her earnings as a launderer and used the money to establish a scholarship at the University of Southern Mississippi. Azie Taylor Morton served as the U.S. Treasurer from 1977 to 1978. Wright, Sisters, 43.
mature. The inclusion of these women also suggested that initiates should not just emulate these women because of their faith alone, but because of the way they were trailblazers in their respective communities. Transformation not only gave initiates the mantle of womanhood, it placed upon them the expectation that they would also become leaders for their community when called upon to do so.

It is worth noting that the Scripture reference of Proverbs 31 for this module on "true womanhood" was also the same one used for Module 13: "Housekeeping." Both lessons, however, did not mention being a wife or having husband (except the Scripture reference). The lesson on housekeeping included lessons on sewing, ironing, healthy eating, and setting the table for a variety of occasions. Unlike the adolescent rituals of WCEs, it was not clear that Transformation saw marriage as the penultimate meaning for a Christian woman. Nor, did it regard it as a reward in exchange for premarital abstinence. Yet, like white conservatives evangelicals, the conservative African American evangelical church placed high value on women maintaining the home—a point reinforced in similar programs for adolescent black males (see below).

The seventh lesson, which focused on types of dancing associated with western Africa was a primer on the importance of taking pride in West African culture and making it a part of one's life. 1 Peter 2:9 and Psalm 150:2-4 serve as Scriptural guidance for this lesson. Transformation
interpreted the former passage as both a claim on one's Christian identity and the idea that young black women have a ancestry akin to royalty, which ought instill a measure of pride in the initiates. 1 Peter 2:9 states: "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation." The Psalm says, "Praise him for his acts of power/Praise him for his surpassing greatness/Praise him with the harp and lyre/Praise him with tambourine and dancing. Both biblical passages augment the call to become physically active and reclaim public dancing as an expression of solidarity and joy, which Wright argued was lost as colonial governments in Africa across outlawed it in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In Transformation biblical scripture and West African dancing styles take on their own role as a form of resistance against political and social压迫. As Wright asserted, dancing and drumming were means by which "[African] ancestors communicate[d] with each other as well as to call the Spirit of God." It is ironic, however, that the "Spirit" referred to here is the same "Spirit" referred to in the first module, calling young girls to harness the Spirit of God to guide them in Christian faithfulness. Yet the Spirit of ancient West African religion was not necessarily rooted in the Trinitarian notion of the Holy Spirit as standing alongside the Father and the Son in the personhood of God. Yet, the

362 Wright, Sisters, 61.
363 Ibid., 62.
364 Christianity has long held that the Spirit of God or Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity: God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and indispensable to the Christian faith.
adaptation of beliefs and history to the unique situation of Transformation's goals are not unique to African American evangelical community. As noted in the previous chapter, white conservative evangelicals also relied on carefully appropriating words in accordance with their spiritual goals (such as in the case of redefining virginity as something that is as much about emotional and spiritual purity as it is a physical one).

When it came to matters of sexuality and intimate relationships, the Transformation program continued its integration of evangelical Christian faith, West African culture, and modern science. As was the case of SRT and TLW, sex education was a lesson in heterosexual normativity rooted in evangelical Christian theology. For example, Module 4: Relationship with Boys, is just that—a focus on heterosexual relationships. While this was not out of the ordinary for this message to be preached in a theologically conservative setting, it was remarkable in the way that Transformation never addressed non-heteronormative relationships. Such an omission either presumed that everyone in the black church community was heterosexual and thus the topic is presumed to be irrelevant, or, they deemed it an illegitimate expression of one's sexual desire. One former participant, Katrina, a 32-year old African American woman, shared that while participating in the program she "knew there were gay people, we
just did not talk about it." The concept of denial and silence will be explored in the following chapter.

Galatians 5:19, 21 served as the scriptural foundation of this session and indicated an attitude toward opposite-sex relationships as detrimental to one's goals and emotionally unreliable. As Galatians 5:19, 21 reads: "The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery, And envy, drunkenness, orgies, and the like." Both white and black conservative evangelicals have understood "sexual immorality" to mean same-sex relationship. Accordingly, Transformation stressed what they understand relationships should not be, rather than what they can be or are.

Alongside the passage from Galatians, the lesson’s objectives stressed teaching young women “how to assert your true self—your goals, values, and moral without being obnoxious." Indeed, the key terms included assertiveness; obnoxious behavior; common interests; introductions, and; “being your best.” As the case for TLW and SRT encouraged initiates to humbly embrace their individuality and rely not on boys for validation, an unreliable and dangerous temptation.

Following the lesson on “relationships with boys” Transformation next addressed on “Taking Care of Self: Sex Education, Responsibility,

365 Author interview with Katrina, October 30, 2011.
366 Wright, Sisters, 48.
The Scripture lessons stressed the body as a gift from God to be regarded with utmost reverence (Matthew 23:24, Genesis 1:27-28, and 1 Timothy 4:4). In contrast to the previous lesson that stressed avoiding "obnoxious behavior" and expressing one's feelings too soon, the message here preached the importance of viewing one's self with high esteem; and, as such, it did not immediately link sex education to romantic relationships, but instead treated it as a matter of intellectual, emotional and spiritual health. Transformation relied on a video for its instruction of intercourse, which focused on contraception, conception, sexually transmitted disease, and the physiological aspects of puberty; there was little exploration of sexuality's emotional and social aspects, a refrain echoing patterns of 1980s *Ebony* articles.

Using a rhetoric of warning, Transformation conflated sexuality with sexual intercourse alone and sex as a primarily dangerous endeavor whose consequences included single parenthood and STIs. The leader's guide also suggested inviting a teenage mother to speak to the group about her experience as an example of the challenges that teenage sexual activity could have on an initiate.

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367 Ibid., 50.

368 Matthew 23: 24 reads: "Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, Hypocrites for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess." Genesis 1:27-28 reads: "...He created him—male and female He created them. Then God blesses them and God said be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it." 1 Timothy 4:4 reads: "For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused." All Scripture quotations are taken from the King James Version, as it was the version used in the ritual.

369 Ibid., 51-2.
Transformation's approach to sexuality and sexual intercourse illustrates the way in which sex education in the conservative black evangelical community was less about chastity as a Christian virtue and more about abstinence as a necessary component for one's health, education, and economic future. Along with learning about STIs and teen pregnancy, Transformation initiates learned how to perform breast self-exams, what takes places in gynecological exams, and personal hygiene. Transformation did not negate purity as a Christian virtue, but as one of many reasons to engage in sexual abstinence.

Although I have focused on eight of the program's 13 modules, the overall message of the program is on the importance of having knowledge of one's self, community, faith, and heritage adequately prepared young girls to become young women. Rather than a ceremony that took place at the same time as their liminal transformation, these young women engaged in months of preparation through meetings, lessons, worship, and one on one meetings with mentors, in which adolescent girls could form a close relationship with an adult embodiment of the life they were preparing to enter. Upon completion of the 9-month program, a graduation celebration or postliminal rite marks the official transition to adulthood in the presence of the congregation. As part of the graduation ceremony initiates are designated graduates and adult members of their community.
As Madeleine Wright asserted, "rituals elevate the humdrum nature of our lives. They focus our attention...[and] connect us to God." By framing adolescence, growth, African cultural history, and Christian theology into a sacred process, Transformation treated puberty, the human body, and a young person's quest for independence as something to respect, honor, and cherish, rather than a period of awkwardness and temptation that their white evangelical counterparts suggest. Throughout the program, the tone remained positive, uplifting, determined, and celebratory. As a matter of fact, the main symbol of the program, which was featured throughout all of its educational and promotional material is a butterfly. The butterfly, they believed, "symbolizes change, love, and soul. Just as the butterfly has changed from the young larvae to the beautiful adults, our initiates are emerging from childhood to womanhood."\footnote{Wright, Sisters, 11.}

Nearly 13 years after the creation of Transformation: Rites of Passage, Daughters of Imani was born in 2004. Although having no connection to ROP, Daughters of Imani built upon similar principles of pride in one's West African heritage, communal responsibility, and evangelical Christianity, Daughters of Imani has been able to reach a broader audience due in no small part to its publication with a major denominational publication (Transformation's program was published with...
a small, local publisher). Although it is hard to estimate the number of churches using the program, a quick search revealed its usage in churches across the nation, ranging from a Baptist church in central to Tennessee, a Disciples of Christ community in Detroit, and three Baptist churches in southern Maryland. Indeed, Transformation and Daughters of Imani remain the only two explicitly Christian rites of passage programs for African American teens beyond individually created programs.

Emerging out of a mentoring program begun in 1994 at Payne Memorial A.M.E., church in Baltimore, Maryland, Daughters of Imani differs little from Transformation in that it utilizes a system of monthly (or bi-monthly depending on the congregation) group meetings, one-on-one mentoring relationships and approaches adolescence holistically. The goal has been “to teach Black girls what it means to be African-American women spiritually, culturally, and physically.” Their identity and pledge statements reflect this amalgamation: The identity pledge, which is recited in the opening ritual marking the beginning of their transformation, states:

We are beautiful African-American women, created by a loving God. We are victorious over the forces of oppression that are designed to destroy us. No weapon formed against us shall prosper, for we are more than conquerors through the One who saves us, Jesus Christ, the Anointed One.

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372 White, Daughters, 5, 11.

373 Ibid., 46.
The pledge, which they recite at monthly meetings, states:

We will remember the lives, glory, trials, and tribulations of our ancestors and honor the struggles of our elders.
We will strive to bring new values and new life to our people;
We will have peace and unity among us.
We will be loving, sharing, and creative.
We will work, study, and listen
So that we may learn and then go out and teach.
We will have discipline, patience, devotion, and courage.
We will live as models to provide new direction for our people. We will be free and self-determined.
We are Daughters of Imani, journeying toward womanhood. Daughters of Imani.3 7 4

Daughters of Imani has also ritualized the process of adolescence as a time of spiritual, physical, and cultural change from a girl fully dependent on her parents to a young woman who has learned to take full responsibility as a young adult caring for and engaging her community and faith as an empowered and prepared person. Key to this ritualization of one's identity has been a rhetoric that emphasizes connectivity to God, one's ancestral heritage, and a sense of social responsibility. Unlike SRT and TLW, which don't rely on months-long preparation, Daughters of Imani has stressed the preliminal stage of separating from one's community so that upon completion young people may reintegrate into the community with an identity formed over the course or nearly a year. As such, the church community serves the role of the community elders.

374 Ibid., 48.
Amy Frances Davis argues that despite the similarity between Transformation and Daughters of Imani, Wright's Transformation "falls into...fantasy" because Wright asserts that the creation and adoption of rituals similar to those of ancient West Africa are requisite to the "transformation of the African American community." Daughters of Imani, she claims, does not make such assumptions of their influence. Instead, they have concentrated on the creation, or, as Ronald Grimes argues, "invention" of rituals that celebrate ancient traditions without stressing any direct connection to the transitional process.

Daughters of Imani has also taken a somewhat more modern, though still conservatively evangelical, approach to sexuality and gender. It has celebrates women as unique creations of God—not because of sexual and gendered differences from men. This approach is a marked departure from Transformation, which stressed activities like sewing and homemaking as a woman's preparation for being a good mother and spouse in the future.

Moreover, the monthly bible studies that are an essential component to the program are all based upon the various stories of women in the Bible, not only the Virtuous Wife of Proverbs 31. The story in the Gospel of Mark of the women caught in adultery frames the first unit on being "born again." The lesson devotes little attention to the act of

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375 Davis, "Rites of Passage," 179.
adultery, instead focusing on Jesus’ recognition, acceptance, and forgiveness of the women as an invitation for her (and metaphorically all the Daughters of Imani) to dedicate their lives to Jesus. Other lessons focus on being “strong” and “purposeful” as expressed in the Old Testament stories of Deborah and Esther. The lessons present Deborah as a strong leader whom God respected and empowered. It does not focus on her leadership as unique or rare but as universal characteristics of all leaders. The story of the women with the uncontrollable bleeding is used a story of bravery, tenacity, and Jesus’ encompassing embrace not merely a story on health and illness. Daughters of Imani places women at the center of the biblical drama and allows young women to make gendered connections to what has been an otherwise patriarchal faith. The tradeoff for this emphasis (if one can call it that) is a lack of connection to female African American historical and contemporary leaders, which Transformation emphasized.

The second unit focuses on a young girl’s relationship with her family and not the ancient past as Transformation did. This again illustrates Davis’ claim that while Transformation sought to make direct connections of continuity between the past and present, Daughters of

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377 Ibid., 33-43.

Imani appropriated symbols and words of ancient West Africa without suggesting spiritual or historical continuity.

The third and fourth units are on health, human sexuality and social graces. Like Transformation, Daughters of Imani has emphasized the importance of caring for one’s health only engaging in sexual intercourse within the confines of marriage. Daughters of Imani, however, devotes more attention to STIs (a reflection of its more recent publication) and stresses female sexuality as a “gift” for marriage (similar to TLW, Transformation, and SRT). True to its evangelical roots, Daughters of Imani makes no mention of non-heteronormative sexual attraction, indirectly linking the concept of a healthily, fully developed sexuality with heterosexual orientation.379 The final unit in the program addresses social graces and includes four lessons on etiquette, social relationships, budgeting, and self-image, offering no marked departure from Transformation with one exception. Finally, Daughters of Imani concludes its program with a reintegration (post-liminal) celebration celebrating young women’s new identity and role in the community. In this ceremony, “daughters” receive a new name from their mentors that reflects the ultimate embrace of their new place in society.

Transformation and Daughters of Imani have elevated adolescence for African American girls as a comprehensive period of celebration,

379 White and Lewis, Daughters, 93-110.
preparation, and growth. They have both sought to place the experiences of black young women at the center of their stories: Transformation emphasized American historical figures and ancestral connections to West Africa; Daughters of Imani turned to the stories of women in the Bible to articulate their egalitarian role of women. While their white evangelical counterparts might have scoffed at the relatively light attention given to gendered marriage, Transformation and Daughters of Imani’s approach to gender and marriage are a partial reflection of their cultural context’s halfhearted embrace of the notion of submission and authority popular conservative white evangelicals. It is also a reflection of the embrace of different embodiments of family life, including step-parents, single parent families, and the inclusion of extended families into the home.

One final and important distinction between these rituals and Silver Ring Thing and True Love Waits is the role of marketing and consumer consumption. Transformation and Daughters of Imani participants did not express their commitment to a life of faithful Christian witness, abstinence, and maturity through a ceremony resembling marriage or the purchasing of rings. Rather, they relied on the production of African style dress handmade by church members. Nor were there any rhetorical attempts to stress the “coolness” or “hipness” of abstinence or adolescence within these programs either. That does not mean that the programs did not feel the influence of contemporary, secular culture. Instead, it suggests an
intentional attempt by the two groups to distinguish themselves from society as a reflection of the identity and sacred transformation young women undertake as adolescents.

"It Takes God to Be a Man": Young Lions

In the late 1990s, a popular phrase emerged among adolescent and young adult Christians seeking to tap into their hipster side: “Jesus is my homeboy.” For many young people, this phrase was a way to shed the image of a distant, formal, and moralistic Christianity they often associated with their parents. As their homeboy, Jesus was now their friend, someone they could hang out with just as they would with their peers. Their relationships presumed intimacy, authenticity, and ease. Christian youths of all races and ethnicities used the phrase, and its use reflects a common thread of many evangelical churches—Jesus, though divine and supreme—is one who identifies with us on a personal, one-on-one level. In other words, Jesus “gets us.” Although adults were less reluctant to employ language such as “Jesus is my homeboy,” the heart of much of their evangelism focused on the idea that “Jesus can fix you.” Once Jesus guides you through your troubling situation, you can then turn and become a change agent for Jesus in the world.

380 Tom Skinner quoted in Chris McNair, Young Lions: Christian Rites of Passage for African-American Young Men (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001), 150.
For, Christopher McNair, an evangelical United Methodist pastor from Minneapolis, Minnesota, emphasizing Jesus' familiarity with teen struggles was a perfect solution for addressing the struggles facing America's young black males in the 1990s and first decade of the twenty-first century. McNair perceived drugs, single-parent families, poverty, and neighborhood violence, and the pressure to join gangs as a crisis among black teenage males. He believed this left many black males struggling for a sense of purpose and trying to survive rather than thrive. While McNair acknowledged that black youths in urban areas faced this problem more often boys in suburban areas, he argued that black teens generally struggled against feelings of oppression and a dearth of positive role models and stories about African American life.

In 1991, McNair published *Young Lions: A Christian Rites of Passage for African-American Young Men* to “enable [black boys] to be the men that God created them to be.” According to McNair, God desired young black men to have strong self-confidence, a clear understanding of their purpose, and a personal faith relationship with Jesus. Young Lions created a symbiotic relationship between African and African American culture and evangelical Christian theology to give special attention to the experiences of African American adolescent males.

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381 Chris McNair, *Young Lions: Christian Rites of Passage for African-American Young Men* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001), 12.

382 McNair, *Young Lions*, 9.

383 Ibid., 10.
Although Young Lions has no connection or affiliation with Transformation or Daughters of Imani, it has utilized a similar theological and programatic framework with one exception. There is no opening or closing worship service to mark the preliminal and postliminal phases. That, however, does not mean the rite has not had a preliminal stage. It is just that it is not given the same celebratory ceremony as the program for young women. Instead, the seemingly negligible preliminal stage is marked by indicating interest in the program and completing the appropriate paperwork. As such, preliminal process of separating from one's church community, parents, and teen peers is lost in minutiae of preparation. Instead, the emphasis on transformation is solely in the liminal stage. As such, it does not depend on the community's participation nor does it make room for the community to celebrate the transformation the young men have gone through.

Nevertheless, like Transformation and Daughters of Imani, Young Lions asserts that a personal relationship with Jesus Christ was conditional for being successful in the program. Although both programs have given the adolescent experience sacred meaning, their respective ideas of what adolescence means are different. According to Transformation and Daughters of Imani, female adolescence is a potentially awkward phase of physical change that holds potential to be a time of spiritual, psychological, and physical preparation for adulthood.
Young Lions, on the other hand, treats adolescence as a critical time of survival. Rather than granting adolescence sacred authority as female rites of passage programs do, the male counterpart denies adolescence’s sacred potential in and of itself. Instead, it is in completing adolescence unscathed by violence, teenage fatherhood, drugs, and other teenage temptations, that one’s experience is granted spiritual authority. Although the program contains 8 learning units with 3-4 lessons in each unit, it is not until the closing ceremony that the community acknowledges that the process of transformation and growth has begun.

As much as McNair sought to tap into the idea of Jesus as a fellow “homeboy,” he also fell in step with the history of storytelling and faith formation in the African American Protestant Church: that of Jesus as one whose trials and temptations are readily identifiable with the oppressed. McNair claimed:

Jesus knew what it was like to be discriminated against and to be feared and hated because of his ethnic background. He knew what it was like to live and endangered life; he knew what it was like to face prejudice; he knew what it was like to grow up male; and he knew what it was like to have limited economic resources. Jesus Christ can speak to the experiences and issues of Black males in America.384

Standing alongside this emphasis on Jesus as a problem solver,

Young Lions has turned to African and African American culture as

384 McNair, Young Lions, 16. African American spirituals, many of which were written during the antebellum era testify to enslaved Africans’ identification with narratives of oppressions, such as Moses and the Israelites exodus and sojourn through the wilderness.
indispensable elements in a program addressed specifically to black males. Whereas Transformation used the butterfly to represent the unique and purposeful changes young women experience as teenagers, Young Lions has employed the image of a roaring lion standing upright in front of the African continent to reflect ancestry, authority and might. But for every mention of its cultural heritage, the program also has stressed its Christian identification. With the exception of the color black, the program's other three symbolic colors—red, green, and gold—have both Christian and ethnic meanings. Gold stands to reflect the "richness of Africa's natural resources and the promise of heaven." Red draws forth images of Jesus' blood and sacrifice and the "struggle of the African American people." Finally, green, mirrors the "natural beauty of [Africa] and the growth of a Christian."\(^3^8^5\) This interdependent relationship between African American culture and evangelical Protestant theology validates and grants authority to the black experience in America as a sacred experience. The program's pledge reflects this well in their expectations that young men will, "[l]earn what it means to be an African American man spiritually, physically, and culturally; respect God in my conduct and relationships; honor [their] family by using [their] God-given potential in every situation; show respect for [self] by respecting others."\(^3^8^6\)

\(^{385}\) McNair, *Young Lions*, 17.

\(^{386}\) Ibid., 19.
Young Lions expects that young men would learn what “it means to be an African American man spiritually, physically, and culturally” in weekly lessons lasting a total of eight months. Each week or every other week, mentors and teens gathered together for two-hour meetings that began with a brief game followed by a Libation and Prayer, a lesson on a famous person in African American history, a cooperative project related to the month’s unit, a game, a personal testimony from an adult, followed by a lesson on how the history lessons and monthly projects make sense in light of their Christian faith.

Like Transformation and Daughters of Imani, Young Lions’ success as a transmitter of culture and faith is due to its ability to integrate West African history and culture and evangelical theology into contemporary practices. For example, mentors and mentees offer a libation at each gathering, mirroring the practices of various African cultures who have used libations—a ritual pouring ceremony of water or wine—to honor their ancestors and invite their blessing and presence into the community. At the same time, Young Lion bases their the libation ceremony on Numbers 28:14-15, in which Moses shares God’s expectations of the proper sacrificial offerings expected of the Israelites. The Young Lions, however, are not offering a sacrifice of any kind. Rather, their libation and prayer are understood to be a way of offering & opening themselves up to God for guidance and instruction. It also allows participants to speak directly to
their experience as both members of the black diaspora and the United States. Young Lions' participants have learned that they are not simply Americans or Christians. They are part of a long ancestral community that extends beyond their immediate family, community, and nation. As members of Young Lions, teen boys gain citizenship into a wider community without having to entirely deny their citizenship as Americans.

Similar to the programs for young women, Young Lion has viewed adolescent education of many components. Each unit has focused on the following: "career and education, self-awareness, African American heritage and culture, the black experience in America, family awareness, growing up, personal responsibility, [and] economic responsibility." As this dissertation is primarily concerned with concepts of the race and sexuality as part of the spiritual, social, and physical formation of teenagers, I will give special attention to the units, "family awareness, growing up, and personal responsibility." At the same time, because I argue that the distinctive factor between white and black conservative evangelical formation rituals and lessons are different understandings of American citizenship and nationalism and its intersection with sexuality, power and race, I will also play close attention to the third unit, which examines black history and culture.

387 Ibid., 20.
388 Ibid., 72-4.
Following two units on career, education, self-esteem, and self image, the program turns its attention to black history and culture. The idea undergirding this section—and arguably the entire program—is the belief that "self-knowledge will promote self-love." McNair argued that without a deep and abiding appreciation for their culture, African American boys would continue to embody the message of shame and self-hatred intrinsic to the history of slavery taught in America's public schools. According to social theorist bell hooks, as a teenager in the 1970s, much of what she and her peers learned about black history in the public school system fostered a sense of self-hate for black Americans and mistrust between black men and women for one another.

Accordingly, the unit's first lesson concentrates on African history and the second on the black experience in America. The Scripture lessons for this lesson feature the captivity and liberation story of people in Egypt and Libya, challenging participants to discount assumptions of Christianity as a European religion. The unit also includes a quiz on Africa's role in scientific and historical contributions to world culture and knowledge. Participants also learn about Africa's geography, political make-up, languages, and various tribal customs and are encouraged to share what they learn in the program with others. Doing so makes Young Lion

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389 Ibid., 116.


391 McNair, *Young Lions*, 116. The Scripture references McNair refers to do not actually speak of Christians, but of Jews in exile.
participants ambassadors of Young Lions’ message, just as SRT and TLW does for its participants.

The next unit, which centers on the experiences of blacks in America emphasizes the oppression of blacks in America, reflecting how each community perceives they are preparing young people to resist. As Charles M. Payne explained, “blacks have a critical patriotism” as a result of a history of living the limitations of American equality and citizenship.392 And as Gary Creets contends (and I explained earlier in this chapter), by the 1970s black nationalism, whether advocating from separatism or full participation in American life alongside racial solidarity believed that racial consciousness and cooperation within the black community was essential for any type of change.393 Accordingly, one of the three lessons in the unit explores the Middle Passage and slavery in America and called upon participants to consider why traders chose African for slaves and the manner in which whites justified their actions toward enslaved people.

Like the previous unit, this lesson also consider the relationship between blacks and Christianity to the extent that blacks have viewed it as a “white religion.” Turning to Tom Skinner, a prominent conservative black evangelical during the late twentieth century who claimed, “It takes God to be a Black man!” McNair believed that God “is the author of


393 Creets, American Crucible, 301, 341-2.
blackness...and every ethnic heritage." That, along with a reference to Genesis 1:26-31, in which scripture speaks of God creating man and women in God's image, McNair has sought to stress the beauty and goodness of being black.

Continuing the theme of black pride, the long Civil Rights movement is the focus of the following lesson, stressing that participants in the movement were able to be agents of change because they embodied a deep pride and confidence in both their race and God's love for them. Young Lions explained this same hope and confidence was crucial for blacks in the late twentieth century to survive the onslaught of negative statistics depicting black life in America. Of some of the figures included: the average life expectancy of black men is 12.2 years lower than that of white men; for men 15-24, the number one cause of death is homicide; black men are nearly 20 times more likely than white men to face jail; 42% of Asian Americans, 25% of whites, and only 14% of blacks have college degrees; 1 in 45 black men will be murdered by age 15, while only 1 in 345 white males face the same probability. These statistics serve as the heart of the third and final lesson of the unit on African American heritage and a reminder to teen boys that this program

394 McNair, Young Lions, 150.
395 Ibid., 153.
396 Ibid., 162.
was intended to serve as necessary instruction for their lives and not simply as a form of extracurricular enrichment.

The next two units concentrated on family life and the physical and emotional changes of adolescence. The logic behind the family unit was the belief that young people (of any race) have long yearned for a place to belong and feel safe. At the same time, McNair argued young black men often did not appreciate the importance of their family and instead turned to gangs to meet their longings. Focusing on the family aimed to "foster...a sense of value and respect towards [sic] their families, whether they are traditional, single-parent, or extended families...[and] to start them thinking about the families they may have in the future." Boys are invited to design their own family crest and write values they think are important to their family or should be important to them. In conjunction with that activity, boys are instructed to read Ephesians 5:21-6:4, which calls for mutual submission between spouses and humble leadership of the family as Jesus modeled. Young Lions program stresses two-parent heterosexual families as ideal while acknowledging that many of the youth may not come from these so-called traditional families. In fact, participants are expected to describe what their family is like, the things they enjoy about it and things they'd like to change. On the last week of this unit, Young Lions asked the young men to draw what their families look like in relation to

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397 Ibid., 167.
John 3:16, a passage often referred to as the quintessential message of salvation ("For God so love the world that [God] gave [God’s] only begotten son that whosoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life.") This Scripture focus at the end of the study was the culmination of a three-week examination of the different variations of family and contended that the Christian community is the only family that will last through eternity.

"Growing Up," the sixth unit of the Young Lions program, addressed the emotional and physical changes young men face. McNair wanted the lesson to prevent what he saw as the greatest threat to African American teenage boys: sexual and physical abuse, absentee fathers, and the growth of STIs, especially AIDS. The theology behind this unit remains in line with the other rituals and instruction programs studied: marriage is between a man and women; homosexuality is a sin and a choice that one can refute; sex is for procreation and mutual enjoyment within the confines of marriage, and; sex prior to marriage is "sexually immoral."

As part of this lesson participants read two different experiences of adolescence: Richard Wright’s *Black Boy* and Claude Brown’s *Manchild in the Promise Land*. They then listened to their mentors share their candid experiences about growing up before reflecting as a group on 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, which speaks of the human body as a temple for

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398 Ibid., 189.
God, and Genesis 2:21-25, which speaks of man leaving his family to join himself in marriage with a woman.

While this unit had quizzes on male and female sex organs, it never addressed matters of non-heteronormative sexuality, circumscribing sexuality to heterosexual relationships and intercourse. It is worth noting, however, that unlike other evangelical resources addressing sex, it did not label masturbation as a sin. Nonetheless, it provided a mechanical definition of the act without addressing its intent for pleasure. ("Masturbation [is] handling your sex organs. This is a common practice during adolescence.") Continuing with the idea that an informed young man is a responsible young man with a future, Young Lions also devoted a lesson to the female body. In doing so, it departs from TLW, SRT, Daughters of Imani and Transformation in its attention to the biological nature of males and females.

As Young Lions illustrated, young black men also learned that becoming a "real man" according to black conservative evangelicals meant being prepared to become the financial provider and head of household. Indeed black conservative evangelicals—like their white counterparts—have relied heavily on the notion of "the traditional family" to understand God’s will and plan for their lives. Even in the face of large numbers of single parent families, young people during the last three

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399 Ibid., 208.
decades of the twentieth century learned that heterosexual marriages and families stood as the ideal norm, illustrating the

**Conclusion**

Transforming from a teenager to a young adult is fraught with physiological, psychological, and social changes. For late twentieth-century conservative evangelicals—white and black—adolescence was a time to “train up” young people in the values they held dear. For African American youth, being raised in the faith was not merely have knowledge of the Bible and guarding one’s heart against the temptation of premarital sex. It was as much about being a proud and engaged member of one’s community as it was about fighting sin. A long history of struggle, oppression, and resilience has made the adolescent experience of BCEs less about preparing for marriage as the penultimate event in one’s life than a process of growing into the knowledge of one’s responsibility to care for and give back to the community.

Between 1970 and the mid 1980s, popular media directed the conversation regarding sex education among African Americans. By the mid 1990s, however,—following the precedent established by Paul Hill Jr.’s, national rites of passage program—predominately BCE churches created their own rites of passage rituals. By emphasizing one’s cultural heritage, Christian faith, and role in the community, these adolescent
rituals refashioned a history of injustice and oppression into a story of resilience and freedom...in Jesus’ name.
Chapter 4: Queering the Church
Conservative Evangelicalism & Sexual Orientation

Introduction

As an openly gay candidate in Houston’s 2009 mayoral race, Annise Parker found herself fighting accusations of having a secret “gay agenda.” In a surprising and rare move, whites and black conservative evangelicals banded together to keep Parker out of office.\textsuperscript{400} Members of the Houston interracial Pastoral Council urged voters to elect Parker’s opponent, African American Gene Locke. Although their campaign failed, theirs was a cooperation rarely encountered in the oil rich metropolis. A year prior, black Christians in California who traditionally voted Democratic were credited alongside Mormons with helping pass Proposition 8’s ban on gay marriage, much to the delight of white conservatives.\textsuperscript{401}

Although both groups expressed disdain for non-heteronormative sexual identities and relationships, their recent political alignment doesn’t necessarily suggest the beginning of a longterm political relationship. As this chapter will explain, although they both white and black conservative evangelicals embodied a belief in homosexuality as a threat to the stability of the family, the differing


\textsuperscript{401} 70% of blacks were reported to have voted against the measure. Karl Vick and Ashley Surdin, “Most of California’s Black Voters Back Gay Marriage Ban,” \textit{Washington Post}, November 7, 2008, Section A, Final edition.
sources for their fears and animosity directly reflects upon the historical lens through which they view the relationship between race and nationalism.

Argument

This chapter argues that the opposition black and white conservative evangelicals held on same-sex attraction and behavior comprised of three components: 1) a literal interpretation of biblical scripture; 2) a rhetoric that regarded homosexuality as a curable disease; 3) and, sexuality as a barometer of a nation's power and stability. Underpinning evangelical rhetoric was the unequivocal belief that God revealed God's divine order for human relationships in Adam and Eve's marriage as husband and wife. As sociologist Christine Gardner has argued, rhetoric is not simply about speech, it's also a "lived expression of individual and group identity." 402 I draw upon Gardner's theory of evangelical rhetoric to explain how conservative evangelicals engaged in the public sphere while simultaneously embracing the identity of "outsiders." Despite similar principles undergirding their opposition to homosexuality, black and white evangelicals' diverging interpretations of American citizenship led to different approaches toward sexuality.

From 1970 to 1990 black evangelicals rhetorically approached same-sex and bisexual sexual orientation as a threat to an already fragile public perception of black sexuality and "something white people did." As a result, a culture of

402 Gardner, Making Chastity Sexy, 18.
silence, secrecy, and shame emerged among black evangelical churches around the topic. Only as more African American contracted AIDS by the end of the 1980s and the early 1990s did conversations around sexual orientation emerge in earnest within black churches; yet, these conversations were traditionally one-sided prohibitions against same-sex activity as a medical and spiritual danger—subtly, yet firmly defining homosexuality as a life-threatening and deviant sexual orientation. Indeed, in the face of non-heteronormative sexual relationships, silence became an unstated yet common approach. By the turn of the twenty-first century, some black conservative evangelicals found themselves tenuously cooperating with their white counterparts in hopes of stemming the gradual, but growing tide favoring the legalization of same-sex marriage. As a result, for African American gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer young adults who came of age in conservative black evangelical churches between 1970 and 2010, the church was a paradox of belonging and exclusion. Churches however, saw their beliefs not as exclusionary, but as a safeguard against a history of racism and sexual oppression.

In the 1970s, white conservative evangelicals viewed homosexuality as a reflection of the nation’s moral decay and a blatant defiance of biblical norms. By


404 Conservative evangelicals primarily used the language of homosexual or gay. There are rare instances in which lesbian or transgender was used; and queer was never used. When analyzing conservative evangelicals experiences & attitudes, I consciously omit the inclusion of transgender and queer in order to stay true to how conservative evangelicals understood sexual orientation. That, however, in no way denies the existence of queer and transgender people between 1970 and 2000. Instead, it speaks to the strict boundaries of sexuality that conservative evangelicals embraced.
1980, their use of biblical apologetics as a defense slowly gave way to three new approaches: 1) healing the psychological threat of same-sex attraction through “ex-gay” ministries; 2) associating same-sex orientation with AIDS, thus regarding it as a public health threat; 3) linking nationalist rhetoric and homosexuality via the outspoken political lobbying of Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, and James Dobson. For the latter strand, same-sex sexual attraction periled America’s “sacred destiny,...divine purpose,” and national security (as same-sex men in the military were seen as effeminate, weak, and susceptible to seduction by the enemy).\footnote{Anders Stephanson quoted in Barry D. Adam, “The Defense of Marriage Act and American Exceptionalism: The ‘Gay Marriage’ Panic in the United States,” \textit{Journal of the History of Sexuality} 12, no. 2 (2003), 267. For more on the relationship between American exceptionalism and Protestantism see Anders Stephens, \textit{Manifest Destiny: American Expansion and the Empire of the Right} (New York: Hill & Wang, 1996).} To WCEs understood did not view themselves as excluding or attacking others but rather saving the “traditional” family and drawing people into a close relationship with God.

Concurrently, the experiences of white and black gays and lesbians who grew up in conservatively evangelical faith communities suggests that sexuality was a more contested space in conservative evangelical churches than leaders and “official” statements would lead one to believe. Their stories provide a window into the challenges gays and lesbians in evangelical communities faced as they sought to reconcile their spirituality, physicality, and sensuality into a whole they—and others would—lovingly embrace.

As is the case for the first chapter, I approach this section with an intersectional lens, illustrating how economics, race, and gender stood alongside
biblical hermeneutics to foster the normativization of heterosexuality. I analyze how the privileging of masculinity among white and black conservative evangelicals ignored the experiences of heterosexual women and lesbians as either incidental, of little consequence, or in the case of conservative evangelicals, of little “threat.” At the same time, intersectionality explains how the subjugation and pathologization of black sexuality paradoxically led some African American conservative evangelicals to stress an idea of black masculinity that countered stereotypes of sexual deviance. Finally, the intersection of economics illustrates how the desire for middle-class respectability espoused by BCE pastors fostered a denial of the role of black gay and lesbian people in church ministries. A concluding note: the oral histories give voice to the experiences of the LGBTQ people in evangelical communities and challenge the idea of universalism of heterosexuality’s normativity in conservative evangelical America.

Limitations

This study is not exhaustive of the interaction of conservative evangelical theology and the history of GLBTQ communities. I mostly address aspects of modern aspects of GBLTQ history as they relate to the concerns and engagement of conservative evangelicals in the second half of the twentieth century. I also focus primarily on the experiences of gays and lesbians as they were the only non-heteronormative sexual identities and orientations primarily addressed in evangelical literature. Even then, most of the literature among black
and white conservative evangelicals focused primarily on gay men, and as such, fewer insights exist on how they integrated lesbians into their perception of same-sex orientation exist. (Leisa Meyer notes that in the 1950s and early 1960s, *Jet* and *Tan Confessions* did address lesbian relationships, albeit without using such language. By the late 1960s and early 1970s *Tan Confessions* was no longer and print and *Jet* and *Ebony* rarely mentioned anything regarding same-sex relationships.\(^{406}\)) Moreover, as this chapter focuses on the middle class, it does not present the diversity in beliefs and orientations found in different classes. Although I have distinguished between sexual attraction and identity, conservative evangelicals in the scope of this study did not. My use of the word sexual orientation in this chapter is not an attempt to conflate the two, but to use the term as evangelicals understood it.

**Organization**

I divide this chapter into four parts. First, I examine the invention of “homosexuality” and “heterosexuality” as categories of behavior and identity. As part of this explanation, I briefly examine the history of gays and lesbians in the latter half of the twentieth century when evangelicals and the American government in general regarded them as “threats” to national security. Second, I will look at the fraught history of the relationship between Christianity and sexuality and its longterm effects. Next, I illustrate how nationalism and the

\(^{406}\) See Meyer, "Strange Love."
rhetoric of cure shaped the approach of WCEs. Finally, I consider how black conservative evangelicals approached non-heteronormative sexualities and the fears held toward same-sex relationships.

The Invention of Sexual Categories & the Emergence of Homosexuality as a “Threat”

Despite the popular assumption that sexual identity and attraction are modern inventions, same-sex attraction and intercourse have long been a part of American culture. Journals from the travels of Lewis and Clark and eighteenth-century sermons and judicial rulings reveal the presence of same-sex relationships among American Indians and British colonists.\textsuperscript{407} By the end of the nineteenth century, New York and San Francisco for example, witnessed the emergence of homosexual communities that fostered the acceptance and embrace of a "gay culture."\textsuperscript{408} Yet, it was not until the end of the nineteenth century, however, that "homosexual" and "heterosexual" emerged as distinct categories of sexual attraction and activity.

As Jonathan Ned Katz has argued, until the end of the nineteenth century one's sexual identity was not contingent on one's sexual attraction or behavior. Instead, gendered expectations of one's procreative roles determined one's sexual identity. Moreover, theorists understood procreation as the definitive

\textsuperscript{407} Michael Bronski, \textit{A Queer History of the United States} (Boston: Beacon Press, 2011), 4-5.

purpose of sexual intercourse; thus, romantic attraction to the opposite sex was a
“natural desire” that served sex’s procreative role, not a thing in and of itself.409
By 1892, twenty-three years after the first discourses among German
psychologists on the categorization of sexual behavior, the language of
“homosexuality” and “heterosexuality” emerged in the United States.

Neurologist James G. Kiernan, was the first to describe homosexual men
and women as people whose “general mental state is that of the opposite sex”
and a “deviance from a gender norm.” Based on the idea that some people who
had a desire to procreate also exhibited seemingly “abnormal methods of
gratification” beyond vaginal intercourse and embodied gendered expectations of
“other-sex inclination and procrea[tion]” Kiernan understood heterosexuality as
existing on a continuum.410 With procreation and gender setting the standard for
sexual desire and behavior, all other expressions became “abnormal.” By the
early twentieth century, homosexuality became a focus of medical and
psychological inquiry. Sigmund Freud claimed that homosexual attraction was
“immature” and the epitome of imperfection. As Siobhan Somerville and Michael
Bronski have argued, the Social Darwinism and scientific racism that drove much
of the reform and progressive impulse of the early twentieth century further
supported the categorization of sexuality into categories of normal and abnormal,
so as to separate and understand the good from the bad.411 As Somerville

411 Patterson, Queering the Color Line; Bronski, A Queer History, 83-103.
argues, the emergence of homosexuality and heterosexuality as categories of sexual attraction coincided with the entrenchment of race as a boundary for social and civic belonging and a way to establish boundaries of power. This in turn reduced sexuality to a dichotomy of opposites that fostered the “otherization” and criminalization of homosexuality and bisexuality and the normatization of heterosexuality in American society—a position of power and privilege that still exists today.412

By the end of World War II and into the Cold War era, disdain for same-sex relationships took on greater urgency as the State Department and Red Scare hysteria of the McCarthy hearings targeted gays and lesbians in the federal government. The Senate’s “Employment of Homosexuals and Other Sex Perverts in Government” accused gays and lesbians of weakening the nation’s security and stability, in turn justifying their expulsion from service. While gays and lesbians were not always accused of political collusion with communists, the government regarded their sexual orientation as easy access for communists wanting to infiltrate the government because they perceived gay men as soft and easily persuaded. To be clear, the federal government did not yet regard homosexuality as morally deviant; rather, they saw the sexual orientation of gays and lesbians as a medical abnormality, specifically of psychiatric nature.413 Until, 1974, when homosexuality was removed from the Diagnostic and Statistical


Manual of Mental Disorders as a mental illness, this was the standard line of thinking for many Americans, especially evangelicals. Indeed, many white, conservative evangelicals used the medical language of “healing” and “cure” as they sought to reverse the spiritual and moral ill of same-sex sexual orientation well into the twenty-first century.

Gays and lesbians did not passively accept these labels, however. During the Cold War, they worked to challenge negative perceptions around homosexuality and end the criminalization and discrimination of gays and lesbians. The most-well known changes in the advancement of the civil rights of gays, lesbians, bisexual, and transgender people came in the final years of the 1960s.

The 1960s, which popular culture has treated as a watershed moment of sexual flourishing, was less a relaxation of sexual mores as much as it was a period of youthful political and social unrest, which included the rejection of postwar sexual mores. As John D’Emilio and Estelle Friedman argue, “more than a response to particular government policies, the student movement generated a complex critique of American social life. The acquiescence to racial inequality in a democracy, to poverty in the world’s richest nation, and to a technologically sophisticated military struggle against a peasant population seemed a damning indictment of middle-class values.”414 At the same time, advances in contraception, specifically the advent of the birth control pill delegitimized the

authority of procreation as sexual intercourse's primary function. While young people had long been having sex outside of marriage for years, the arrival of the pill, as well as more young women staying single longer, suggested that having sex wasn't limited to the marriage bed.\textsuperscript{415}

Although the government had regarded gays and lesbians as threats during the 1940s and 1950s, it was not until the Stonewall protests that white evangelical conservatives began to confront same-sex sexual orientation with a vigorous and concerted effort. On a warm June day in 1969, three years after members of the Mattachine Society staged a sit-in at a New York bar demanding service, a group of New York City police officers stormed into Stonewall Inn, a gay bar in Greenwich Village, to close it down.\textsuperscript{416} Aware of a growing movement within the city to close bars primarily solicited by gays and lesbians, bar patrons quickly fought back, throwing bottles at windows and setting off a small fire in the front of the bar. Riots continued into the night, and in a matter of weeks a group of New Yorkers had formed the Gay Liberation Front. Although the Stonewall Riots drew attention to the lack of civil rights for gays and lesbians, it did not spark an immediate movement nationwide. However, it was crucial toward pushing injustices the gays and lesbians faced into a wider audience.

Taking cues and energy from the Black Power Movement's "Black is Beautiful" slogans, the gay rights movement sought to make the "personal

\textsuperscript{415} Ibid., 302-4.

\textsuperscript{416} Stonewall Uprising.
The LGBTQ movement for civil rights, however, largely remained a predominately white community. Even still, “gay liberation confirmed the growing significance of the erotic in modern life, even as it seemed to break with the assumptions of sexual liberalism,” namely the notion that sex was not merely an activity but a multifaceted expression of one’s attractions and/or identity. It stirred national conversation around sexuality and challenged the binary categories first established at the turn of the century.418

The removal of homosexuality as a mental illness in the DSM and the push for civil rights, however, did not alter the position of many white conservative evangelicals: same-sex attraction and intercourse was sinful. Indeed, it was one of the issues that cemented the split of white evangelicalism into liberal and conservative camps. WCEs believed it placed the stability of the American family in jeopardy and risk notions of femininity and masculinity that formed their understanding of marriage. Although BCEs did not see homosexuality as a threat to the America’s stability and international dominance per say, many did regard it as a potential threat to the already battered image of black sexuality and the black family. Indeed, there is little evidence of conversations around the matter in BCE communities throughout the 1970s.

417 D’Emilio and Friedman, Intimate Matters, 318-321.
418 Ibid., 321.
Christianity's Attitude Toward Same-Sex Attraction and Behavior

Conservative evangelicals have traditionally relied on three Scriptures to explain their attitude toward same-sex relationships: Leviticus 18:32; Romans 1:27, and 1 Corinthians 6:9. Despite criticism from more progressive theologians that the word "homosexuality" as understood in modern times is not the equivalent of the same-sex activity referred to in the Bible, conservative evangelicals literal reading of Scripture and their firm belief in its inerrancy has nonetheless been their predominant support opposing homosexuality.

Nevertheless, in the eyes of conservative evangelicals (and most Christians in general) sin stands as the greatest hindrance to faithfulness Christian living.

Indeed, for many conservative evangelical Christians, the heart of their faith has been and continues to be about winning a war against sin and evil. One 25-year-old heterosexual white male who was raised and remains active in a non-denominational evangelical church said that sin is disobeying God or doing anything the Bible admonishes, a reflection of the literal and authoritative hermeneutic guiding conservative evangelicals. Yet, such boundaries and limitations, the young man said, were not restrictive. Rather, they ensured spiritual and emotional security and provided clear order.

Still, in survey after survey after interview after interview, people who grew up in conservative evangelical communities shared that this dichotomy between the reality of their

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419 One exception to this idea are the subset of adherents to the Prosperity Gospel, whose theological understanding is centered on experiencing salvation and success as sign of God's favor. For more information see Bowler, Blessed.

420 GRSEA survey.
lives—including their desires, beliefs, longings, and experiences—rarely coincided with what they believed their parents, clergy leaders, friends, faith, and church expected of them. Nonetheless, they understood that the goal of their life was to avoid sin, a goal that shaped how they regarded non-heteronormative relationships and orientations.

White Evangelical Conservatives and Sexual Orientation

In 1973, *Trends*, the United Presbyterian Church’s (UPC—a mainline, theologically moderate magazine) bimonthly magazine for youth and young adults denounced the idea that gays and lesbians were mentally ill or living in sin. As one of the first denominations to show such support on a national level, the UPC quickly drew the attention of white conservative evangelicals. Not long after *Trends’* editorial, Harold Lindsell, editor of the evangelical flagship magazine *Christianity Today*, responded with a passionate critique of the article’s logic and denounced the presence of homosexual men and women in the church.421 Lindsell argued that supporters who asserted that homosexuality’s singular mention in the Old Testament and omission in the four gospels of the New Testament as proof of their argument was insufficient and flimsy at best. Lindsell responded that although Jesus was silent on the matter, the apostle Paul preached against same-sex relations. According to Lindsell, homosexuality, unlike other prohibitions in the Old Testament, was mentioned in both the Old

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421 Harold Lindsell, “Homosexuals and the Church” *Christianity Today* (September 1973), 8-12.
and New Testament and validated the legitimacy of Leviticus' mandate. Lindsell went on to say that the church’s acceptance of gays and lesbians into full participation in the church promoted “false compassion that confirm[ed] the sinner in his wicked ways.” To that end Lindsell asserted that churches who let in other sinners, including “fornicators, adulterers, and drunkards” and even in “unitarians [sic]” were disregarding biblical authority.422

Lindsell’s biblical reasoning and rhetoric reflects the general approach of white conservative evangelical during the 1970s, the majority of whom viewed homosexuality and its gradual acceptance in some more liberal denominations as a sign of the eroding moral authority of the Bible. His defense also illustrates WCE’s broader emphasis throughout the same decade on “right belief” as evangelical’s central unifying element (see chapter 1 for more on this—especially as liberal evangelicalism sought to deemphasize strict orthodoxy with a focus on social justice and mission).

Months before Lindsell’s editorial, Christianity Today featured a five-page Q & A spread with Klaus Bockmühl, a Swiss theologian who argued against scientific and psychological research supporting same-sex sexual attraction as a product of genetics or choice. He called on Christians to remember the “lordship of Jesus Christ,” and as such, the final authority on all matters.423 For WCEs in the 1970s, the most common defense was also the only defense: the Bible. As

422 Ibid., 10-11.

423 Klaus Bockmühl, “Homosexuality in Biblical Perspective,” Christianity Today 16 (February 1973), 12-18. It is worth noting that while Bockmühl denounced the findings of psychology in support of homosexuality, he did use psychological research to support traumatic childhoods as a “cause” for same-sex sexual orientation.
the findings of Jeremy Thomas and Daniel Olsen support, of the 22 articles Christianity Today published on homosexuality between 1970-1979, more than 71% focused on biblical and theological arguments against it. In the following decade only 24% of such articles relied on Christian apologetics alone (instead turning to the language of illness or disease).424

Another argument, which emerged in 1976 (after white evangelicals divided into liberal and conservative camps), was the assertion that same-sex sexual orientation led to the unraveling of the nation's ethical framework. In 1976 and 1977, the Southern Baptist Convention declared homosexuality a sin and blamed it for the "precipitous decline of moral integrity in American society...at an alarming pace."425 The SBC also claimed "the success of those advocating such deviant moral behavior would necessarily have devastating consequences for family life in general and...children in particular...and the radical scheme to subvert the sacred patten of marriage in America has gained formidable momentum by portraying homosexuality as normal behavior."426 Calling on local churches to deny gays and lesbians employment or ordination, the SBC resolutions were among the first to express a growing belief that same-sex attraction (along with feminism, women working outside of the home, and the

426 Ibid.
legalization of abortion) threatened the gendered approach to marriage and child reading that WCE advocated.

One of the most well-known examples of this rhetorical framework was Anita Bryant, who, in 1977, led a campaign to reverse a Dade County, Florida, ordinance prohibiting discrimination in “employment, housing, or public services, including public and private schools.”

Bryant, a runner-up for Miss America in 1959, asserted that gays and lesbians “were ‘trying to recruit our children to homosexuality’; because they “cannot reproduce...they must recruit.” By approaching the argument from the mother of four trying to protect her children and the children of the nation, Anita Bryant made same-sex orientation political and personal. Rather than limiting her influence, Bryant’s role as a housewife and mother gave her authority as a matriarch for the nation’s values. As Mark Jordan explains, Bryant “shift[ed] the speaking voice from male pastor to female congregant—indeed, more importantly, to the suffering Christian mother.” In doing so, Bryant mirrored the actions of other evangelically conservative white women in that half of the decade. As noted in chapter 1, Vonette Bright and Beverly LaHaye used their role as housewives to protest against the ERA as a clarion call for Christians to reclaim their authority and the importance of gender roles in marriage. Unlike Bright and LaHaye, however, Bryant’s crusade garnered


national attention due in no small part to the financial and operational support of Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson, rising stars in the increasingly political world of WCE. To Falwell and Robertson, same-sex attraction was one more reason in a long list of grievances—including abortion, women’s rights, and President Jimmy Carter’s seeming “betrayal” to Israel—compelling them to take their faith to the halls of Washington. As Tim LaHaye (writer of the popular pre-millennial dispensation series, *Left Behind*) declared in his 1978 book, *Unhappy Gays: What Everyone Should Know About Sexuality*: “It is time for us Christians to lead this enormous majority of pro-moral Americans in reestablishing the values that earned for us the blessings of God on our country.” For the rising stars of white conservative evangelicalism, homosexuality was nothing short of God’s call to take control of the nation. The best way to do it, of course, was to place the Bible as the final authority on matters of ethic.

Although WCE perceived same-sex sexual orientation as a threat to one’s spirituality that demanded immediate action, the discovery and spread of AIDS in the 1980s, led to a shift in rhetoric linking homosexuality and AIDS together as a reflection of homosexuality’s threat to America’s public health. In a televised interview, Jerry Falwell said, “AIDS...caused by homosexual promiscuity is a violation of God’s law, laws of nature and decency. And as a result, God who loves people hates sin and deals...we pay the price when violate the laws of

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430 Ibid., 136.

God." While Falwell's homophobic rhetoric is familiar to many today, it was not the universal approach everyone took in the early 1980s, especially those without political aspirations or a bully pulpit.

For example, in 1985, Pentecostal televangelist Tammy Faye Bakker interviewed Steve Pieters, a gay minister in Los Angeles. While Bakker linked AIDS to gay men, she did not consider it a punishment or judgement from God. Instead, she limited her questions to questions about how the disease had altered "the gay community" and Pieters personally. When Pieters shared how he came out to his parents, who accepted him fully, Bakker fought back tears, as shared with Bakker: "Thank God...thank God for a mom and dad who will stand with a young person...no matter what happens in their life and I think it's so important as mom and dad love through anything...that's the way with Jesus, Jesus loves us through anything."\(^\text{432}\) When fellow evangelicals condemned Bakker's interview with Pieter, she defended his presence on her show and eventually spoke out to evangelicals on the importance of radically welcoming gays and lesbians. When Bakker died in 2007, the Metropolitan Community Church released an official statement praising her as "a woman of God who reached beyond the boundaries to include all people...millions of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people saw and experienced the depth of her unconditional love and the authenticity of her spiritual faith."\(^\text{433}\)


By the end of the decade, as the nation better understood the cause and spread of AIDS, WCE outside of the political limelight began shifting away from the jeremiad of judgement. To be fair, they continued to suggest a casual link between homosexuality and AIDS. However, they also began advocating compassion and the need for missional work among people dying from AIDS. In 1989, Scott Cox told a Virginia megachurch that he was HIV positive and gay. In a follow-up interview with Cox, *Christianity Today* noted the shift in how (conservative) evangelicals have spoken about AIDS:

> The tragedy of AIDS continues to challenge the church. Initially, many Christian leaders called AIDS ‘God’s judgment’ against homosexuals. In recent months, many of those leaders have softened their rhetoric with statements of compassion and forgiveness. Often, such changes in attitude come when a close friend or family member has AIDS.434

Despite the magazine’s repudiation of harsh rhetoric, five out of the eight questions concerned Cox’s sexual orientation and the relationship between his sexual orientation and his diagnosis. Rather than asking Cox to share advice on living with AIDS, *CT* asked him to share advice on “struggling with homosexuality and living with AIDS,” insinuating a causal relationship between the two. Although various WCE churches created ministries supporting people with AIDS, such outreach was often isolated in nature and focused more on fighting against

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434 “One of Our Own: One Man’s Struggle with AIDS,” *Christianity Today* 33, no. 2 (February 1989), 56.

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homosexuality rather than ministering to the needs of gays and lesbians or those with AIDS.\textsuperscript{435}

While some WCE confronted same-sex attraction and sex as a biblical sin and medical threat, other WCE outside of the national spotlight focused their energy on establishing “ex-gay” ministries. Unlike the lobbying and political machinations of Falwell, Robertson, and others, ex-gay ministries were not run by ordained clergy, but by men and women who had renounced their sexual orientation as gays and lesbians. Although a small handful of ministries popped up in 1973 and 1974, it was not until 1976, when “ex-gay” men and women established Exodus International, an umbrella organization similar to the National Evangelical Association. Exodus quickly became the largest and most-well know ex-gay organization, and at its height at the turn of the new millennium, provided advocacy, financial support, and networking for up to fifty individual ministries.\textsuperscript{436}

The foundation of these ex-gay ministries was a belief that genetics did not determine someone’s sexual attraction. Rather, it was a “condition” resulting from a “distorted” relationship with one’s father or a history of childhood sexual

\textsuperscript{435} However, with the election of George W. Bush in 2000 and the creation of the Office of Faith-Based Initiatives, WCEs returned their attention to AIDS, this time as an issue of international concern. Throughout his campaign, Bush pledged to provide funding of religious groups providing social services and outreach.\textsuperscript{34} For WCEs, AIDS became a perfect way to exercise their impulse for international mission work, an impulse with origins as far back as the postwar era For more on the history of evangelicals and international missions, see Ruble, \textit{The Gospel of Freedom and Power}.

\textsuperscript{436} In 2013, the CEO of Exodus International, announced the end of the program as a ministry seeking to “cure” people of homosexual attraction and apologized to the LGBTQ community for the harm their work may have caused. For more information see, Jeff Chu, "\textquote{Let's Do Something Different}: The End of the World’s Leading ‘Ex-Gay’ Ministry," \textit{The Atlantic}, accessed October 4, 2013, http://www.theatlantic.com/sexes/archive/2013/06/lets-do-something-different-the-end-of-the-worlds-leading-ex-gay-ministry/277039/.
violence. It was a conscious choice, not a disposition. Participants in an 1989 Exodus International meeting described it as a “disease of the soul” or psychological malady requiring time, emotional support, and spiritual guidance. Hal Schell, leader of an ex-gay ministry in Cincinnati, Ohio, claimed homosexuality was a temptation rooted in a “compulsive behavior disorder.” WCE’s tendency to define same-sex attraction in the language of “condition,” “disease,” and “disorder,” marked their shift away from biblical defenses against same-sex relationship to a focus on psychological and physiological trauma, a transition mirroring their adoption of therapeutic and psychological rhetoric in conversations on marriage in the 1980s. Nevertheless, the emphasis on disorder and compulsion suggested a readiness to pathologize non-heteronormative sexualities as theologically and psychologically aberrant and a threat to one’s emotional health.

However, ex-gay-ministries claimed that they did not “cure” people of their attractions. Indeed, many were hesitant to state how many people had undergone conversion “successfully.” Instead, they insisted that a steady process of counseling and education on what it meant to be a follower of Jesus helped “heal” gays and lesbians from the childhood tragedies and losses believed to have led to same-sex attraction. That’s exactly what Ted Haggard,

437 Beth Spring, “These Christians are Helping Gays Escape from Homosexual Lifestyles,” Christianity Today (September 1984), 57.


440 Ibid., 16.
megachurch pastor and National Evangelical Association president, said in 2006 after being forced to resign from his church upon allegations that he had engaged in a three-year relationship with a male escort. Although, Haggard initially denied the allegations, he later admitted to “inappropriate behavior.” In a letter announcing his resignation from New Life, Haggard confessed: “The fact is I am guilty of sexual immorality, and I take responsibility for the entire problem. I am a deceiver and a liar.” After completing months of “reorientation” treatment in Arizona, Haggard went on to say that childhood sexual abuse caused his attraction to men. While he was quick to say he was not cured of the attraction, Haggard claimed he was healed from the temptations of his same-sex desires and had a renewed love and commitment to his wife. Since most of Exodus’ ministries were charismatic—a tradition within evangelicalism emphasizing transformational healing as an essential aspect of Christian discipleship—ex-gay ministries emphasized Jesus as the original source of healing, not contemporary, secular models. Along with intensive counseling that took place at rehabilitation centers similar to those utilized in the treatment of substance abuse, conversion therapy stressed same-sex re-socialization. According to proponents of ex-gay ministries, part of the struggle that men and women faced

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442 Roose, “The Last Temptation of Ted.”

443 Charismatics’ emphasis on healing originated from the Jesus acts of healing as recorded in the Gospels.
was an inability to relate and engage with peers of the same-sex. As a result, same-sex re-socialization became one avenue toward a new life in Christ and with the world.444

According to Nick Terranova, though, a member of LIFE Ministry in New York—an organization committed to “healing” people of their disease—no one could force someone not to be gay. Instead, a person needed compassion, understanding, and acceptance (though not agreement) in order to feel safe and supported enough to begin the healing process.445 Judy Lowry echoed Terranova’s emphasis on compassion. Lowry, who dropped out of seminary to respond to God’s “insistent call” to minister to Washington, D.C.’s, gay community, said that most gay men were ashamed of their life and yearned to hear that God loved them. As Lowry, who ministered to men at gay bars, explained, “I am convinced that the Lord loves them, waits for them, and reaches out to them. It is vitally important that we as a Christian community provide an atmosphere of love and acceptance so we do not inadvertently drive our young people toward this.”446 Although these leaders denounced homosexual attraction, they did not use biblical apologetics or nationalist jeremiads used by their peers engaged in political lobbying. Instead, they exhibited a more emphatic approach that stressed the psychological detriments of same-sex sexual orientation.

444 Spring, “These Christians,” 57.
445 Ibid., 58.
Still, ethnologist Lynne Gerber argues that the belief that people can change their sexual orientation—the crux of ex-gay ministries' existence—poses inherent risks to their conservative theology. Drawing upon the work of fellow ethnographer Tanya Erzen, Gerber contends that the idea that one's orientation can be altered and changed to what "it should be," relies on the assumption that gender and sexual identity are culturally constructed. Such a belief however calls into question the assumption that God established a divine order for creation, including the roles of males and females, and heterosexuality as the natural and only acceptable sexual orientation.447

Gender ideals have also been at the heart of the experiences of spouses whose partners engaged in non-heterosexual activity. According to Michelle Wolkomir, the wives of men who engaged in same-sex intercourse while married often saw themselves at fault for their husbands' infidelity, which "challenged their femininity and ability to see themselves as good Christian women."448 As noted in chapter 1, the heart of WCE approach to marriage was a conflict-free relationship between a bread-winning husband and a nurturing and supportive wife. When that model seemed to fail, evangelicals wives were left with a sense of guilt and a loss of meaning. Ted Haggard's wife, Gayle, reflected in an interview four years after Haggard underwent treatment that she originally questioned whether she


448 Michelle Wolkomir "Giving It up to God': Negotiating Femininity in Support Groups for Wives of Ex-Gay Christian Men," *Gender and Society* 18, no. 6 (December 2006), 740.
had done something to have caused her husband to go astray and whether she was still could still remain his wife.449

Not all evangelicals agreed with the idea of reparative therapy. In 1975, Ralph Blair, an evangelical psychologist who, among other places, studied at the fundamentalist Bob Jones University and Dallas Theological Seminary, created Evangelicals Concerned (EC), an organization providing support and resources for gay and lesbian evangelical Christians.450 Blair advocated for the right of gays and lesbians to have monogamous relationships and denounced reparative therapy as dangerous and misleading.451 Evangelicals Concerned claimed the same essential theological beliefs as conservative evangelicals— authority & inerrancy of Scripture, a definable moment of conversion, an impulse for evangelization, and salvation through faith in Jesus Christ alone. They differed however on the role contextualization in reading Scripture. As a volunteer-based and loosely structured organization, it is unclear how many people joined Evangelicals Concerned.452 After their singular mention in a CT article in 1989, they did not receive any more press in evangelical Christian magazines, suggesting that the gatekeepers of conservative evangelicalism regarded them...

449 Gayle Haggard interview, by Michel Martin.


452 In 2010, Evangelicals Concerned changed their named to Gay Christian Network and now openly preaches against ex-gay ministries and pushes for the full inclusion of gays and lesbi
with little respect or legitimacy. Perhaps, however, EC had little desire to seek national prominence and the challenges that would come with such attention.

The final and most well-known strategy WCE employed was the rhetoric of American nationalism. In a 1983 debate with Troy Perry, a founder of the gay-affirming Metropolitan Community Church, Jerry Falwell claimed his harsh rhetoric was his way of “protecting the nation” from AIDS and a decline in morality. He also went on to say that the “one sure cure for AIDS...one man for one woman for one lifetime; it’s called the traditional family and it’s worked for 6,000 years.”453 James Dobson also stressed the idea of the “traditional family” as the basis for preventing same-sex attraction. Dobson, like proponents of ex-gay ministries, attributed same-sex attraction to childhood sexual trauma and a distorted family of origin. According to Dobson, children who grew up in homes in which mothers and fathers did not conform to evangelical expectations of gender placed their children at risk of a distorted “gender identity.” Quoting fellow psychologist and friend Joseph Nicolosi, who challenged gay people to “develop their heterosexual potential,” Dobson argued, “mothers make boys [but] fathers make men.” Dobson claimed that boys could only learn masculinity from their fathers and from him, “learn what gender he is supposed to be.”454


Dobson's emphasis on gender as something a child "learns" affirms gender's social construction and malleability. Dobson, however, intended to emphasize that the relationship between gendered order and sexuality not only affirmed the evangelical belief in a divinely ordered creation, it gave fathers a distinct and eternally valued purpose beyond financial support and leadership. To support his beliefs in the political sphere, Dobson created Focus on the Family Action—a political lobbying group—which allowed him to channel financial contributions to candidates with similar values. In 2010, the organization changed its name to CitizenLink, a name reflecting their nationalist impulse. As they explained: "CitizenLink is a family advocacy organization that inspires men and women to live out biblical citizenship that transform culture...We also encourage [families] to participate in the democratic process in order to forge a better future for our children and our culture." As was the case for sexual abstinence programs and rituals, WCE stressed the importance of the future generation as leaders of the faith and nation. In making the personal political again, WCE suggested that everyone had a place in the nation's future, and opposition to homosexuality wasn't about being a Christian, it was about being an American citizen.

In 1992, WCE became strong supporters of the exclusion of gays and lesbians from military service. One army chaplain expressed his opposition to gays and lesbians by saying, "We dare not remain silent while the Pentagon becomes a general headquarter for a Sodom on the Potomac." A Southern

Baptist resolution argued "homosexual conduct...[was] detrimental to morale, cohesion, good order, discipline, and mission accomplishment." Robert Knight, leader of the conservative Family Research Council, declared: "Undermining military families by placing homosexual behavior on a par with marital would provide devastating evidence that our government no longer recognizes the importance of strong families in cultivating the virtues that enable us to be a free, self-governing people." As Barry Adams argues, the nation's identity has historically been tied up in ideas of masculinity of "strength and belligerence." For WCE, allowing gays and lesbians into the material amounted to surrender of America as a superpower and moral exemplar among other nations.

In 1996, proclaiming that "traditional marriage" was further declining, WCE encouraged supporters to write their congressional representatives in support of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), defining marriage as a union between a man and women. In using the language of "traditional marriage," WCE turned their religious beliefs into civic concerns in which all marriages were at stake. The religious became political because in defining the boundaries of marriage between a man and woman, DOMA supporters circumscribed the definition of American citizenship and the benefits therein. According to one conservative

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evangelical biblical scholar, "marriage is not an end unto itself but overflows, most obviously to the procreation of children." To support same-sex marriage was to deny God's created order and the importance of the human family.

From 1970 and 2010, white conservative evangelicals' rhetorical construction of homosexuality as a danger to American society underwent a shift from a matter of biblical hermeneutics to one of national consequence. Same-sex marriage was not only immoral to them, but destructive to the American family—namely a middle-class white heteronormative family. To that end, AIDS was not just a deadly disease affecting gay men, it was plague that threatened everyone. Gays and lesbians in the military was not about the denial of equal opportunity, it was about the feminization of the military and erosion of America's international strength. Long known for their emphasis on evangelization and international missions, WCE made homosexuality their domestic mission field in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. Healing people from the temptation of same-sex and bisexual attraction was not just about re-socialization it was also about converting people from a life in the dark to one in the light. Homosexuality provided a way for WCE to engage in society while still maintaining their "outsider" status, a status they wore as a badge of honor.

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“Belonging and Exclusion”: Black Conservative Evangelicals and Homophobia

In the fall of 1998, one day after “Ellen,” the central character of comedian Ellen Degeneres’ sitcom Ellen came out as a lesbian on national TV, gospel recording duo Angie and Debbie Winans wrote, “Not Natural.” While some celebrated the television portrayal of lesbian woman by a lesbian, the Winans sisters believed it was a cause for lament. Emboldened by what they had witnessed on television and confident “the Lord inspired the song,” they took pen to paper:

There were people celebrating and congratulating
The new addition to the gay community
I was vexed in the spirit
And I began to write this song
It may be cold but let the truth be told
I’m here to let you know
It’s not natural.
No, that’s not the way it goes.
It’s not natural.
Just because it’s popular,
Doesn’t mean it’s cool.
It’s not natural.
No, that’s not the way God planned.
It’s not natural, not natural.461

Like many conservatives evangelicals who adopted the mantra, “Hate the sin, love the sinner,” as way to encapsulate their approach to homosexuality, the Winans’ sisters were confident their song wasn’t homophobic; it was “the truth.” Although outcry among supporters in and of the LGBT community was strong,

the Winans remained confident: "Wrong has taken precedence for so long. It's just time that God's principles have some publicity so that we can present and alternative choice...some people are just upset about the truth." 462

Although "Not Natural" stirred varied emotions among whites and blacks alike, its passionate denouncement of non-heteronormative sexual orientation mirrored much of the homophobia among predominately black evangelically conservative church communities throughout the latter decades of twentieth century. In a 2003 study, Gregory B. Lewis reported that among surveys conducted by four different organizations between 1973 and 2000, more than 75% of African American respondents expressed disapproval of same-sex sexual orientation and relationships. 463 Similar to white conservative evangelicals, black conservative evangelicals relied on a belief that one's gender was determined by one's biological sex and are essentially one and the same. They also denounced same-sex sexual orientation as a menace to the community's well-being and identity. The two communities, however, diverged in the type of threat they perceived same-sex orientation caused. WCE feared the erosion of the nation's virtue and stability. For black conservative evangelicals, same-sex identity and activity endangered a historically fraught perception of black sexuality, masculinity, and respectability. As Mattie Udora Richardson argues, African


Americans' desire to "protect themselves from defamation," led to the creation of "histories that exalted their manhood and heralded their femininity...prov[ing] their heterosexuality, thereby establishing themselves as decent, moral, and above all, 'normal human beings.'" Doing so required that black Americans adopt the sexual normativity of a nation that had created such boundaries based on the exclusion of black Americans.

As noted in chapter 1, the Moynihan Report's assertion that the challenges black families faced were a result of an overly dominating matriarchy and an absence of male leadership evoked visceral reactions within the African American community. Some critics of the report argued "that women were perfectly capable of heading families, that women's efforts inside and outside the home had been vital to the survival of Black families, and that the broader roles of women had reduced the importance of gender in the organization of family work." Other approaches stressed the importance of creating and privileging black masculinity as gender normative. As Elijah Ward explains, this understanding of black masculinity relied on three theories: 1) black masculinity as rebuke to generations of sexual oppression; 2) black masculinity as a reflection of conservative and literal biblical hermeneutics, and; 3) black


masculinity as a means of "race survival consciousness." Often associated with athletes, hip hop artists and rappers, black masculinity demanded (and arguably still demands) physical prowess, dominance over black women, and a fierce denouncement of any inclination toward same-sex sexual orientation. E. Patrick Johnson notes that during the 1980s athletes were the best embodiment of black hypermasculinity; by 1990, hip-hop and rap artists joined the fray. This construction of black masculinity intersected with a desire of the growing black middle class to conform to middle class ideas of respectability, an idea Michael Dyson, Kelly Brown Douglas, and Cornel West all argue was modeled on the sexual mores of the white middle class. Yet throughout the twentieth century, white sexuality relied upon the deconstruction of black sexuality as pathological and deviant. Thus the construction and stress on masculinity in the 1970s and 1980s was predicated on a history of overcoming racial and economic prejudice and subjugation even as their desire for respectability relied upon it.

To Ward’s theory, I would argue that the authority of black male pastors also provided a foundation for the perpetuation of black masculinity as heteronormative. Throughout the 40-year period this dissertation surveys, black evangelical pastors steadfastly embodied and proclaimed masculinity as a prerequisite for respect and authority as a black male. As Johnson notes, “African American folklore consistently depicts preachers as lovers of women, money, cars, chicken, and liquor—in essence, as pimps.” Yet [their] “historically high

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468 Ibid., 496.
position within African American communities makes him only too vulnerable to ridicule and satire."\textsuperscript{469} Despite their vulnerability, black preachers often exuded a sense of invincibility situated both in their theological authority and a culture of silence that expected allegiance and support of the pastor as a civic and spiritual leader.

In 2010, days after four young men accused Atlanta megachurch pastor Eddie Long of having a sexual relationship with them, Long championed his innocence, claiming he was the victim. Standing in front of his congregation in a suit that accented his bulging muscles, Long declared, "...I want you to know one other thing: I feel like David against Goliath, But I’ve got five rocks, and I haven’t thrown one yet."\textsuperscript{470} Two months later, however, he temporarily stepped down from the church and his wife filed for divorce. Although the scandal led to a decline in the church’s membership, other high-profile black megachurch pastors Crefflo Dollar and T.D. Jakes remained steadfast in their support for Long. Seven months later, however, Long not admitting any culpability, agreed to a confidential, out-of-court settlement and returned to the pulpit.\textsuperscript{471} Long’s advocates said his willingness to settle out-of-court was not evidence of his guilt; he just wanted to eliminate external distractions and focus on his work in the


church. What was perhaps most unique about Long’s story was his longstanding belief that “sexual reorientation” programs could effectively “cure” people of their same-sex desires. At the same time, in positioning himself alongside a well-known biblical story, Long adopted himself into a larger and more sacred narrative, in turn giving him a myth-like status. 472

As “Angelo,” a gay black man from Greenville, South Carolina, explained, he was excommunicated from his charismatic evangelical church for preaching a sermon on the contradictory manner of his pastor whom he caught having sex with another man: “…it’s just that it was a known thing in the church and that they knew what I was talking about, and for fear that something else might be brought up. It’s just that it shouldn’t have been said.”473 Johnson, Ward, and Dyson note that the authority many male pastors evoked in their community granted them an authority that silenced dissenting voices, and in some cases, rendered them impervious to accusations of non-heteronormative sexual behavior. It also presented a picture of masculine authority rooted in silence and duplicity. This not only silenced the experience of women, it placed gay and bisexual black men in the church at risk for “lower self-esteem...and sexual behaviors that put them at risk for HIV.”474 Privileging black masculinity and granting black pastors (presumably male) authority as moral and civic exemplars contributed to a

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hesitation within churches to openly acknowledge and embrace any expression of sexual orientation that did not conform to their heteronormative understanding of masculinity as unquestionable leaders, sports-lovers, and unfailing keepers of women and children. As a result, between 1970 and 2010, BCE tacitly fostered a trinitarian culture of duplicity, disdain and silence around non-heteronormative sexuality. Doing so was not simply about exclusion or shaming, but about confronting charges of black sexual deviance and asserting an image of middle-class respectability.

Although conservative black churches were less willing to publicly discuss same-sex relationships, Leisa Meyer notes that public discourses about sexuality among African Americans broadly speaking extended as far back as the 1950s, as evidenced in the contestation over the limits of black female sexuality in print magazines. After Tan became Black Stars in 1971, discussion of black sexuality in popular magazines was limited to discussions on heterosexual relationship with the exception of a 1970 story on the petition of Wisconsin

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475 Michael Eric Dyson, *The Michael Eric Dyson Reader* (New York: Basic Civets, 2004), 226-9; West, *Cornel West Reader*, 514-5. For a thorough explanation on how the emphasis on black masculinity shaped the lives of black women and the importance of their experiences as an interpretive lens, see Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*.

476 Elijah Ward concurs, noting that predominately black churches supportive and inclusive of members of the LGBTQ community tend to be a part of predominately white denomination, including the Episcopal and United Methodist churches. Elijah G. Ward, "Homophobia, Hypermasculinity and the US Black Church," *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 7, no. 5 (2005), 497.

477 See Meyer, "Strange Love."
lesbian couple to marry, a lesbian wedding in Chicago, and a 1975 reprint of the 24 year-old story of Georgia Black, a transgendered woman.  

In 1970, Manonia Evans and Donna Burkett filed suit against a Wisconsin county clerk for refusing them a marriage license. The couple who planned a wedding on Christmas Day regardless of the outcome, asserted that they deserved the same rights as heterosexual couples. A month earlier, Peaches Stevens and Edna Knowles married in a Chicago gay bar.

Georgia Black, born George Canty, died in 1951, after living as a woman for more than thirty years. As *Ebony* explained, Black had become the “sweetheart” of a “homosexual—a male retainer” at a large Charleston farm, who dressed him in women’s clothing. Although the relationship eventually ended, Black went on two marry two other men and adopt a son in her lifetime. Most telling about Black’s story and its place in the history of black gender identification and sexual orientation is the response of the Sanford, Florida, community where Black died and how *Ebony* portrayed her life. Most residents who knew Black were either in disbelief that she could have been a man or entirely unfazed by it. Her pastor at St. James Methodist Church even praised her life the Sunday following her death. Throughout the article, however,

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*Ebony* referred to Georgia Black as a "he" and a "homosexual," again conflating gender with sex and sexual orientation. The 1975 reprint was the only mention of "homosexuality" in *Ebony* the entire decade. That "homosexuality" was scarcely mentioned in print media and in sermons suggests that rather than tacitly approving it, the gatekeepers of middle-class black media either saw it as irrelevant to their community or not appropriate for their audience.

By the late 1980s, conversations around same-sex orientation emerged again in print media and from pastors, but overwhelmingly in reference to the AIDS crisis. Even then, such discourse was limited to it as a threat to one's health alone or in explaining the reluctance of many African Americans, especially evangelically conservative pastors, to address the spread of AIDS, believing that it was a "gay White disease" or "God's way of punishing immoral homosexuality."482 In 1985, Thad Martin wrote a feature series on the rising AIDS epidemic in America.483 The article opened with the story of a young black male who had AIDS. He was also gay. Although Martin sought to dispel the myth that AIDS was simply a gay person's disease via statistics comparing the number of AIDS cases between black and white men and women, he ultimately reinforced it in the opening paragraph by using as a gay man as his example. He continued to do so with every person interviewed in his article save for two.484 Moreover, in

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483 Thad Martin, "AIDS," 91-96.

484 Martin, "AIDS," 92.
admonishing readers to practice caution when dating someone new, such conversations explicitly referred to heteronormative relationships, implicitly suggesting while AIDS had struck black gay men and women, same-sex relationships remained the provenance of whites. And in conversations around the "new black sexuality" of the middle class, which was purportedly less restricted and more expansive in the 1980s, discussions were limited to vaginal intercourse; nothing was mentioned of same-sex and bisexual orientations.485 It was not until 1990 that *Ebony* featured an article on the lives of black gays and lesbians.486

In the fall of 1990, Harvard psychiatry professor Alvin F. Poussaint, published an article on the African American gay and lesbian community. Poussaint argued that despite popular misconception that there were few, if any, black gays and lesbians—and those who were theatre actors—there was in fact great diversity within the black gay and lesbian community. He went on to argue that denying this diversity not only led to the perpetuation of stereotypes—e.g., gay males as effeminate and lesbian females as masculine—it continued to foster prejudice and ignorance, including the then-popular belief that black gay men were the primary culprit in the spread of the AIDS virus in the black community.487 Poussaint also argued that the presence of homosexuality in the African American community was not a new concept. Indeed, the sexual

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orientation of James Baldwin, Bayard Rustin, and Audre Lord, just a few of the many openly black gays and lesbians in the twentieth century, was known to many black Americans. However, it was not until after their deaths that their sexuality was discussed more openly, even if there was still a measure of resistance and condescension.

Poussaint sought to provide a more in-depth look at the life of black gays and lesbians and to do so he not only shared the stories of men and women who identified as gay and lesbian, he also challenged the historical assumption that homosexuality was a more recent notion. Most importantly, in acknowledging the popular support of Hollywood stereotypes about gays and lesbians (i.e. Eddie Murphy as a drag queen). As he passionately affirmed, "There is no single gay lifestyle...the horrors of AIDS, alcoholism and lung disease come to all those who abuse their bodies, with no regard for sexual orientation. It is perhaps inevitable that we are uncomfortable with those who are different from us...human rights for gays and lesbians will more firmly establish freedoms for all people in America." In addition to dispelling myths, stereotypes, and fears surrounding homosexuality and bi-sexuality among African Americans, Poussaint also reflected upon the unique struggles that black gays and lesbians faced because of their double-minority status and how they responded.

In 1984, six Los Angeles businessmen created the satirical Eddie Murphy's Disease Foundation and published a series of ads in Rolling Stones

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488 Ibid., 124-6.
489 Ibid., 126, 128.
magazine deploring Murphy's reference to gay men as "faggots" and "that casual contact with gays can spread AIDS." Murphy fought back saying that he made jokes about gays and black people and that he was not "anti-gay, only anti-aids [sic]." The *Baltimore Afro-American's* feature of the story was the only story addressing homophobia in the black or white community in its 95-year history. Sadly, Murphy's comedy was not unique to the era.

The 1990s variety show *In Loving Color* frequently featured a segment called, "Men On Film," a parody sketch of movie critics Gene Siskel and Robert Ebert. The men, Blaine and Antoine, dressed in brightly colored dresses, donned flamboyant jewelry, and spoke in high-pitched voices. Their segments were among some of the most-well known and beloved pieces on the show. In one segment, Antoine played a gay Navy officer and refused to let one of his subordinates put his shirt back on after completing a series of activities ordered by Antoine. The dis-ease on the sailor's face was obvious, suggesting that most men ought to feel uncomfortable around gay men. Although theology shaped the mischaracterization of black gays and lesbians, in calling gay people "fags" or creating hyperbolic character sketches, black entertainment was able to separate itself from homosexuality and refute it as a normative representation of black masculinity. Though such media was secular, it remains an important insight into the cultural environment of African Americans, which also held the church as one of its essential institutions.

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Within black conservatively evangelical church communities, however, literal interpretation of Scripture underpinned the homophobia and opposition to same-sex sexual orientations. In a sermon delivered in December 1997, one pastor in Fort Worth, Texas shared his feelings that marriage was between “Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve.” As he recounted, he turned on the television earlier that morning to find a television show with two gay men on it. The pastor, however, an African American Baptist in his early 70s, suggested that not only was the sight out of the ordinary to see, it was repugnant and a sign of America’s degradation. Like many conservative evangelicals, he believed that the end of the world would be marked by a slow degradation in morality, politics, and natural disasters, signaling the imminence of the rapture and the return of Jesus Christ. The presence of two gay men on television was as good a sign as any that the United States was on a slippery slope. To the pastor, such rhetoric was not an attempt to exclude or preach hate toward gays and lesbians. Instead, he understood it as a prophetic embodiment of God’s Holy Word and a chance for gay and lesbians to become faithful Christians.

Such beliefs originated not only from the pulpit, but were also part of the education of adolescents. In *Talks My Father Never Had with Me (Helping the Young Black Male Make it to Adulthood)*, part of the TALKS mentoring program established at churches in the Midwest and Southeast, the Reverend Harold

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Davis, devoted an entire chapter on "avoid[ing] the lure of homosexuality." According to Davis the issue of homosexuality was devastating to the African American community because it led to, "one less man to lead a Black household; one more negative example for our youth; one more potential AIDS victim; one more life that will be severely scarred by sin...it is one of many paths to a miserable life." In equating same-sex sexual orientation to the breakdown of the black family, Davis perpetuated the idea of a two-parent heterosexual marriage as not only normative, but the only form of well-being for African American families. He also defined women as helpmates in marriages whose leadership was a secondary alternative that was neither ideal nor biblical.

Second, Davis' equation of same-sex sexual orientation fostered the idea that non-heteronormative sexual orientation automatically led to the AIDS virus. Like other conservatives evangelicals who understood same-sex orientations as incompatible with Christianity, Davis turned to Leviticus 18:32 and Romans 1:27. Davis went further, claiming that the creation narrative in Genesis 1, supports the idea that homosexuality was not "innate." Davis asserted that according to Genesis 1:27, which says: So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them, that "no man is born gay" because God is not gay and man is created in God's image.

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492 Davis, Talks My Father Never Had with Me, 133-41.
493 Ibid., 133.
494 Ibid., 133.
In attempting to anthropomorphize God as a male, Davis failed to realize that he was actually questioning the Christian belief that God transcends gender.

Rather than being born gay, Davis argued, men were born with a proclivity toward sin and weaknesses, even likening homosexuality to thieves—a kind of moral degeneracy affecting the population at large. Davis' interpretation was similar to leaders of “ex-gay” ministries who stressed that while they did not “cure” people of their sexual orientation, they helped them attain healing from past trauma and taught them how to resist temptation.

Patrick, who attended “a very traditional Southern Baptist Church” as a child in the 1960s and 1970s recalled hearing his pastor say “mean things about homosexuals and the fact that they're gonna die.” Carver, a 33-year old-African American man in Washington, D.C., agreed. Throughout his childhood, he regularly attended a predominately black Baptist church in San Antonio, Texas, with his grandmother. Despite his dis-ease with the church because of its repeatedly anti-gay and “fire-and-brimstone sermons,” he agreed to be baptized at the age of 13 because of his grandmother’s insistence. Carver thought becoming baptized would take away his feeling for men. Of the 63 men E. Patrick Johnson interviewed for his oral history on the lives of gay black men in South, nearly all of them recalled hearing homophobic sermons from pastors, some of whom they suspected had engaged in same-sex relationships secretly.

495 Ibid., 133-4.
496 “Patrick” in Johnson, Sweet Tea, 239.
Still, as adults, many gay black evangelical men chose to be a part of conservative churches despite their contempt for non-heteronormative sexuality. Although the sermons offended them, these men found the church to be a familiar place of fellowship and support.497 As one man from North Carolina explained, “...while I’m there and I’m in that room, they’re wonderful people and there are some that I know would stand by my side if I ever needed them.”498

My interview with Ramone affirmed such a position.499 Ramone is a 44-year old African American man active in a large Baptist church in suburban Washington, D.C. and Carver’s partner of two years. When asked how he reconciled the belief in his church community that his sexual orientation is morally repugnant, he shrugged his shoulders and acknowledged that there were many people who interpreted the Bible that way and it had no bearing on how he viewed himself, his sexuality, or his relationship with Carver. He conceded that while he out among his friends, he is not sure if his pastor or others in church leadership know of his sexuality. As he rather beautifully articulated, his faith—though shaped and informed by the church community—was not limited to it nor confined by the behaviors and beliefs of others. He understood himself to be wondrously created by God and not circumscribed by the prejudices or beliefs of others.500

497 Ibid., 11.
498 Ibid., 231.
499 Author interview with Ramone, February 4, 2012.
500 Interview with Ramone.
Others interviewed—especially those involved in the church’s music ministry as a vocalist or instrumentalist—said that the church was the place where their spiritual and physical souls connected and could be unleashed freely without regard to being characterized as effeminate. E. Patrick Johnson notes that gay men often led worship as instrumentalists or singers, working in tandem with the rhythmic cadence of the pastor’s preaching and setting the tone for the service. Michael Dyson concurs, arguing that worship in many evangelical black churches is sensual, erotic, and intense as it is worship involving the entire body. Yet the fraught history of the black body created a culture in which any public displays of intense sensuality were scorned and needed to be “tamed” lest outsiders question through sexual propriety. As a result, black gay men could express themselves in worship, but once worship ended, their sexuality needed to conform to an idea of masculinity that scorned such behavior. This uncomfortable relationship created a culture of shame that fostered secretive same-sex relationships and a fear among some gay black men that openly embracing their sexual identity would lead to rejection by their community.

As theologian Horace Griffin suggests, despite the hypocrisy and exclusion gays and lesbian faced, many chose to stay in predominately black conservative evangelical churches because it helped maintain a level of denial about their own sexuality, especially since that conformed to the ideals of their faith community. One person who Griffin interviewed asserted that “DL [Down

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501 Dyson, Michael Eric Dyson Reader, 225-9.
low] men simply have not gained the courage to be public about their sexual attraction to men in the black communities in which they find themselves. "Down low," as it is commonly referred to, most often refers to men who self-identify as heterosexual—and in some cases are married—who engage in sex with other men.502 It can also refer to women who identify as heterosexual but who also have sex with women. The term, however, is mostly used in reference to men. It first became popular in the 1990s when R&B singer R. Kelly and the now-defunct hip-hop group TLC made it popular in their songs. In his study of "men on the down low" Jeffrey McCune notes that the "down low" culture actually provided men who participated in it a chance to assert their masculinity for being on the "down-low" was an assertion of one's heterosexuality by refusing to fully acknowledge their same-sex attraction.503 Being on the "down low" was not a maker of shame or secrecy, but rather a display of one's strength.

In 2005, Keith Boykin, a former special assistant to President Bill Clinton and cable news political commentator, published his third book, *Beyond the Down Low: Sex, Lies, and Denial in Black America*, with the hope of creating more dialogue around non-heteronormative sexualities. The previous year he faced a captive audience and a less-than-supportive Oprah Winfrey as he shared on her hit talk show his experience of being a black gay man in America.504

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Throughout the 60-minute interview, Winfrey, a self-declared expert on living “your best life” railed into Boykin for his apparently casual, matter-of-fact approach to the so-called down-low culture in black America. It was the first time that the notion of a “down low” culture had been addressed on such a public stage to a predominately white audience. Winfrey chastised Boykin for refusing to speak *against* the down-low culture and blamed him for the number of families broken up because of the down-low culture. Winfrey had no statistics to back up her statements. Rather, she spoke from a place of emotional experience, citing the stories she has heard from women who later discovered their husbands were also attracted to and sexually engaged with other men. For Boykin, Winfrey’s response proved his point: much of the blame for the spread of AIDS and broken families often fell on black men who are supposedly engaged in the down low culture. Yet, as Boykin argued in *Beyond the Down Low*, there were just as many black women and white women and men who also struggled to embrace their sexuality or have chosen to keep it hidden, instead claiming a sexual identity of heterosexuality.505 Boykin’s experience, however, sheds light on how discourses on the black family, masculinity, and sexuality have compounded to create a silence around anything that is not heteronormative. For example, of rites of passage programs analyzed in chapter 3, there is no discussion around sexual orientation. Instead, relationships and sexuality are strictly heteronormative, an unstated, yet clear rejection of any other sexual orientations.

505 Boykin, *Beyond the Down Low*, 61-5.
Michelle, a thirty-two-year-old African American medical professional raised in a Baptist church in New Jersey and now living in South Carolina, grew up in a deeply religious family in which silence surrounding sexuality, especially homosexuality was paramount. When she heard her family talk about it, it was in a pejorative and joking manner, as though it were something that only affected a passing few people. In 2001, when she was in college, her 31 year-old cousin, a minister, died of pneumonia. Although she had suspected he might have been gay, she said her family never talked about it. It was not until ten years later, when talking to her brother who had a close relationship with her cousin, that she learned that her cousin was indeed gay and had maintained what she called a “secret lifestyle” for many years. Still, she says, no one in her family has talked about it. According to Michelle the notion of not talking about sexuality, especially non-heterosexual orientations, is “pervasive in [her] family and the black community.” Notice that they referred to her cousin as having a “secret lifestyle,” as though it were an aberration to his personality rather than an essential component to his identity.

Michelle was not alone in her experience or thoughts on the “black community.” She believed that her church and churches today contribute to the idea of the “down low” culture because they don’t always explicitly mention homosexuality, but nonetheless allude to it in a derogatory way, stereotyping gay men as effeminate and lesbians as butch. Another respondent, a twenty-four

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506 Author interview with Michelle, January 17, 2012.
507 Ibid.
year old white women from Tennessee believed that the reason she knew so many people who engaged in bisexual or homosexual activity while publicly asserting homosexuality did so because of the conservative town she lived in and fear of being ostracized if other suspected they were anything but straight.508

Further compounding the issue, is the fact that most literature, whether popular or religious, often associated the “down low” with men and not with women. This in turn had the effect of homogenizing the sexual orientation of women as heterosexual and perpetuating the notion of sexuality as nothing more than sex and women as having little sexual expression and embodiment other than to be in relationship with a man.

My interview with Amanda, a 29 year-old black lesbian in Quincy, Massachusetts, is an example suggesting otherwise.509 Growing up, Amanda was heavily involved in her Alabama Baptist church’s various programs and worship services. Although she could not remember all the details she learned around sex education, she remembered that it was all about “scare tactics.” She remembers first being aware of her sexual orientation as a lesbian around the age of 12 or 13. Yet, she remained scared and confused. She heard that “homosexuality was wrong” and had few people in which to confide. Weary of her internal struggle, she came out to her parents when she was 15. Her mom responded by telling her she would pray that she would become straight (a

508 GRSEA Survey, #205.
prayer she says her mother still prays) while her dad told her that God was in judgement of her. Amanda attended a predominately black college in the South, and though she remembers some professors and students being uncomfortable with her sexual orientation, she found an affirming community when she abandoned her Baptist roots to join an Episcopal church. There, she says she found not merely acceptance, but an embrace that did not make her feel as though she was an outsider. Although her reflection is not indicative of the whole, the paucity of literature on the intersection of black lesbians and Christian churches reminds us that discussions of black homosexuality in the church often focused on black men and in dire need of a more thorough and holistic approach to sexuality.

Conclusion

As this dissertation has illustrated, the sexuality of blacks in America is deeply embedded in a history of racial subjugation and a paradoxical attitude of masculinity that exalts manly authority and leadership. From 1970 to 2010, it contributed to a culture among black conservative evangelicals that would not allow them to lay claim to any expression of sexual orientation other than heterosexuality. Indeed, homosexuality threatened the fragile public image of black sexuality that the black middle class sought to project. Yet, the central role of many black conservatively evangelical churches as civic and spiritual guides led many black evangelical gay Christians to find solace and community in their
churches. To outsiders, it may seem paradoxical. Yet, as this chapter illustrated, it was simply just the tax that came with being black, gay, and evangelically Christian.

Between 1970 and 2010, white conservative evangelicals found that cultural shifts shaping gender and sexuality were a ripe opportunity to make their gospel the nation’s gospel. While they originally relied upon biblical apologetics in their defense against homosexuality, the growing therapeutic culture of the 1980s and the spread of AIDS at the same time led to a shift away from Scripture alone and to one that utilized a rhetoric of emotional and medical well-being. But while some WCE tended to the individual, more outspoken, politically active WCE turned to the national stage in favor or legislation barring the service of non-heterosexuals in the military or the legalization of same-sex marriage. Despite the treatment of sexual orientation as a choice between binary forces, the experiences of gays, lesbian, and bisexual evangelical Christians suggests that it has never been quite that simple.
Conclusion: “To Do Justice & Love Mercy”

From 1970 to 2010, conservative evangelicals in the United States were on a fast track to political, religious, and social dominance. Mainline Protestant Churches were on a well-documented decline, conservative politics was on the upswing, and the passage of historic civil rights legislation in 1964 and 1965 convinced some that racism was becoming a thing of the past—except, that it was not. Race continued to serve as a critical discursive factor for understanding the religious, cultural, and political experiences of white and black Christians in America, especially evangelicals. This dissertation has argued that despite sharing central tenets of theological belief, differing embodiments of American nationalism have determined how black and white evangelical conservatives have responded to matters of sexuality, gender, and the family. The politics, practices, and practical theology of conservative white evangelicals of the late twentieth and first decade of the twenty-first centuries were the byproduct of their belief in America as a Christian nation with a responsibility to lead with the world in moral excellence. While they turned to national politics to legislate their beliefs, their attitudes and political yearnings also shaped their day-to-day living. They provided counsel to married couples in the form of advice that stressed a husband's leadership and authority and a wife's complimentary role as the caretaker of the home and children. Through purity rituals, abstinence-only sex education, and a three-fold rhetoric of purpose, destiny, and purity, WCE teenagers became partners in the quest to spread evangelical Christianity across
the nation. At the same time, WCEs' singular approach to sexuality as nothing more than vaginal intercourse left many teens with a limited understanding and appreciation for the intricacies of the human body and the relationship between one's physicality and spirituality. Through Interviews, letters, and articles, I have illustrated how white conservative evangelicals blurred the lines between the political and personal.

Black conservative evangelicals on the other hand found that in understanding themselves as a "nation within a nation," they could fully embrace their faith, their ethnicity, their history, and their current experience without apology and with hope. Through the lens of oppression and victory, they could speak to the past while also providing the motivation for change and perseverance. One of the most dominant forms of oppression they sought to counter between 1970 and 2010 was the subjugation of the black body as sexually deviant. Using a heteronormative understanding of human sexuality, middle-class BCE were able to articulate their past and their yearning for respectability and stability. At the same time, their desire to live beyond the white gaze fostered a culture a silence, secrecy, and shame for members of the LGBTQ community. They also emphasized adolescence as a critical period of learning, belonging, and emotional, physical, and intellectual development. Through a combination of ancient West African practices, conservative evangelical theology, and social responsibility, BCE teenagers were able to find a sense of purpose and destiny through their faith and their community, just as
white teens experienced in purity rituals. Through an intersectional approach to
gender, sexuality, race, and adolescence, this dissertation has highlighted the
complexities, contradictions, and yearnings of CBES following the legislation of
civil rights laws in the 1960s.

Since the rise of social media as a form of activism, the experiences of
young people who came of age in evangelical communities between 1970 and
2010 suggests that while they have taken in what they heard from their parents
and church leaders, they have struggled to embrace some of these beliefs as
adults. Oral histories and the GRSEA survey suggests that those who have
remained evangelical as adults still have a strong commitment to
evangelicalism's emphasis on conversion, biblical authority, and evangelization.
At the same time, they also have a strong desire to present a softer, less militant
public face than generations before them. On the other hand, men and women
who abandoned the conservative evangelicalism of their youth have expressed a
feeling of dis-ease and apathy for the Church and instead favor a commitment to
individual exploration and spirituality.510

Still, other conservative evangelicals of the late twentieth century have
sought to integrate some of the tenants of evangelical orthodoxy with a passion
born out of progressive politics and an emphasis on social justice. On May 9,
2012, a week after the citizens of North Carolina voted to pass an amendment
limiting marriage to heterosexual relationships, Rachel Held Evens, a white thirty-

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something popular evangelical Christian blogger from Dayton, Tennessee (home of the infamous Scopes Monkey Trial) wrote the following: “My generation is tired of culture wars. We are tired of fighting, tired of vain efforts to advance the Kingdom through politics and power, tired of drawing lines in the sand, tired of being known for what we are against, not what we are for.”511 512

Less than a week later, the Reverend Otis Moss, Ill, pastor of Trinity United Church of Christ, a 6000-member predominantly black congregation on Chicago’s South Side, shared an open-letter he wrote to a fellow clergyman after he threatened to withdraw support for President Obama upon Obama’s declaration of support for same sex marriage. 513 As Moss passionately stated:

“The economic crash, foreclosures, and attack upon health care were not caused by gay and lesbian citizens. Poor schools were not caused by people wanting equal protection...We are called to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God. Gay people have never been the enemy and when we use rhetoric to suggest the source of all our problems we lie on God and cause tears to fall from the eyes of Christ. I am not asking you to change your position. But I am stating that we must stay in dialogue and not allow our personal and emotional prejudices or doctrines to present us from seeing the possibility of the beloved community...The sprits of Ella Baker, Septima Clark, Fannie Lou Hamer, A. Phillip Randolph, James Orange, Medgar Evers, and Martin Luther King, Jr., stand in the balcony of heaven raising the question, ‘Will you do justice, live mercy, and walk humbly with God?’ Emmitt Till and four little girls in Alabama did not die for a


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Sunday morning soundbite where you could show disdain for one group of God's children. They died because of an evil act by men who believed in doctrine over love. We live today because of a man who believed in love over doctrine, who died on a hill at Calvary in the dusty plain of Palestine.  

Thanks to social media, both Moss' sermon and Evans' essay received over 400,000 hits combined in just a few short months. Although Moss' congregation is predominately black and Evans readership is predominately young and white, their words and the volume of support they received in response suggest that although conservative evangelicalism is the largest group of Christians in the United States outside of Roman Catholics, there is less uniformity among them—or at least an image of uniformity—than there was just 20 years ago.

Yet despite their shared desire for a more progressive and inclusive faith—especially in regards to sexuality—Evans and Moss are products of their culture, and as such, their messages are not as identical as they appear. Evans' response to North Carolina's Amendment One was born out of her frustration with the political rhetoric and moral arrogance of white conservative evangelicals.

Moss, on the other hand, was not concerned about America's moral authority. Indeed, the nation that Moss addressed was the African American experience—"the nation within a nation." His answer to those who criticized the president's decision was an invitation to remember the African American

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experience and the need for justice that has motivated them for generations. Although Moss' embrace of same-sex marriage was rooted in his theology, his passion for sharing that message was born out of a rhetoric of oppression and victory.

Together, Rachel Held Evans and Otis Moss, III, exemplify the impact of cultural nationalism in the practice of evangelical Christianity in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Yet as Moss' eloquent simplicity suggests, perhaps it is time for much of evangelical Christianity—white and black—to forsake fear and prejudice and sing a new song. Indeed, one of the cornerstones of the Christian faith is the belief that God is continually doing a new thing in God's creation. One can only hope that for evangelicals this new work has already begun.
APPENDIX

Gender, Race, Sexuality and Evangelical Adolescence
Survey

All answers will remain anonymous unless you chose to write your name.

1. What is your current age? ______________________

2. What year were you born? _________________

3. What is your current religious affiliation? __________________

4. Did you attend church as teenager? ______________

5. What was the name of the primary church you attended as a teenager?

   a. What denomination was your church a member of?

6. At what age did you become a Christian? ____________
   a. How influential were your parents in this decision?
      
      Very Influential Somewhat influential Neutral Not influential
   b. How influential was your church community in this decision?
      
      Very Influential Somewhat influential Neutral Not influential
   c. How influential were your friends in this decision?
      
      Very Influential Somewhat influential Neutral Not influential

7. Were you parents Christian?

8. Did your parents attend church with you regularly?

   Yes                 No
9. As an adolescent, what did it mean for you to be a Christian?

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

10. Were the peers you most associated with Christian?
    Yes  No

11. Were you part of a youth group at your church?
    Yes  No
        If yes, How often did you all meet? __________________

12. If you were part of a youth group, was your primary leader male or female?
    Male  Female

13. How did your membership in your church as a teenager shape you?

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

14. What other activities were you involved in at church?

______________________________________________________________________________

15. What activities were you involved with in the community and at school?

16. What did “faith” mean to you at that age?

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

17. Define “worship” as you understood it as a teenager and its impact on your teenage years.

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________
18. Define "prayer" as you understood it as a teenager and its impact on your teenage years.

_________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________

19. Describe your relationship with the adults in your church community.

_________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________

20. Describe your relationship with the pastor at your church.

_________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________

21. What would you say were the most important values to your church community as a whole?

_________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________

22. Describe some of what you understood as a teenager as your church's most important ministries.

_________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________
The Family

1. Were your parents married throughout your childhood and adolescence?
   Yes    No

2. If not, how old were you when they divorced? _________________

3. Which parent did you primarily reside with? _________________

4. How often did you have visitation with your other parent?
   _________________

5. Did either one of your parent’s remarry while you were still living at home?
   Yes    No
   a. Describe your relationship with your stepparents.
      __________________________________________________________
      __________________________________________________________

6. Did either one of your parents die before you turned 21?
   7. If so, who? _________________

8. Please describe how this changed your relationship with your living parent:
   __________________________________________________________

9. Did your parent remarry? _________________

10. How many siblings did you have growing up? _________________

11. If your parents were married, did they share equally in the parenting?
    Yes    No
12. Describe the division of labor at your home.

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

13. Which caregiver was the primary disciplinarian in your home?

________________________________________________________________________

14. Did other relatives live with you at home?

Yes  No

15. If so, please describe the number and relationship.

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

16. Did you live with someone other than your parents growing up?

Yes  No

17. If yes, please describe.

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

18. Please describe your primary caregiver’s expectations for your behavior as an adolescent.

________________________________________________________________________

19. Were you ever arrested as a teenager?  Yes  No

20. If yes, please describe:

________________________________________________________________________
21. Did your parents ever receive marriage counseling/psychotherapy?
   Yes  No

   a. If yes, what age were you? ________________
   b. How long were they in counseling/psychotherapy? ____________

22. Did your family ever attend counseling/psychotherapy?
   Yes  No

   a. If yes, what age were you? ________________
   b. How long was your family in counseling/psychotherapy? ____________

23. Did you ever receive individual counseling/psychotherapy?

24. If so, what was your primary concern?

25. How old were you?

26. How long were you in counseling/psychotherapy?

27. How often did you interact with your extended family (i.e., cousins, grandparents, aunts, and uncles).

28. In light of your childhood and adolescence, please define the term family.
Sex & Sexuality

1. How would you classify yourself? (Please circle one)

Heterosexual  Gay  Lesbian  Transgender  Bi-sexual  Queer

Other________

2. From whom did you first learn about sex?

Parents  Friends  School  Church  Other________

2. How old were you when you first learned about sex? ________

3. When was the first time you had sexual intercourse with someone of the opposite sex? ___________

4. Did you use any form of contraception? Yes No

a. If yes, what form did you use? ______________________

b. Where did you procure it? _________________________

c. Did someone assist you in getting contraception? Yes No

Who? _______________________

5. If you had sex before the age of 21, what was the primary motivation?

In love  Curiosity  Peer Pressure  Other: _______________

6. Who was the first person you told after you had sexual intercourse for the first time?

_________________________________________________________

7. If and when did you tell your parents or primary caregivers that you were sexually active?

Age__________ Did not ever tell them_______________
How did your parents react to your news?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

8. How many sexual partners did you have by the time you were 21? _________

9. If you describe yourself as heterosexual, did you ever have sex with someone of the same gender? _________

10. Did you ever have oral sex as a teenager? Yes No

   11. If yes, how old were you the first time you had oral sex? ____________

12. What did your church teach about sex?

   ___________________________________________________________________

   ___________________________________________________________________

13. What did you learn in school about sex?

   ___________________________________________________________________

   ___________________________________________________________________

14. What did your friends say about sex?

   ___________________________________________________________________

   ___________________________________________________________________

15. Was sex ever preached about from the pulpit?

   Yes                     No
Can you recall how many times? _________________

14. If it became known that a teenager in your church was having or had sex how did your youth leader and pastor react?

______________________________

A. The church community?

______________________________

15. If someone had a child outside of marriage, how did your church community respond? Where they welcomed or shunned?

______________________________

16. Did your church community have a ministry or support for single parents?

Yes No

If so, please describe:

______________________________

______________________________

17. As a teenager, did you know someone who had an abortion?

Yes No

18. What was your reaction as a teenager toward the news?

______________________________

______________________________

19. Did you ever have an abortion by the time you were 21?

Yes No

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20. If yes, how old were you? __________

21. For males only: Did you ever date someone who had an abortion as a result of getting pregnant while dating you?
   Yes        No

   A. Please describe that experience.

22. At what age did you first learn about masturbation? ________

23. Where did you first learn about masturbation? _______________________

24. Did you masturbate as a teenager?
   Yes        No

   25. If yes, how often? ______________

26. Did you and your friends ever talk about masturbation or oral sex?
   Yes        No

   If yes, how often did you all discuss it? ________________________________

27. Were you ever sexually assaulted?
   Yes        No

28. Did you tell anyone about the assault?    Yes        No

29. Did you ever receive counseling?    Yes        No

30. At what age did you first become aware of your sexuality? __________

31. If you are GBLTQ and are out, at what age did you come out? __________

   Please describe the immediate reaction of those you told:
32. Did your church have an official stance on homosexuality?
   Yes  No

   If yes, please describe:

23. Do you know of anyone at your church who came forward about their sexuality?
   Yes  No
   a. How did your church respond

24. As a teenager, did you view homosexuality as a sin?
   Yes  No

25. Do you view homosexuality as a sin now?
   Yes  No

25. At what age did you first learn about homosexuality? _____________

26. Where did you first learn about homosexuality? ____________________

27. As a teenager, did you have any friends who were openly GBLTQ?
   ___________
28. Did you or do you currently know people who are on “the down-low?”

Please describe:

---------------------------------------------------------------------

---------------------------------------------------------------------

29. What was your church’s attitude toward teenage pregnancy?

---------------------------------------------------------------------

---------------------------------------------------------------------

30. How did your church respond to a teenager who became pregnant?

31. What was your church’s attitude toward teenage pregnancy?

---------------------------------------------------------------------

---------------------------------------------------------------------

A. Did you agree with their stance? Why or why not?

---------------------------------------------------------------------

32. Did you ever sign a pledge of purity?

Yes No

How old were you? __________________________

What encouraged you to sign the pledge?

---------------------------------------------------------------------

33. If you had sex after you signed a pledge of purity or committed in another form to remain abstinent until marriage, how did you feel afterwards?
34. Did you ever tell a church leader once you had sex?  Yes  No

If yes, how did he or she respond? ____________________________________________

35. What did your church leaders say about teenagers who already had sex?

__________________________________________________________________________

36. How did the teachings on sexuality, sex, and the family shape your attitudes as an adult?

__________________________________________________________________________

37. If you remained abstinent until marriage were you glad you waited?

Yes  No

Please describe:

__________________________________________________________________________

38. If you remained abstinent what do you feel was key in helping you maintain this commitment?

__________________________________________________________________________
39. Regardless of your sexual status, have your views on sex and sexuality changed since your adolescence? Yes No

40. Do you think your sexual status affected your dating prospects as a young adult? Yes No

41. If you have had sex, do you think potential partners/spouses view you differently if you had not? Yes No

Why, or why not? _______________________________________

42. How do you think men tend to look toward women who have had sex?

Very Favorably  Favorably  Doesn't Make a Difference

Unfavorably  Very Unfavorably

43. How do you think men tend to look toward women who have NOT had sex?

Very Favorably  Favorably  Doesn't Make a Difference

Unfavorably  Very Unfavorably

44. How do you think women look toward men who have had sex?

Very Favorably  Favorably  Doesn't Make a Difference

Unfavorably  Very Unfavorably

45. How do you think women look toward men who have NOT had sex?
46. Where do you think teenagers should learn about sex? (Circle all that apply)

Home  Church  School  Friends  Media  Community

47. Is there anything else you would like to share?

__________________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________________

48. Would you be willing to be contacted for an interview with the researcher?

(All answers will remain confidential. Your name will not be released.)

Yes  No

If yes, please provide your name and email address. Your email address will not be shared with anyone.

Name: ______________________

Email address: ______________________
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