A Fountain Sealed:
Virginity and the American Evangelical Family

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Graduate Department for the Study of Religion
University of Toronto

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Abstract

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Doctor of Philosophy 2012

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This thesis is a psychoanalytic and feminist critique of the contemporary American abstinence movement that finds its roots within Christian evangelicalism, but has far-reaching public impact on social policy and education and contributes to an ideology of nationhood. Through the examination of the phenomena of virginity pledging and purity ball events for fathers and daughters, it is shown that notions of purity, in this context, have more to do with the narcissistic production of white, middle-class, Christian families and traditional gender identities, and less to do with sexual ethics.

Chapter one provides a historical framework for understanding the contemporary virginity movement within the context of Christian eschatology, with a particular focus on premillennialism and its mandate to protect believers from the corruption of the non-Christian world until the imminent return of Christ and the rapture of the Christian elect.

Chapter two is an examination of the influence of conservative Christian values on American politics and sex education. Chapter three is an analysis of the phenomenon of virginity pledging, its definition of what constitutes sex, its effectiveness at delaying first intercourse and curbing rates of disease and teen pregnancy, its success as an identity movement and its propagation of traditional gender roles and fantasies of true love.

Chapter four begins with a discussion of the convergence of conservative evangelical and
Freudian views of psycho-sexual normativity in relation to virginity and the family then applies psychoanalytic theories of narcissism to virginity pledging and purity balls, revealing some of the psychological aspects of this movement such as the oedipal dynamics between fathers and daughters. Chapter five outlines a model of transcendent intersubjectivity as an alternative to the narcissistic, oedipal subjectivity found in the purity movement and explores the way that language and ideology function in the formation of gendered subjective and intersubjective self-understandings with a final proposal of the possibility of an alternative, ethical view of abstinence that does not appeal to notions of purity.
For Mike
Acknowledgements

The last thing that my father said to me was, “Have you finished your thesis yet?”

So much of my inspiration for working on this thesis came from my parents, Margaret and Jim. Their home has always been a place of lively intellectual discussion and invigorating debate.

I am enormously indebted to my supervisor, James DiCenso, who encouraged and challenged me from beginning to end. I am thankful for his thoughtful, consistent guidance and will miss our stimulating conversations immensely. I am also indebted to my other committee members: Pamela Klassen, whose careful reading of my thesis led to a much better dissertation, and Mary Nyquist, whose reading suggestions drew me to a number of illuminating sources that became central to my work. Two other professors that have influenced my academic career significantly are Jim Gollnick, who introduced me to psychoanalysis, and Ann Yeoman.

My brothers Thomas and Micah and their partners Shoshanna and Erin, and my in-laws Jo-Ann, Fred, James, Rachel, Jeff and my grandmother-in-law LaVina have all mustered up continued interest in my topic. Thank you for your love and patience. A number of friends have also provided suggestions and support – Lisa, Marci, Andrew, Jenn and Jenn, Tanja, Jenny, Shadell, Laura, Kath, Matt and Petra, and my fellow graduate students at the Toronto Mennonite Theological Centre, to name a few. I’d also like to acknowledge my church families at Rockway and Toronto United Mennonite, who have given me a sense of accountability in my difficult quest to represent fairly other Christian communities.
Finally, I would like to thank my husband Mike. I would not have been able to complete this project if it weren’t for his steadfast love, our treasured late-night conversations and his partnership in parenting our two boys, Christof and Bastian.
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INTRODUCTION

A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse;
a spring shut up, a fountain sealed.
~ Song of Solomon 4:12

The purity ball for fathers and daughters has become a popular phenomenon for evangelical Christians in the United States, with 48 states having hosted these events to date. At the purity ball, fathers and daughters attend a commitment ceremony that affirms the role of the father as guardian of his daughter’s sexual purity and the high value placed on the daughter’s pre-marital virginity. As a token of the father’s and daughter’s pledges, there is often an exchange of rings. A girl receives a purity ring from her father which she wears on her wedding finger until she is married. One father explains the significance of the ring that he wears to his daughter as follows:

It is in the form of a shield, symbolizing my commitment to protect and shield you from the enemy. Inside the shield is a heart, which is your heart, which I am covering. Across the heart are a key and a sword—the key is the key to your heart, which I will safeguard until your wedding day, and the sword is the protection I pledge to you...On your wedding day, I will give this ring to your husband. I love you, my jewel, my princess.¹

The mark of his integrity as a man and a father, in this case, is the father’s ability to succeed in protecting his daughter and instill in her a sense of her own worth so that her body and her heart are intact on her wedding day. The mark of a daughter’s purity are the

upholding of her promise to remain chaste and her continued receptiveness to paternal protection.

When I was a teenager, my mother and I had a conversation about pre-marital sex, as many mothers and daughters do. I was raised in what I would deem a religious, church-going, but socially liberal, Mennonite, Christian family. Therefore, I was somewhat surprised by the tack my mother took. I was expecting that God, the Bible, and the Christian tradition would be consulted as sources of moral authority; however, this was not the case. She encouraged me to wait to have sex until I was mature enough to make a responsible decision that would protect me from contracting a disease or from getting pregnant before and if I planned to do so. She said that the most important thing was that I have the freedom to reach my goals and to live the life I wanted to live without avoidable obstacles getting in the way. I respect my mother for encouraging my sense of agency as a young woman and for not appealing to fear or to the importance of sexual purity as reasons to abstain from certain sexual behaviours until marriage.

My dissertation is an exploration of this distinction between ethical subjectivity and purity in relation to the contemporary sexual abstinence movement found within American evangelicalism. I define ethical subjectivity, more specifically transcendent intersubjectivity, as having to do with how one’s identity is shaped by the way one makes ethical decisions with regards to others and by the degree of freedom and autonomy one is afforded in making those decisions. An intersubjective model of development provides a way to recognize both the other and the self as mutual subjects, thereby overcoming the subject-object model of relating that inevitably serves the narcissism of the subject while commodifying or objectifying the other. I argue that the conceptualization of purity and
its application to one’s lifestyle also contributes to identity formation, but can be categorically differentiated from ethical subjectivity, in the sense that purity, in this particular context, has to do with how boundaries (both personal and collective) are delineated and defended. Purity, here, also contributes to the objectification of the feminine virginal body, to the detriment of the subjectivity and ethical formation of young women.

It is my contention that the evangelical abstinence movement must be understood in relation to the conservative Christian notion of the ideal family. I show that the strength of this connection between virgin and family results in a prioritization of purity over ethics. This is evident in virginity pledging, a phenomenon that was popularized by the Southern Baptist church in the 1990s, abstinence-only-until-marriage educational programs in public schools, which first received federal funding in 1981, and in purity ball events, the first of which was held in Colorado Springs, in 1998.

While I do analyze the sociological phenomena associated with this abstinence movement, the primary goal of my research is not to uncover the actual behaviour or belief systems of young evangelicals and their families, but to examine the discourse of virginity and purity as it relates to identity formation in these communities and to construct a normative psychoanalytic and feminist alternative for how narcissistic understandings and embodiments of virginity and gender can be reimagined through the concepts of intersubjectivity and self-transcendence.

One of my most surprising discoveries has been that while psychoanalysis and Christianity have generally been perceived as having a polemical relationship, they actually converge on a few critical points when applied to father-daughter relationships
and family dynamics. For example, Freud observed that daughters tend to form oedipal attachments with their fathers and that these early attachments provide the paradigm according to which all future (hetero)sexual relationships take shape. The same could be said about the conservative evangelical families that I examine, in that a close father-daughter relationship is seen as the crucial foundation for ideal future marital relationships. However, for these girls, the shift from the early oedipal situation into the later marital situation seems to be a fairly seamless one because of the emphasis placed on purity and the way that feminine sexuality is understood. These girls can be seen as maintaining a continuous narcissistic identity in which they are the objects of love and the recipients of masculine protection throughout their lives. In other words, they do not ever completely exit the oedipal situation into adulthood. For Freud, it is essential, albeit difficult, that girls experience a rupture in their childish connections to their fathers. This rupture is essential because it instigates the birth of an adult, moral subjectivity.

At the heart of such a project is the question of freedom, particularly the relationship between ethics and freedom and the extent to which abstinent young people exercise their freedom in their quest for sexual purity. I interpret the resolution of the oedipal phase as the birth of a kind of existential, ethical, adult freedom, or, what Freud would call the formation of the super ego. If Freud is right that some girls have a hard time resolving their oedipal relationship with their fathers and forming the super ego, then one could argue that these girls are caught in a prelapsarian or pre-ethical stage which prohibits the freedom of sexual choices and their participation in the development of their own adult identities. The virginity pledge is an interesting case study in oedipal theory. There appears to be a choice on the part of a pledger to take the pledge and
remain committed to a life of pre-marital chastity, however, I would question the psychological limits of freedom in such a choice, due to what Simone de Beauvoir would deem the girl’s “immanent” position within her family which keeps her from transcendent ethical activity.

I acknowledge that such a discourse on freedom and ethics reflects an inescapably modern, Western set of values that places autonomy at the pinnacle of individual development and freedom of conscience, religion, the right to choose one’s life partner and the equal rights of women as inalienable and self-evident. However, I complicate this discourse somewhat in my construction of a relational form of intersubjectivity as ethically preferable to isolated subjectivity. Intersubjective ethics is founded on the recognition of and cooperation with other free subjects as opposed to the pursuit of one’s own subjectivity with little concern for the other’s own pursuit of subjectivity. The achievement of a solitary sense of subjectivity without also achieving mature, post-oedipal bonds with others, simply results in another type of narcissistic identity.

1. Literature Review

I take my data from a number of studies and reviews of virginity pledging and abstinence-only-until-marriage education programs. There is very little formally published research on purity balls, therefore I depend on a few documentaries that feature footage of purity balls and interviews with families that have attended them, and information from purity ball sponsoring websites and magazine features.
a. Virginity Pledge Studies

*The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health* (Add Health), designed by Peter S. Bearman, Jo Jones and Richard Urdry, is a nation-wide American school-based, three-wave survey that took place between 1994 and 2002, that measures the social well-being, health and behaviour of adolescents from grades 7 through 12. The study includes surveys from 141 schools and approximately 90,000 participants.  

Bearman and Hannah Brückner use Add Health data for their 2001 study of the effects of taking a virginity pledge to abstain from sexual intercourse until marriage on the timing of first sexual debut. They found that pledging does delay first intercourse as long as the group of pledgers is in early rather than late adolescence and as long as the size of the group does not become large enough to be normative within the school community. In 2005, Bearman and Brückner published a follow-up analysis of the Add Health results of STD acquisition rates in blood samples that were taken from adolescents between 2001 and 2002. They found that pledgers and non-pledgers have virtually the same STD acquisition rate, proving that pledgers do not abstain completely from risky sexual behaviour.

In 2006, Janet E. Rosenbaum analyzed pledge retractions and pledge denials in waves 1 and 2 of the Add Health surveys, arguing that 53% of wave 1 pledgers denied ever having taken a pledge by wave 2 so that they would not have to admit to having

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broken their pledge.\textsuperscript{5} In 2009, Rosenbaum reported that 82\% of the original pledgers from wave 1 denied ever having taken a pledge.\textsuperscript{6} In a three-wave study of 870 California teenagers between the ages of 12 to 16, with data collected between 2002-2004, Melina M. Bersamin, et al, found that private promises to oneself to delay sexual debut were more successful than public pledges.\textsuperscript{7}

\textbf{b. Abstinence-Only Education}

The United States is the only developed country that has attempted to ensure the virginity of its unmarried youth using federal funds. Ronald Reagan instituted the first funding for abstinence-only-until-marriage public education under the Adolescent Family Life Act (AFLA).\textsuperscript{8} There are currently three federal programs overseeing funding for abstinence-only education: AFLA, Section 510 of the Social Security Act (Title V) and Community-Based Abstinence Education (CBAE). Some of the major advocates of abstinence-only education are The Abstinence Clearinghouse,\textsuperscript{9} American Family Association,\textsuperscript{10} Concerned Women for America,\textsuperscript{11} Eagle Forum,\textsuperscript{12} Family Research

\textsuperscript{9} www.abstinence.net January 2011 (accessed).
\textsuperscript{10} www.afa.net January 2011 (accessed).
\textsuperscript{11} www.cwfa.org January 2011 (accessed).
\textsuperscript{12} www.eagleforum.org January 2011 (accessed).
Council, Focus on the Family, Heritage Foundation, Medical Institute for Sexual Health, and the National Abstinence Education Association.

The Heritage Foundation, a think-tank dedicated to the formulation and promotion of “conservative public policies based on the principles of free enterprise, limited government, individual freedom, traditional American values, and a strong national defense,” published their own findings on sexual education. They contend that condom use is highly ineffective in preventing sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV, and that sex before marriage is psychologically and emotionally damaging and can inhibit the ability of young people to form “stable and healthy relationships in a later marriage”, leading to a 50% increased likelihood of divorce rate compared to people who wait to have sex until they are married.

In 2007, The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, a group of medical, educational, and federal and state-level politicians, found that programs that encourage abstinence and contraception use are the most effective at decreasing rates of both teen pregnancy and sexual transmitted infections and diseases. In 2007, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services also found that young people participating in

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abstinence programs that were federally funded did not abstain from sex, have fewer sexual partners or even delay sexual initiation compared to young people not participating in these programs.\(^{21}\)

After reviewing 83 studies on sex education programs from 1980 until 2007, The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued a report on November 6, 2009, that concluded that comprehensive sex education programs are more effective at delaying sexual debut and preventing sexually transmitted infections than abstinence-only programs. This panel of 19 experts were called together for this task in order to inform Congress as it considered whether or not to redirect abstinence-only funding to more comprehensive ones.\(^{22}\)

The Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS), funded through private contributions and foundation grants, has reported that abstinence-only education curricula do not protect young people from sexually transmitted diseases or infections.\(^{23}\) Furthermore, SIECUS contends that abstinence only curricula exclude information for gay and lesbian teenagers, fail to deal with issues of sexual abuse, promote stigmatization against pregnant and parenting youth,\(^{24}\) and that the majority of


them use fear and shame-based approaches and include medical inaccuracies in their material.25

The Guttmacher Institute, whose mandate includes social science research, policy analysis and public education in the area of sexual and reproductive health, has also reported on the effectiveness of abstinence-only education programs. It has found that many abstinence programs teach that sex outside of marriage is wrong and only discuss contraceptive use in terms of its failure rates.26 It also reports that there are no federally funded programs that promote both abstinence and contraceptive use, despite evidence that these are the only programs that have any measureable success in curbing the rate of teen pregnancy and STD acquisition.27

c. Purity Balls

_Daddy, I Do_ is a documentary that features purity ball events in its analysis of father-daughter relationships, virginity pledging, abstinence-only programs versus comprehensive sex education programs, and issues of female sexual identity.28

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28 _Daddy I Do_, Cassie Jaye, director. (Jaye Bird Productions, 2010).
Virgin Daughters, that appeared on England’s Channel 4 television, focuses on the first host of a purity ball, Pastor Randy Wilson, and his family’s experience with these balls. Pastor Wilson and his wife Lisa have also published a book entitled Celebrations of Faith about their involvement with the inception of the purity ball, the significance of the event and its growth in popularity. The Al Jazeera show Everywoman interviewed one particular family, the Merkels, about their purity ball experience. I also obtained data from one of the Wilson’s websites and from the website of Abstinence Clearinghouse, which provides many of the resources for abstinence programs and purity ball planning.

2. Abstinence, Religion, and the Family

All of the virginity pledge and abstinence education studies focus on the benefits and disadvantages of virginity pledging and abstinence education for sexual behaviour, reproductive health and teenage pregnancy with some focus on the social dynamics between those who pledge virginity versus those who do not. However, there has been little in-depth analysis of the religious and ideological roots of the abstinence movement or the psychological, ethical and gender role implications of its promotion of sexual purity. My dissertation provides a psychoanalytic and feminist critique of this purity movement and examines the role of the traditional Christian family in virginity commitments. In this context, virginity is more than the conscious abstention from sexual activity.

29 “The Virgin Daughters,” Cutting Edge, Channel 4 documentary series (Sept. 25, 2008).
30 Randy and Lisa Wilson, Celebrations of Faith (Colorado Springs: Cook Communications Ministries, 2001).
31 Everywoman, the Al Jazeera English channel (May 18, 2007).
intercourse or the circumstantial state of not yet having had sexual intercourse. It is not just about the not doing of something or the prohibition of immoral sexual behaviour. American evangelical virginity is about the production of certain perceived ideal identities that participate in certain perceived ideal family structures – identities that I deem ultimately narcissistic in nature.

In chapter one, I present a historical framework for understanding the contemporary virginity movement within the context of premillennial eschatology. I compare premillennialist and postmillennialist worldviews and the role their adherents have played in shaping the American spiritual and social landscape. I argue that premillennialism is a conservative evangelical movement whose objective it is to protect the Christian elect from the corruption of the non-Christian world by encouraging purity and narcissistic isolationism until the imminent return of Christ and the rapture of the elect. Virginity, in this context, can be interpreted as a defensive strategy against non-Christian, polluting influences. Postmillennialism, on the other hand, is also a historical evangelical movement, but where premillennialists are pessimistic about the state of the world and see no need to battle injustice in society, postmillennialists are optimistic about the world and aim to ameliorate social conditions for society’s underprivileged members and participate in God’s plan to establish his kingdom on earth. I argue that proponents of premillennialism prioritize personal purity, while proponents of postmillennialism prioritize social justice and the ethical treatment of others.

In chapter two, I examine the extension of conservative Christian values into the political sphere. I discuss the popularization of family values as political rhetoric and
finally the influence of conservative evangelicalism on education, including abstinence-only and character education programs in public schools.

In chapter three, I analyze the phenomenon of virginity pledging, its definition of what constitutes sex, its effectiveness at delaying first intercourse and curbing rates of disease and teen pregnancy, its success as an identity movement and its propagation of traditional gender roles and fantasies of true love.

In chapter four, I apply psychoanalytic theories of narcissism to virginity pledging and purity balls, in an attempt to reveal some of the psychological ramifications of this movement with a particular emphasis on the oedipal dynamics between fathers and daughters. I also discuss the convergence of conservative evangelical and Freudian views of psycho-sexual normativity in relation to virginity and the family.

In the fifth and final chapter, I suggest a model of transcendent intersubjectivity as an alternative to the narcissistic, oedipal subjectivity found in the purity movement. I use the biblical examples of Eve and Mary as points of comparison to some Christian ideals of virgin girls today, whose purity shows a similar prelapsarian, pre-ethical subjectivity. I also discuss the way that language and ideology function in the formation of gendered subjective and intersubjective self-understandings. Finally, I propose the possibility of an alternative, ethical view of abstinence that does not appeal to notions of purity.

In the end, I hope to present a portrait of a particular movement with far-reaching effects on American young people and their families. I also aim to diversify the concept of what constitutes a family, to provide helpful possibilities for the transformation of this movement that would change the way fathers and daughters relate, to show the harmful way sexual education is taught in American public schools and finally to expose
xenophobic notions of purity that protect a young woman’s childishness at the expense of an ethical adult subjectivity.
CHAPTER I

A “Genealogy” of Purity in American Evangelicalism

It’s coming to America first,
the cradle of the best and the worst.
It’s here they got the range
and the machinery for change
and it’s here they got the spiritual thirst.
It’s here the family’s broken
and it’s here the lonely say
that the heart has got to open
in a fundamental way:
Democracy is coming to the U.S.A.¹

There has been a longstanding historical divide within American evangelicalism between the imperative to reform social and moral conditions on the one hand, and the need to protect its own members from the corruption of the “outside”, non-evangelical world on the other. These trends wax and wane over time, with one gaining prominence over the other and then shifting the other direction, but they often occur, to some degree, simultaneously. The current American evangelical climate, for example, is experiencing a surge of both the impetus for social justice and the self-initiated isolation of Christian believers. On the surface, it appears that those belonging to the so-called Christian Right dominate the overall American evangelical scene, and even America as a whole. However, there is a growing number of politically and religiously vocal evangelicals who consider themselves to be socially progressive and count among their influences the

leaders of the Social Gospel movement of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.

One of the core factors at the heart of this tension is evangelical eschatology. The majority of optimistic, progressive social reformers within American evangelicalism have been “postmillennial” in their eschatology, while the majority of socially and politically conservative evangelicals are “premillennial” in their eschatology and pessimistic about the future of humanity. It is my contention that this overall “premillennialist” evangelical, conservative position contributes directly to the evangelical promotion of virginity among young adults as a way to defend them against the corruption of the non-conservative evangelical world while they wait for the imminent return of Jesus Christ. It is also my contention that a concern for purity can be more closely associated with this conservative, defensive posture, than with the more open posture of progressive evangelicals.

Purity movements, such as the virginity movement, promote personal piety, cleanliness and integrity of the body, including the communal body, while social reform movements, such as the Social Gospel movement and its contemporary manifestations, promote issues such as welfare reform, poverty reduction, health care, and environmentalism. With premillennialism, there is not as much incentive to ameliorate social conditions for all American citizens. Why bother if Satan has gained control over the human world, which will initiate the return of Christ and his kingdom at any moment? Missionary efforts to win souls for Christ can therefore be considered defensive in nature, so that fellow Christians can be protected from unclean influences. With postmillennialism, it is believed that Christ will come after the righteous millennium has
already been established; therefore, there is a hopeful momentum to bring humanity up to these standards so that this can happen.

In this chapter, I discuss the history of church and state issues and eschatological theology in the various forms of American Protestantism. I compare premillennialism and postmillennialism and the ways that they have shaped the relationship between Christianity and society at large, including social reform and isolationism. I also examine the protectionist stance of the Christian Americans toward their children and families as it is manifested in suburbanized lifestyles and homeschooling. I argue that the concern for sexual purity and the safety of the family unit is a symptom of a larger preoccupation with the end times.

1. Secularization in America

Church membership waned in the European countries from which the settlers hailed, which has led to the mistaken assumption that all Western societies have become increasingly secularized. Religion scholars Peter Berger, Grace Davie, and Effie Fokas have even gone so far as saying that Europe is the world’s only continent (particularly the Western, non-orthodox countries) that has experienced a significant secularization. In this way, they diffuse the notion of American “exceptionalism,” saying that other than Europe, America is much like everyone else in terms of how “religious” it is.²

Even when the strong secular current hit European countries in the 19th century due to the publication of Darwin’s *Origin of the Species* in 1859 and the popularization of the modern method of biblical criticism that called biblical inerrancy into question, Protestantism still remained vibrant in America. Of course, science and secularism did flourish in the United States, but so did religion. With industrialization, science did not just appear as a theory of human origins; it had practical applications that affected the everyday lives of American citizens. For example, the 19th century saw the invention of the telegraph, the steam engine and domestic electricity.³ It was these everyday technologies that brought science into people’s lives in a real way and increased people’s faith in science, human reason and human self-sufficiency.

Historian Martin Marty argues that there was a “Modern Schism” that hit Western nations in the mid-nineteenth century and influenced the direction of the twentieth-century. He writes:

The Western nations went ‘over the hump of transition’ towards a new ethos of industrial enterprise, urbanization and nationalism, accompanied by locally varying programmes or creed like liberalism, evolutionism, socialism, or historicism. These and other ‘isms’ helped constitute the modern world and made up…the rivals of the twentieth-century Church.⁴

Marty uses the term “schism” to infer that this secularization did not cause the death of religion, but simply its “relocation.” Religion was no longer the de facto ruling force of

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the public sphere. Of course, this does not mean that religions such as Christianity were not affected profoundly by this shift. Christians did begin to question the truth claims of their traditions. Christianity had to change with the times. Some groups became modernized, some radicalized, and some lost members. However, even in its transformed state, Christianity has maintained a solid base in America.

George Marsden, a confessing evangelical and prominent historian of American fundamentalism, argues that American culture has always been a uniquely paradoxical thing in that it has been shaped simultaneously by both religion and secularism since its beginnings. The irony is still at work today, he says, as people who consider themselves to be extremely religious live and work in a highly secular society. It is important to note that religion and secularity are not wholly incompatible. The American case exemplifies this. Many Christians interpret worldly wealth and success in the public sphere as a sign of the efficacy of their religious faith. Therefore, this poses no contradiction for them.

One could argue that secularism, as distinguished from atheism, can also mean that which does not attend to matters pertaining to religion. This does not by necessity imply that secularism is opposed to religion or, as in the case of atheism, that it outright rejects the idea of God; it simply concerns itself with a different set of issues. In this case, a religious person can also be a secular one. In some ways, this theory is the only one that allows for Americans to be able to continue to exist in a democratic nation. However, this does not quite do justice to the reality of the American situation in which the everyday

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material and public world is permeated with religious meaning for many people. The political is religious for many. There is an assumption present in this view that suggests that we can “abstract persons from personhood,” as Ann Pellegrini states.

Pellegrini posits the roots of the “fiction” of a “universal secular” in the European Enlightenment, which came to mean an attempt at a “banishment of ‘irrational’ religion to the private.” She argues that with politics, one cannot “abstract persons from personhood”, therefore our “feelings” inform our political attitudes. One cannot expect conservative evangelicals to divorce themselves from their feelings on issues of personal rights and laws that deal with moral issues. Similarly, one cannot expect left-wing evangelicals, liberals, Christian secularists, or “secular humanists” (as they are often called in the U.S.), to divorce their values and feelings from their political involvement. It is also false to assume that people who do not ascribe to a particular faith have no values. People do not cut off their faith or their values when participating in political matters. However, this does not mean that there is not a particular way to be secular and religious in the American political sphere without compromising the fundamentals of the “disestablishment” of government-sponsored religion and freedom of religious practice and belief that is at the heart of the constitutional separation of church and state.

Pellegrini proposes that we not “fix the meanings and boundaries of the religious and the secular…so as to expand both intellectual and political possibilities.” She and Janet R. Jakobsen warn against a fantasy of a “universal secular” that acts in opposition

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7 Ibid.
to a plurality of religions worldwide. This universal secular is what they prefer to call “Christian secularism” since it is generally a response to European and American forms of Christianity, and, even more particularly, Protestant Christianity. And, it is vital to note that this secularism interacts with, informs, and is informed by Protestant forms of liberal and conservative religion. This is the reality of the American church-state relationship. It is therefore not my intention to be yet another voice of “secularism” in the face of some kind of a monolithic “Evangelicalism.” I wish to respect the differences within American evangelicalism, just as I wish to respect the differences within the myriad “secularisms” of the globe.

The interplay between faith and science, religion and secularism, contributes to the ongoing debate between matters of church and state. Protestants and Catholics have disagreed vehemently over how to teach religion in public schools, there is the obvious example of the Scopes Trial and there are numerous church-state issues that are extremely contentious today, including teaching evolution versus teaching creationism, comprehensive versus abstinence-only sexuality education in public schools, Christian prayer in public schools, abortion laws, stem-cell research, gay marriage, and so on.

The major problem facing the separation of church and state is that a huge majority of those citizens who make up the state are Christians who believe that they are living in a Christian nation. The vision of the founding fathers for a secular public sphere was not representative of the nation as a whole. It was the vision of a powerful few. The

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French Revolution occasioned an organic shift to secularity in France, but the American Revolution did not have quite the same effect. Therefore, while much of American society agrees with the separation of church and state, this does not necessarily trickle down into the everyday lives of American believers.

The constitutional ideal of the “wall of separation between church and state,” as articulated by Thomas Jefferson in an 1802 letter, holds that religion “is a matter which lies solely between man and his god” – a relationship that should not be infringed upon by the government, thereby showing respect for religious freedom. Jefferson saw this respect as going both ways. While the government was to respect the freedom of religion, the religious were to respect the nonsectarian nature of government. At the time, the so-called “Establishment Clause” of the First Amendment of the Constitution that prohibited the government from setting up a national religion, or from showing preference for any religion over other religions or religion over non-religion and vice versa, was a federal clause. This was not applied to all of the individual states until the Supreme Court ruled on an “incorporation doctrine” of the Bill of Rights, through a series of decisions starting in the 1890s. It was not until midway through the twentieth century that the establishment clause, the incorporation doctrine and the separation of church and state really became instituted throughout all of the states.⁹

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Even now, the constitutional rule regarding religion is a living, changing thing and is constantly reviewed and challenged. For example, in 2004, George W. Bush enjoyed enormous support as he pushed for an amendment to the constitution that would have banned a constitutional right to same-sex marriage. The grounds for this were that Bush and his followers thought that same-sex marriage would destroy the sanctity of the Christian marriage of a man and a woman and would thus undermine the shape of the American family, and, by extension, the American nation. Needless to say, the relationship between faith and politics is extremely complicated in the United States and America continues to be both a highly secular and highly religious country.

2. The Varieties of American Evangelicalism

American evangelicalism can be taken to mean an umbrella term for Protestant Christians belonging to the mainline denominations, including some Baptists, Methodists, Congregationalists, Presbyterians, Anabaptists and others, as well as the more militant Fundamentalists, the born-again, and the charismatic groups stemming from the holiness movement such as the Pentecostals. Many of these groups differ radically from one another and disagree on many points of doctrinal interpretation, but they share a number of beliefs and historical roots in common. In the nineteenth century, evangelicals were made up of a “broad coalition” of “subgroups [who were] united with each other, and with persons from other nations in their zeal to win the world for Christ.” 11 Although

many changes have taken place within evangelicalism, it is still a coalition of a diverse group of denominations and non-denominational Christians. Marsden writes:

The essential evangelical beliefs include (1) the Reformation doctrine of the final authority of the Bible, (2) the real historical character of God’s saving work recorded in Scripture, (3) salvation to eternal life based on the redemptive work of Christ, (4) the importance of evangelism and missions, and (5) the importance of a spiritually transformed life...[Evangelicalism] can also mean a self-conscious interdenominational movement, with leaders, publications, and institutions with which people from many subgroups identify. ¹²

In other words, evangelicals share central common convictions about the reality of the existence and work of God and Jesus Christ and the movement of the Holy Spirit in history and will contribute to this work through their own personal piety and through spreading this Christian gospel of the truth, as they see it. Some evangelicals belong to the movement through historical association, while others actively participate in particular projects that promote these beliefs.

Fundamentalists are historically linked to Christian evangelicalism, but have become radicalized in their propagation and defense of their evangelical beliefs. Marsden calls a fundamentalist “an evangelical who is angry about something.”¹³ Fundamentalists responded, in an aggressive and polemical way, to the flourishing of modernism in America. In his seminal work *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, Marsden identifies

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¹² Ibid., 4-5.
¹³ Ibid., 1.
three major themes that characterize American fundamentalists: 1) a “paradoxical
tendency” to at times side with the “establishment” and at times with the “outsiders”; 2)
revivalistic and pietistic practices that stress their individualism; 3) an ambivalent
relationship to intellectualism. These three themes show the shifting relationship of
fundamentalism to the state and other institutions such as universities. One group, the
Plymouth Brethren, embodies another paradoxical tendency of fundamentalist groups. On
the one hand, the Plymouth Brethren want to create a pure, exclusive fellowship of true
believers and on the other hand, they want to win souls for Christ and open their
fellowship to newcomers. Therefore, they struggle between isolationism and the
command to spread the gospel.

3. Calvinism and Methodism

Until the American Revolution, the Calvinist tradition had a strong bearing on
American public life. These Calvinists, many of whom were Dutch Reformed,
Presbyterian, and Baptist, believed that “a Christian worldview should and could
continue to dominate America’s political, educational, and moral institutions and
practices.” They continued to preach this Christian vision throughout the modernist
period of the late nineteenth through the early twentieth century, when secular humanism
was gaining significant influence in the public sphere. This was extremely problematic,

14 Marsden, Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century
15 Gary Scott Smith, The Seeds of Secularization: Calvinism, Culture, and Pluralism in America
since this period was marked by the secularizing forces of both scientific discovery and application and by a swiftly growing cultural and religious heterogeneity. Yet Calvinists continued to hold fast to their conviction that even those Christians and non-Christians who disagreed with their values should still adhere to their ideological domination of public institutions such as the public education of children.  

Even though Calvinism as a whole has waned in the United States, the legacy of its approach to issues of public concern has continued to be felt in public education and in abstinence-only sexuality curricula in particular. Many Americans still see their nation as ideally a Christian nation; therefore Christian values play a substantial role in what kinds of things are taught in public schools, even if, on the surface, these values have been thinly translated into a secular vernacular in order to preserve the legal separation of church and state.

One of the central tenets of Calvinism that shaped American culture early on is the doctrine of predestination that only a chosen few belong to God’s elect, according to God’s “sovereign grace.” Calvinists also believe in “total depravity”; that humanity is sinful and fallen and that it takes a supreme effort to keep Satan away. This requires much self-control and personal piety on the part of the believer. A sign that the believer is a member of the elect and successful at resisting Satan’s influence is God’s blessing of prosperity. Therefore, capitalism is a system that has functioned harmoniously within the theological framework of American Calvinism.

16 Ibid.
Calvinism was challenged by Arminianism in the form of John Wesley’s Methodism. Many evangelical Protestants were uneasy about the idea that God has only determined that a few would be his chosen people and were ready for a theology that promoted God’s grace for everyone who chooses to be a believer. Arminianism, named after the Dutch Reformed theologian Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609), stressed the universal nature of God’s grace and the importance of free will as opposed to the predestined election of a small group of believers. John Wesley (1703-1791) still preached total depravity, but offered Christianity as an option for all sinners, with the optimism that human beings were capable of reaching perfection through perfect love of Jesus Christ. He taught that “Christ died for the salvation of all…(not just the predestined elect) and that [humans have] an important role to play in obtaining their own salvation.”

Wesley participated in a pietistic revival in his native England. He had a reputation for being a charismatic preacher and encouraged similar gifts in other “itinerant evangelists” and lay preachers. Wesley enjoyed enormous success when he travelled to America at the end of the eighteenth century. Until then his church was still linked with the Anglican Church, or the Church of England. However, upon arrival in America, he instigated a split from the Anglican Church and formed the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1784.

Methodism stressed “experiential conversion, moral purity, and growing in grace” and exemplified the emotional spirit of the Second Great Awakening of the early

19 Ibid., 95.
to mid-nineteenth century. This spirit contributed to the spread of evangelical Protestantism throughout the Northern and Southern states. While the First Great Awakening of the mid-eighteenth century in America was essentially Calvinist in its theology, the second one saw the strengthening of Methodist and Baptist denominations and the rise of the holiness movement, an offshoot of Methodism that stressed the atoning effect of Jesus’ death on humanity. Groups such as the Pentecostals find their roots in the holiness tradition. The Second Great Awakening motivated social reform, particularly in regard to issues such as abolition, women’s rights, temperance and the reforming of prison conditions.20 The Calvinist notion of predestination was undermined by the growing confidence in the human ability to effect change in society at this time. This confidence was interrupted by the horrors of the Civil War, but regained its strength after the war through the Social Gospel movement.

4. The Civil War (1861-1865)

“The most destructive war in American history was in several ways a religious war,” writes Robert Jewett.21 One of the contentious issues was not only slavery itself, but the scriptural justification for or disparagement of slavery. Jewett argues that the Second Great Awakening’s “popularization of biblical literalism” and promotion of the ideal that “each converted person his or her own interpreter of scripture” led to great

20 Ibid., 112-113.
disputes about what the Bible actually says about subjects such as slavery. The Civil War also saw the rise of the apocalyptic language of “redemptive” violence, for example, Julia Ward Howe’s “Battle Hymn of the Republic,” written in 1862, takes as its inspiration the apocalyptic themes of the book of Revelation. The North and the South both thought that God was fighting on their side. However, even in the midst of the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln, as expressed in his second inaugural address, still believed that the country could be united based on the fact that North and South “both read the same Bible and pray to the same God.” Lincoln, here, appeals to Christianity as a potential unifying force rather than a divisive one.

5. The Deliverance Doctrine of 1910: the Five Fundamentals

Theologian H. Richard Niebuhr claims that the fundamentalists of the early twentieth century found their following mainly among the rural populations, while liberal modernists were mainly middle-class, educated urbanites. However, this is not a complete picture of fundamentalists at this time. The fundamentalist-modernist debate echoed throughout the halls of higher education, with many academics defending conservative beliefs. In the 1893, Charles A. Briggs, a biblical scholar and professor at Union Theological Seminary in New York City, was brought to trial by the Presbyterian

22 Ibid., 116.
Church for teaching that there are inconsistencies and errors in the Bible.\textsuperscript{26} Briggs had adopted the method of “higher criticism” that was founded in German biblical scholarship circles and had subsequently started to gain popularity in the United States. Briggs was dismissed from the New York Presbytery, but kept his position at Union Seminary.\textsuperscript{27}

The Briggs trial sparked a series of similar trials and debates throughout American Protestant churches and educational institutions that eventually led to the articulation of the “five fundamentals.” In 1895, at a Bible conference in Niagara, New York, 14 doctrinal points were considered, of which 5 were later affirmed as the five fundamentals of faith by the Presbyterian General Assembly in 1910. These five fundamentals include: the inerrancy of the Bible, the virgin birth, the atonement and resurrection of Christ, miracles, and the dispensationalist interpretation of scripture and history.\textsuperscript{28}

6. The Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy

Some of the evangelical leaders of dispensationalist thinking, such as Cyrus Scofield, contributed their efforts to the anti-modernist publication of the series \textit{The Fundamentals}, between 1910 and 1915,\textsuperscript{29} which outlined the 5 “essentials of orthodoxy”

\begin{footnotes}
\item[26] Charles A. Briggs, \url{http://www.americanpresbyterianchurch.org/briggs.htm} June 2010 (accessed).
\item[29] Marsden, \textit{Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism}, 40-41.
\end{footnotes}
that had been recently accepted by the General Assembly. The term “fundamentalism” comes from this series of booklets. Not all of the authors were dispensationalists, in fact many of them disagreed with the dispensationalist view of history. Noll writes: “Dispensationalists and confessional Calvinists, ecclesiastical separatists and loyal denominationalists, advocates of holiness and those wary of holiness themes all cooperated in this venture as a conserving response to the day’s theological challenges.”

These theologians sought to present a unifying conservative voice that would articulate the crucial aspects of the Christian faith at a time when that faith was shaken and confused by modernism.

These *Fundamentals* inspired a movement that would become increasingly more militant over time. Marsden recounts the revivalistic fervor that resulted from these publications, along with an increased conviction about the “inerrancy of Scripture, a premillennial eschatology, conventions of Victorian morality, and the epistemology of common-sense philosophy.”

The fundamentalist-modernist controversy blossomed in 1922, when the liberal Baptist preacher Harry Emerson Fosdick preached a sermon for First Presbyterian Church in New York entitled “Shall the Fundamentalists Win?” This sermon makes an appeal for liberal Christianity and draws contrasts between “liberal” Christians, “conservatives”, and “fundamentalists” in America. He claims that “all fundamentalists are conservatives, but not all conservatives are fundamentalists,” meaning that some

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31 Ibid.; Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*. 31
conservatives are still willing to have an open dialogue with liberal Christians, while fundamentalists seek to wrench the name Christian from all those Christians who are not fundamentalists, thereby excluding many from “Christian fellowship.” This sermon contributed to a split within the Presbyterian church, but it also motivated a split between many of the mainline Protestant churches. Most of the major Protestant denominations ended up accommodating liberal theology to a certain extent, however, the Southern Baptists officially considered themselves to be fundamentalist by the 1960s and 1970s, and expelled numerous moderate or liberal pastors and leaders from their positions in the church. Proponents of this move called this a “conservative resurgence” while detractors called this a “fundamentalist takeover.”

In large part, dispensational premillennialism grew as a conservative response to the challenges of modernity to the Christian church. The Christian modernists thought that God worked within culture as it changed and shifted in form, therefore, theology should also reflect the changes of culture. People such as Horace Bushnell, who taught that Scripture was written in poetic, rather than literal language, contributed to this view. Mark A. Noll writes: “Bushnell had wished to revise traditional doctrines into language that emphasized intuition, human potential, social progress, and the redemptive potential of the world.” Bushnell’s theology exemplifies the marriage of faith in human science and reason and the Christian God, which is at the heart of Christian modernism.

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33 Noll, A History of Christianity, 374.
However, this form of theology had more success in universities, divinity schools and colleges, than in the churches at the time.

Shailer Mathews, dean of the Divinity School at the University of Chicago, wrote *The Faith of Modernism* in 1924, in which he lays out one of the most influential messages of modernism for academic circles: that the Christian tradition that preaches the doctrine of salvation with Jesus Christ as Saviour and the Bible as a complete document of revelation is still relevant, but that these doctrines must be reinterpreted as culture changes.\(^3^4\) In other words, these modernists tried to accommodate society’s changes and speak to these changes theologically. They believed that the tenets of Christianity and the Bible still held valid truth claims, but that they needed to be read through the lens of current cultural trends and issues. Otherwise, Christianity would lose its veracity in the face of science and other timely challenges. Mathews was vocal in his rejection of premillennialist readings of religious history. He said that Christ will not return to earth in any literal, physical sense. He argued that the premillennialists do not believe in the “spiritual” power of God, but view God as having to “revert to physical brutality...[and] miraculous militarism” in order to save the world. Mathews did think that Jesus Christ would come again through the Holy Spirit, inspiring people to bring about the Kingdom of God and the “triumph of the ideals of Jesus”\(^3^5\).

7. Dispensational Premillennialism

Ernest Sandeen critiques what he sees as the common misconception among historians of American fundamentalism that contemporary fundamentalism is only a direct manifestation of the “Doctrinal Deliverance of 1910,” also known as “the Five Fundamentals” and of the “Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy” of the 1920s. He claims that fundamentalism also finds its roots in an eschatological tradition that came earlier.36

Because of the horrific nature of the Civil War, particularly since it pitted “brother against brother,” apocalyptic themes grew even stronger after the War ended. A new consciousness took root – that the war might have been a sign of things to come. Dispensational premillennialism gained immense popularity after the war, as did the impulse toward social reform. Two contributing factors to this were the sizeable number of immigrants, particularly Irish Catholic, who came to America at this time and the overwhelming increase in urbanization.

Dispensational premillennialism is a movement that has ancient roots in the “millenarian” apocalyptic tradition of the writer of biblical book of Daniel and the later New Testament vision of John recorded in Revelation that both deal with the end times for Jews and Christians. In particular, Revelation 20 is considered the central text of all forms of Christian millennialism, but its interpretation is highly disputed. The King James version of Revelation 20: 1-4 reads:

And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, and cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season. And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.

This scriptural passage describes how Satan will make his “deceiving” presence felt on earth and Christ will return to be with those believers that have not been influenced by Satan. The debate between millennialists who attempt to interpret this passage centres on when these events will come to pass and how to read the signs of the times.

Sandeen argues that American fundamentalism must be understood in relation to its “millenarian” theology that developed in the late nineteenth-century, particularly its dispensational premillennial eschatological reading of Revelation. Even today, almost all fundamentalists consider themselves to be millennialists and the majority of these are dispensational premillennialists. 

37 Sandeen.
Dispensationalism started with John Nelson Darby (1800-1882), an Irish Anglican clergyman who left the Church of Ireland and was one of the founding members of the Plymouth Brethren movement. Dispensationalism became popular in England before it came to America. The idea is that history is divided into 7 dispensations. Each of these dispensations represents a different way that God relates to humanity. These different modes of relating helped to explain why God relates to God’s people in varying ways throughout time and in the Jewish and Christian scriptures. Marsden writes:

In each of these dispensations God tested humanity through a different plan of salvation. Humans failed each test, and each era ended in a catastrophic divine judgment. The first dispensation ended with the human Fall into sin and expulsion from Eden, the second ended with the Flood, the third with the Tower of Babel, and so forth. We live in the sixth era…also heading toward catastrophe and divine intervention.  

Dispensationalism not only interprets the meaning of past events, but serves as a prophetic commentary on the events of the present and a prediction of things to come, including the end of the world. It features a highly pessimistic view of humanity, teaching that humanity will grow increasingly more corrupt and sinful before Christ returns to earth for a second time to usher in a new Christian era, centred in Jerusalem.  

The movement grew in respectability and influence in America due to the adherence of well-known Protestant evangelical leaders such as Dwight L. Moody, who

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38 Marsden, Understanding Fundamentalism, 40.
started the Moody Bible Institute, and Scofield, known for his publication of the *Scofield Reference Bible*. These leaders organized evangelical conferences and implemented dispensationalist ideas in classrooms of the Bible institutes that they led. According to Scofield, among others, we are living in the sixth dispensation called “Man Under Grace” which will come to an end soon when the seventh and final dispensation called “Man Under the Personal Reign of Christ” will arrive. This final period is known to dispensational premillennialists as the “Millennium”, which will be marked by the reign of Christ for a thousand years in Jerusalem.\(^{40}\)

One of the key developments in the dispensationalist view of history was the formation of the State of Israel in 1948. The sign that the Jews were returning to their “homeland” after a lengthy period of diaspora existence, showed that Christ would soon come again – to Jerusalem in particular - and that the Jews would finally acknowledge him as their Messiah. Despite their insistence that the God and human relationship has manifested itself in different ways throughout history’s dispensations, dispensationalists are not all supersessionist (the idea that Christianity evolved from Judaism and superseded it as a fulfillment of Jewish prophecy). In other words, they still consider the Jews to have a special covenant with God.\(^{41}\) However, they do believe that the Jews are destined to accept the Christian Messiah upon his return.


\(^{41}\) *Green*, 336.
8. The Rapture

The idea that Christ will return at any moment is a powerful incentive to remain pure as a person, as a family, as a community, and to some extent, as a nation. On its website, the Christian organization for men called The Band of Brothers states: “We believe the kingdom of God is advancing and that our King is rallying together his ‘no matter the cost’ disciples. Do you hear the call?” And beneath a photograph of men gathering together holding swords, it says:

These are important days - possibly the last days. Many in our ministry believe this to be true. In this generation, the Kingdom of God is advancing against forces of evil. All of God’s image-bearing children are being called by Christ our King to follow Him in the purpose for which we each were uniquely created.

These men believe that they are preparing for the great battle of Armageddon in which the strength of their faith and integrity will be put to the test.

As a part of their mission of preparing for the coming of the King, The Band of Brothers encourage their male members to protect their families. As a symbol of their honouring of their families, men are invited to purchase a sword-shaped “Rite of Passage” pendant for their sons and a heart-shaped “Princess Ring” for their daughters. The son’s pendant is also called a “Young Warrior Pendant” and is promoted as a “gift for your son (ages 12-17) to express your love for him, your pride in him, and your belief in him…The pendant serves as a great gift to your son as part of a "Rite of Passage" into

The site laments that there are so few rites of passage for young men in the American culture and argues that it is imperative for fathers to pass on their wisdom, their love, and their beliefs to their sons so that their sons can become warrior disciples for Christ and be prepared to fight by Christ’s side when the time comes.

The father-daughter relationship is presented in different terms. The Princess Ring link reads:

My precious daughter, I give you this Princess Ring as a symbol and as an everlasting reminder to you of my feelings for you. I hope you will hear these words from the deepest place in your heart and soul, because these words will forever be true: I Delight in You! I Think You are Beautiful – Both Inside and Outside! You are a Princess and I will Forever Love You and be Proud of You! For I have seen your true identity – you uniquely reflect God’s beauty. I see in you a princess, a crown jewel of God’s creation, and a sister of Christ our King. Please allow me to stand by and fight for your life, your eternal legacy, and your sacred honor.  

The daughter is cherished as royalty, as a precious treasure of her father’s. By giving her the princess ring, her father is committing himself to “fight for [her] life”. This statement also has end times undertones, expressing a feeling of imminent danger to the daughter’s eternal soul. The Band of Brothers sees a direct connection between raising a son with

integrity and encourage and a daughter with a sense of purity and belovedness with preparing for the Rapture. And the family is presented as a sacred unit in need of protection.

“The Rapture makes me have to focus because I may meet my maker,” a woman named Laura Bagg from Ellington, Connecticut says in the 2009 documentary *Waiting for Armageddon*. The Rapture refers to an interpretation of Paul’s New Testament letter to the Thessalonians 4:17 that says: “We will be caught up together in the clouds to meet the Lord.” It is believed that when the time is right, Christ will wait in the clouds and take up true Christians, dead or alive, to unite with him. The question is continually asked: “Are you ready?” by preachers and the roadside signs that dot the American countryside. One woman, Devonna Edwards of McAlester, Oklahoma, is sure that she will “never hold a grandchild” and that her son “will not live to graduate.” This conviction shows the pressing feeling of imminence regarding the end times. And, instead of fearing this possibility, she is comforted by this thought. Her daughters do not feel as comforted and say that it is not fair that they will not get to have the experiences that their parents and grandparents have had.

In the documentary, North Korea and Iran are cited as being the Northern and Eastern countries that will attack Israel in the last battle that is described in Revelation, therefore everything that is happening right now in world politics has a ring of sacred

46 Franco Sacchi, Kate Davis and David Heilbroner, directors, *Waiting for Armageddon* (New York: Eureka Film Productions, 2008).
47 Ibid.
time. Even the division of history into BC, before Christ, and AD, anno domini (after Christ) is an ordering of profane history through sacred time. Things that were written about in the Bible are interpreted as describing current events. Therefore, current events and world issues take on spiritual meaning in that they have been foretold in scriptural prophecy. It is also believed that there will be an Antichrist who signs a peace treaty with Israel near the end of what is called the tribulation period, when the earth is rocked with war and catastrophe on a grand scale. This treaty marks the 7 year tribulation, a kind of countdown to the end. At this time, it is prophesied that all of the earth’s armies will come together on a hill outside of Jerusalem called “Har Megiddo,” or Armageddon, to attack Israel. Israel is believed to be the chosen people, but Christians still pray that they will come to accept Christ as their saviour.

Every year, American evangelicals donate millions of dollars to Israel. But this comes with the expectation that Israeli Jews will essentially stop being Jewish and become Christian in their beliefs. Jews who do not convert to Christianity are still going to hell, no matter what. Pastor Scott Nelson of Salem, Oregon says:

Today Christians are becoming increasingly vulnerable to a worldview that certainly resulted in the persecution of the Jews under the Nazis. And whether you had Nazis celebrating the Aryan race and denigrating the Jew, today you have

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48 Ibid.
49 Ibid.
multiculturalists celebrating the feminist and the gay lifestyle and denigrating the white European male [sic]. ⁵⁰

Here, Christians are associated with “the white European male” who is persecuted by liberals. “No one shall come to the Father except through me” is the non-negotiable truth professed by conservative Christians, as is their belief that “not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven.” ⁵¹ There is no space for other interpretations of these truths that divide between believers, non-believers, and those who claim to believe, but are not true believers.

One of the culminating acts that will signal the return of Christ is the triumphalistic rebuilding of the Temple of Solomon upon the Temple Mount, a place which currently houses the Al-Aqsa Mosque, also an extremely holy place for Muslims. However, for Christ to return, the mosque has to be removed, and the Jewish Temple rebuilt and then Christianized. When one mixes these beliefs about the significance of Israel in premillennialism, coupled with the enormous influence of the Christian Right on the American Government, you see what Gershom Gorenberg calls an “apocalyptic foreign policy” take shape with an eye to shape future events in Israel. ⁵² The city of Jerusalem or parts of Israel should never be compromised in bargains with Palestinian Muslims, since the land is believed to be the Judeo-Christian God’s land. And the millennium, or thousand years of Christ’s reign on earth that comes after the tribulation, will be a return to Eden, a new earth.

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⁵⁰ Ibid.
⁵¹ John 14:6; Matthew 7:21. NIV.
In Paul’s letter to the Romans 11:7-10, he repeats the words of Deuteronomy, Isaiah and the Psalms, prophesying about what will happen to those who are not God’s elect: “David says: “May their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a retribution for them. May their eyes be darkened so they cannot see, and their backs be bent forever.” President Reagan announced that he believed that the earth is heading for a biblical Armegeddon. This influenced Reagan’s so-called “Star Wars” defense for protecting America using nuclear weapons. During the 1984 Presidential Debates Reagan referred to the prophecies of Armageddon and “the fact that a number of theologians for the last decade or more have believed that this was true, that the prophecies are coming together.”

One can detect the influence of a premillennialist disparagement of society by much of the Christian Right in the U.S. today. While the Right seems to continue to fight the culture war against corruption and “chaos” on behalf of Christian order, many of its members believe that they are and will lose that culture war. However, even though they may be losing some battles, they will win the ultimate war, because the worse the world gets, the sooner Christ will return and usher in a new age.

Randall Balmer, historian of American history and a self-proclaimed leftist evangelical, grieves the loss of the prophetic, postmillennially inspired social reform of the past. He writes:

Evangelicals [use] premillennialism as an excuse to withdraw from campaigns of social reform… in order to devote their full attention to preparations for the Second Coming of Jesus, which [entails] cultivating inner piety and trying to convert others to the faith. In

Waiting for Armageddon.

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the face of mounting social ills, evangelicals shifted their attentions from the long term to
the short term--because the time was so brief, they [believe], until the return of Jesus.54

The incentive for premillennial evangelicals to participate in moral reform has waned
significantly because any attempt to better society at large might delay the Second Coming. This
explains, in part, why some factions of the Christian Right have gone so far as to welcome the
degradation of the environment and have actually fought against efforts to reverse the effects of
global warming and the depletion of the ozone layer. 55

Why, then, does the Christian Right fight so vehemently to have a political voice in
matters of public policy, particularly policies pertaining to sexuality? Why do some Republicans
support a libertarian view that minimal government involvement in the lives of citizens is best,
while attempting to dictate laws regarding sex and the body? Why do its members care if same-
sex couples are marrying, that women are free to choose abortion and teenagers are being taught
about comprehensive sexuality? Why do they care if stem cell research is gaining support and
pornography is available? Wouldn’t the success of the so-called secular humanist agenda just
hasten the Second Coming of Christ? One answer for this contradiction is that the Christian
Right does not want to reform society; it wants to protect its own from the moral ills of society.

Children are susceptible to influence, therefore, if they are to attend public schools, for example,
they should not be taught about the possibility of sex outside of the bonds of marriage.

Missionary efforts have also continued to be carried out by premillennialists, despite their
pessimism about the future of humanity. Why? I would argue that this is a defensive move, not a

54 Randall Balmer, Thy Kingdom Come: How the Religious Right Distorts the Faith and Threatens
55 Ibid., 148.
proactive move. In other words, premillennialist missionary efforts are still aimed at saving souls for Christ, but this is not for the ultimate betterment of society. It is so that the already Christian youth will not be corrupted by non-Christian outside influences. This is also apparent in U.S. foreign policy that takes a kind of aggressive-defensive posture toward things like the “war on terror,” rooting out other countries’ weapons of mass destruction, and supporting foreign leaders that adhere to American democratic principles. This defensive posture has deep roots in the history of the nation’s approach to foreign policy. For example, after World War 1, the U. S. decided that it would adopt an isolationist stance in world affairs and concentrate on taking care of its own country.

9. The Social Gospel Movement and its Legacy

From 1860 until 1920, the population of the United States tripled. Droves of people moved from rural areas to the cities to find work, while many immigrants also sought employment in the cities. But urbanization and industrialization brought a rapidly growing disparity between rich and poor and the cities were marked by both extreme wealth and extreme destitution. It was in this climate that the Social Gospel movement was formed. Labor rights were fought for by people such as Columbus, Ohio-based Congregationalist minister Washington Gladden who wrote Working People and Their Employers in 1876. Charles Sheldon, a pastor from Topeka, Kansas, coined the catchy slogan “what would Jesus do?” in his 1897 book In His Steps. But, the most influential of the Social Gospel preachers was theologian and Baptist minister Walter Rauschenbusch, who worked with the poorest of the poor in the “Hell’s Kitchen” neighbourhood of New York City. His theology that was articulated in books such as
Christianity and the Social Crisis (1907) “combined a prophetic ideal of justice with a commitment to building the kingdom of God through the power of Christ.” Like Gladden, one of Rauschenbusch’s main concerns was the rights of laborers who were exploited by their employers.

In this movement, personal responsibility was stressed as well as social consciousness. Randall Balmer writes: “The Social Gospel movement...[emphasized] the doctrine of the kingdom of God as a distinct historical possibility and calling upon Christians to seek the conversion not only of individuals, but of sinful social institutions.” Evangelicals associated with the Social Gospel Movement sought to reform society in order to participate in the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth. These Christian social reformers were largely postmillennialists.

Postmillennialism is an eschatological belief that a “thousand years of righteousness [as] described in Revelation 20, [will] precede the [prophesied] Second Coming of Jesus.” Evangelical reformers, therefore, found their inspiration for good works in this belief that they could help bring on the Second Coming by fostering righteousness in society. Both pre and postmillennialists are focused on future events and share the idea that they have work to do here on earth before Christ’s return. Therefore, they are both prophetic traditions. However, the premillennialists’ work is primarily purifying, isolationist or conversionary while the postmillennial work is to ameliorate the material world according to God’s mandate. In other

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58 Balmer, Thy Kingdom Come, 145.
words, the premillennialists want to protect the elect and save souls for Christ, while postmillennialists generally try to improve social conditions for everyone.

Many evangelical Christians were not convinced of the eschatology of the Social Gospel and preferred to focus instead on “individual, rather than social, regeneration.” Individual piety is commonly associated with premillennialist rather than postmillennialist Christians. This is because the premillennial preparation for the kingdom of God involves a purification of the self, an inward focus, and a nourishing of one’s so-called “personal relationship with Jesus Christ.” Premillennialists do not harbor hope that society can be reformed. Sandeen writes:

[Premillennialists] abandoned confidence in man’s ability to bring about significant and lasting social progress and in the church’s ability to stem the tide of evil, convert mankind to Christianity, or even prevent its own corruption. The premillennial return of Christ presupposed a view of the world in which judgment and demolition were the only possible response from a just God. Christ’s return would mean salvation and blessedness for a few but judgment for the world.50

Their hope for Christ’s return is contingent on a pessimistic view of humanity, because Christ will only come when society has hit its lowest point. Therefore, the destruction, not restoration, of society is in the best interests of premillennialist Christians.

Some proponents of the Social Gospel also took a defensive posture toward society, despite their attempts to diminish poverty, crime and inequality. These social reformers were caught between conservative values like moral purity and progressive values like a just society

59 Balmer, Encyclopedia of Evangelicalism, 537.
60 Sandeen, 13.
for everyone. The Woman’s Christian Temperance Union’s (WCTU) mandate was “protection of the home” and its slogan was “For God and Home and Native Land.” It fought for women’s rights such as the right to vote, the right to education, property and child custody. It also crusaded for alcohol temperance and censorship legislation. In 1885, the WCTU and lobbied to raise the age of sexual consent for girls from 10 to 18 years of age. In Delaware, the age of consent was 7.61 Eunice Lee, Melissa Doak, and Rebecca Park write:

The WCTU created an official Social Purity Department in 1885, at the beginning of the campaign to raise the legal age of consent. The WCTU undertook educational and reform work to protect women from moral downfall, but just as importantly, they aimed to transform attitudes toward the sexual double standard. The WCTU organized purity societies for boys and men to help them resist sexual temptation. The organization also undertook a major petition drive to convince legislators to raise the age of consent and make sexual contact with adolescent girls illegal.62

Men were commonly portrayed as sexual predators during the Victorian era, therefore part of alcohol temperance meant training men to control their sexual urges by removing vices like alcohol consumption that contributed to men giving in to their lower natures.

Along with their passion for social reform, temperance and suffrage, the WCTU was concerned with issues of purity. Its members even produced their own alternative “pure”

literature and movies as a response to what they saw as the morally corrupt popular culture of their day. In her book *Delinquent Daughters*, Mary E. Odem explains that “the [WCTU] campaign found its largest following and most fearful leaders among middle-class white women… [who] believed that the downfall of young women was the direct result of male vice and exploitation.” The “purity activist” literature portrayed young women as white, innocent and passive, while it “ignored the sexual dangers facing African American women and girls.” The WCTU also contributed to the “moral panic” that spread from Britain to the U.S. surrounding underground “white slavery” during this era, whereby white girls were abducted by men into a life of forced prostitution. Many historians realized that the prevalence of white slavery was grossly exaggerated. However, the essence of the message of the WCTU was that white girls needed to be protected.

In 1893, the WCTU and the New York Committee for the Suppression of Legalized Vice formed the American Purity Alliance. The President of this new organization, Aaron Macy Powell, said this at the beginning of his presidential address:

Purity is fundamental in its importance to the individual, to the home and to the nation. There can be no true manhood, no true womanhood except as based upon the law of Purity. There can be no security for the home, there can be no home-life in its best sense, except as it is based upon the law of Purity. There can be no true prosperity, there can be

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64 Ibid., 9-10.
no perpetuation of a nation except as its life is based upon the law of Purity. Impurity is
destructive alike to the individual character, of the home, and of the nation.\textsuperscript{65}

Purity, here, is associated with the personal, with the home, and with the country as a whole.
Each of these spheres rests upon purity as an ideal. It is also foundational to essentialist ideas of
what it means to be a man and a woman. For the WCTU, purity meant that the structures of
society were intact and that proper social relationships were upheld. However, the WCTU was a
paradoxical organization that was both revolutionary in its promotion of a feminist agenda that
stressed the need for the reform of women’s place in society, including the need for women’s
education and voting rights, and traditional in its belief that women needed to be protected from
men from the safety of home life.

Besides the WCTU, another leader in the Victorian purity and social reform movement in
America was Anthony Comstock, who was mostly concerned with the unhealthy effects of
obscenity and vice. Comstock was responsible for laws that prohibited the distribution of
pornography and information on birth control through the mail. His main goal was to protect
children and youth, stating that this protection should start with the home, where mothers should
keep a close eye on their children. In his book, \textit{Traps for the Young}, Comstock threatens that
obscenity of any kind leads to immorality, crime, lunacy and even death (especially as a
consequence of excessive masturbation).\textsuperscript{66} Comstock’s other cause was to keep immigrants out

\textsuperscript{65} Aaron M. Powell. Document 19: “The President's Opening Address,” in \textit{The National Purity

\textsuperscript{66} Anthony Comstock, \textit{Traps for the Young} (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, Belknap Press,
1967).
of government, claiming that foreigners were responsible for importing obscenity and corrupting politics.67

Nicola Beisel, in her book *Imperiled Innocents*, argues that Comstock’s moral reform movement was not supported so much by the lower classes, but by rich “white-collar” businessmen and the middle-class. She concludes that these middle and upper classes were concerned with maintaining a certain class structure and managing their families. Family networks and alliances functioned to protect and uphold the class structure for future generations.68 Inter-marriage between immigrants and so-called American children and between the lower and middle or upper classes was deemed socially unacceptable. In fact, “miscegenation,” or interracial marriage, was illegal until 1967, although a clause in the Alabama Constitution still stated that a person of African-American descent could not marry a white person until the year 2000.

The legacy of Comstock’s anti-obscenity efforts can still be seen in America. For example, the Communications Decency Act of 1996 attempts to control internet pornography and information on homosexuality and birth control. Beisel notes that in the 1980s, The Leaders of the Parents’ Music Resource Center argued:

Heavy metal poses a threat to ‘our own kids,’ encouraging them to consider inappropriate sexual behaviour, drug and alcohol use, and suicide. Rhetoric about rap music, however, claimed that the music’s consumers were a threat to society. Arguments about rap music conjured up images of menacing packs of Black and Hispanic teenagers creating

68 Ibid., 5-8.
mayhem. Anti-rap rhetoric was devoid of concern that the music would cause its listeners to harm themselves.  

Like the class-conscious parents of the white upper and middle-classes during Comstock’s time, who feared that working class young people were a dangerous influence on upper class young people, these parents in the 1980s and 1990s were also concerned with threats to “their own kids,” be it the internal threat of heavy metal music or the perceived external threat of African-American or Hispanic kids.

In the South, social purity was taken to the extreme in certain circles resulting in overt racial discrimination and persecution. In the 1920s, the Ku Klux Klan had become an influential factor in society and unleashed unspeakable violence on those it did not deem racially, religiously or morally pure. Proponents of the social gospel were labeled “communist agitators” and any attempts to disrupt the status quo were felt as attacks on God’s will. In addition, established social conventions and religious beliefs came to be known as “family values.” Glen Feldman writes: “This [family values] morality served as a foundation for southern society in the same ways that white supremacy, material privilege, and male domination did.” There was an assumption that because the majority of the population was white and Protestant, that this meant that God intended it

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70 Beisel, 9.
72 Ibid.
to be that way. Nancy MacLean also writes about the Klan’s rapid increase in popularity in the 1920s:

> Across the country, the Klan ingratiated itself with solid middle-class white citizens on the basis of its unrivaled commitment to community moral ‘clean ups’... Unnerved by postwar unrest, they looked to the family to provide a model of stability for the rest of society. In “purifying” domestic life, they would rid the wider world of its evils. 73

An emphasis on social purity, family values and the affirmation of the white middle-class as normatively American, helped the Klan find a certain niche in the South. This contributed to further divisions along economic and racial lines.

In the urban centres of the North, women were gathering together in various prayer and missionary organizations, such as the WCTU, and this association by gender fueled women’s reform movements. 74 Jean Friedman argues that in the South, American evangelicals were connected through kinship, which acted as a deterrent to women’s reform there in the nineteenth century. She writes:

> In the South a particular “system of relationships” found meaning and direction in the southern evangelical community. Neighbourhood kinship networks defined

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rural-town settlements throughout the South and preserved the familial evangelical culture of the southern community.\textsuperscript{75}

In the South, women were still most closely tied with other evangelicals through family and kin ties rather than by independent networks centred on gender. By the end of the nineteenth-century, it was still difficult for the small number of southern suffragists to allay the fear that giving women the right to vote in political and religious matters would inevitably lead to the breakdown of the social order and the family.\textsuperscript{76} Southern women, for the most part, still identified more with “community rather than with alien women’s groups” at the turn of the century.\textsuperscript{77} One of the disturbing observations made by Friedman is that any inroads made by the suffragists in the South came from their stress on upholding of white supremacy and the overall white social order.\textsuperscript{78}

10. Gated Communities and the Cold War Era:

The Cold War era from the end of WWII until the 1990s saw some interesting developments in evangelical Christianity and its attempts to guard children and young adults against harmful influences. Eileen Luhr writes:

The key to conservative ideological politics during the Cold War era – whether in the form of anti-communism, law and order, anti-feminism, or culture war – was the

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid., 121.
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., 128.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., 130.
protection of the white middle-class home and family. Discourses about youth and the home dominated the American political, social, and cultural landscape.\footnote{Eileen Luhr, \textit{Witnessing Suburbia: Conservatives and Christian Youth Culture} (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009), 5.}

With communism looming as a potential threat to the so-called American way of life, Americans worked hard to maintain their values and to raise their children in a safe environment. Even now socialism is seen as a threat to the American way of life, for example, this term comes up in debates against public health care. It appears that the underlying fear is that taking on the responsibility of the public welfare of all citizens will lead to the diminished entitlement and treatment of the chosen few. This attitude that is harbored primarily by Republicans, but also white middle-class people from both parties reflects the Calvinistic worldview that has left an indelible mark on American self-perception.

\textit{Time} magazine recently published an article called “The New Calvinism” which says that Calvinism has made a comeback in American evangelical circles with the overtly Calvinistic messages of mega-church pastors such as Minneapolis Baptist minister John Piper and Seattle-based preacher Mark Driscoll as well as head of the Southern Seminary of the Southern Baptist Convention, Albert Mohler. Even Ted Olson, the editor of \textit{Christianity Today}, says that the “energy and passion” of the Evangelical world comes from this New Calvinist surge.\footnote{David Van Biema, “The New Calvinism” in \textit{Time}, March 12, 2009.} This Calvinistic preferential option for the Christian elite, as predestined by God, contributes to the fear of others who might pollute the inner circle of the blessed.

In the 1960s and 1970s, suburban neighbourhoods were formed across America. The suburbs became a place of refuge from the ills of the city like crime, poverty, and
overpopulation. However, it was certain people who were drawn to the suburbs, people who also valued the idea of the home as a haven from the world and the embodiment of an ideal, pure structure. The suburbs are largely white, middle-class and Republican. Luhr writes:

> Drawn by the populist rhetoric of suburban political culture that emphasized “meritocratic individualism” while it ignored structural inequalities in American society, suburbanites gradually became increasingly Republican during the late twentieth century. While the suburban vote in 1960 slightly favored Republicans, by 1988, suburbanites – constituting 48 percent of the electorate – favored Republicans over Democrats 28 to 20 percent. In 2004, Republican George W. Bush dominated the outer suburbs...by winning ninety-seven of the nation’s one hundred fastest-growing counties.  

Bush helped to rekindle a kind of sacralization of the “typical” American home that mirrored the Victorian ideal of the private domestic sphere as a microcosm and foundation of the nation as a whole. In other words, a good home produces good citizens. Luhr writes: “to conservative suburbanites, the protection of the white middle class entailed not just home values but values in the home.”

In later years, the gated community became a further development in the suburbanization process, although a small portion of gated communities do exist as enclaves in the midst of the urban centres. The gated community, as Blakely and Snyder suggest, is a metaphor for what is happening in the social climate of the broader communities in which they are situated. These gates draw literal and metaphorical boundaries between “us” and “them” for the purpose of

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81 Luhr, Witnessing Suburbia, 6.
82 Ibid., 13.
security against crime and a feeling of special belonging in the midst of dehumanizingly massive urban populations. However, these authors claim that since the 1980s there has been a growing “fortress mentality” in America among the middle and upper classes which promotes a feeling of being threatened by the “outside” world. These walled neighbourhoods host approximately 3 million American families nationwide, and are some of the fastest growing neighbourhoods in the United States. They write:

Gated communities manifest a number of tensions: between exclusionary aspirations rooted in fear and protection of privilege and the values of civic responsibility; between the trend toward privatization of public services and the ideals of the public good and general welfare; and between the need for personal and community control of the environment and the dangers of making outsiders of fellow citizens.

Ideas like “safety” mask delineations that are being made between who is an insider and who is an outsider, by who belongs and by who threatens this sense of belonging. Even the transformation of suburban neighbourhoods into carefully guarded “communities” suggests that some belong and some do not.

In addition to the class separation of those in the gated communities and those on the outside in the urban centres, these gated communities and suburbs have been largely white. The migration from the cities to these communities in the late 1960s and early 1970s was called the “white flight”, meaning the white population left the urban centres in a massive exodus to the

84 Ibid., 3.
85 Ibid.
suburbs. With the “white flight,” the urban “ghetto” became associated with what Dan Quayle called a “poverty of values” and “the suburban home was apotheosized as the epitome of American virtue.” In other words, the cause of poverty and its attending social ills were not structural or systemic, but due to the “bad values” of the African Americans who mainly populated those neighbourhoods. Blakely and Snyder write:

America is increasingly divided by income, race, and economic opportunity. There can be little doubt that the resulting urban problems are part of the stimulus for the wave of gating. The drive for separation, distinction, exclusion, and protection has also been fueled by the dramatic demographic and social changes of the second half of the twentieth century. The original suburban movement was based in nostalgia for peaceful small town life and separation from the problems of industrialization. In the middle of the century, suburbs expanded with the affluence of a new middle class and their flight from the poor and minorities living in the inner cities.

The family home seems to be a “nostalgic” longing for a more rural existence sometime in the indeterminate past, but the structuring of the family home in this way also has future, not just historical, motivations. The premillennialists are waiting and preparing themselves for the return of Christ and his ushering in of a new era, therefore, the gated community, or suburban neighbourhood, function as a kind of protective bunker until that time.

A vast number of these white middle-class suburban and gated families have been and are evangelical, a demographic that fits the overall religious identity of the nation. 75% of

86 Eileen Luhr, Witnessing Suburbia: Conservatives and Christian Youth Culture, 9-10.
87 Edward James Blakely and Mary Gail Snyder, Fortress America: Gated Communities in the United States, 144.
Americans are white; almost 80% of Americans still identify themselves as Christian. Approximately two-thirds of these are Protestant and the majority of these Protestants self-identify as Evangelical.\(^88\)

11. Home School

The home itself can become a gated community. The virginity pledge and purity ball subculture within American evangelicalism represent an interesting case of faith and piety in the midst of secularity that is often centred on home and family. Many of the young girls who attend purity balls attend Christian schools or are homeschooled, or are at least encouraged to befriend only other Christians who have similar values if they go to public schools. A girl’s purity must be protected, therefore her environment and her external influences must be carefully structured and monitored.

With homeschooling, the public becomes private. The U.S. Department of Education reported that by 2007, 1.5 million children were homeschooled,\(^89\) and the U.S. Census Bureau estimates that this number is growing by fifteen to twenty percent every year.\(^90\) The National Household Education Surveys (NHES) of 2003 and 2007 said that the three main reasons that parents give for homeschooling are: concern about the school environment (88%); to provide religious education (83%); and “dissatisfaction” with the

teaching at other schools (73%). The majority of these homeschooled children belong to suburban communities. A Homeschool Legal Defense Association spokesman Ian Slatter said that “the majority of home-schoolers self-identify as evangelical Christians.” In fact, a study of homeschooling families reported that more than 90% of homeschooling mothers and fathers self-identify as “born-again” Christians. Slatter confirms that the leading homeschooling science textbook in its “History of Life” chapter is anti-Darwinian and said that “most home-schoolers will definitely have a sort of creationist component to their home-school program.”

The home becomes a sacred space which functions as both church and school. Colleen McDannell writes:

The Christian worldview is a worldview of judgment and division. Ideologically, there is a fundamental division between the Christian and the non-Christian. Spatially, there is a division between the home and the world. Through homeschooling, Christians demonstrate their commitment to separating themselves from evil and constructing the good.

The home school, like the gated community, draws boundaries between us and them, between Christians and the world, between the religious and the secular. There is a

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91 http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oii/nonpublic/statistics.html June 2010 (accessed).
93 http://www.foxnews.com/us/2010/03/06/home-school-texts-dismiss-darwin-evolution/?loomia_ow=t0:s0:a4:g4:r2:c0.000000b0:z5 June 2010 (accessed).
premillennial, Calvinistic belief that children must be protected from Satan’s influence as long as possible. Many of the purity balls attendees are homeschooled girls whose sexuality is also being protected by their fathers. The Christian home and family are sacred institutions that do not prepare children for interaction with the world, but teach them to fear it and refrain from participation with others who are different.

Premillennialism appears in the private, isolationist, protectionist stance, and the aggressive-defensive position of trying to win souls for Christ. Part of the latter has influenced the way some Evangelicals approach education. Not all Evangelicals want their children to be homeschooled. Some want to protect their children from within the public sphere by promoting their Christian family values in public schools. Abstinence-education-until-marriage is one such example of this aggressive-defensive approach to the non-Christian world.
CHAPTER II

The Politics of Sex Education in America

A young man’s natural desire for sex is already strong due to testosterone, the powerful male growth hormone. Females are becoming culturally conditioned to fantasize about sex as well.

~ Coleen Kelly Mast, Sex Respect: The Option of True Sexual Freedom

Protestant Christianity has always impacted social policy and education in the United States, despite the American commitment to the official separation of church and state. One way that Protestantism has influenced public life can be seen in the enormous ideological and financial support of abstinence-only-until-marriage sexuality education programs in the public school system since the 1980s.

Despite spending the most money on abstinence education and legislation in the developed world, the United States still has one of the highest rates of abortion, sexually-transmitted diseases and teen pregnancy.\(^1\) It seems that abstinence-only programs are not meeting their goal to reduce these problems.\(^2\) If this has proven to be an ineffective way of preventing pregnancy and disease over the nearly 30 years since their inception, then why did the government continue to fund these programs at a rapidly increasing rate? I propose that one of the main reasons is that behind the concern for the health and welfare of young people, there is a religious ideology that is concerned with maintaining what it


sees as the cornerstone of American society – the traditional nuclear family. Therefore, virginity and abstinence, for conservative evangelical Americans, cannot simply be understood as a personal moral end in itself, but must be considered as a means toward ensuring the reproduction of traditional families.

1. Teaching Abstinence and Family Values: The political context

The sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s caused a backlash from religious and social conservatives. Powerful organizations such as Focus on the Family, led by James Dobson, arose in the late 1970s with a mission to “nurture and defend the God-ordained institution of the family and promote biblical truths worldwide.” Focus on the Family’s website articulates its work in the following way: “We support families as they seek to teach their children about God and His beautiful design for the family, protect themselves from the harmful influences of culture and equip themselves to make a greater difference in the lives of those around them.”

Numerous national faith-based organizations such as the Christian Coalition, Concerned Women for America, Family Research Council, Traditional Values Coalition, and the American Family Association (AFA) stress the importance of the family to the well-being of the nation. For example, the AFA’s chief concern is the “preservation of marriage and the family,” which it enacts through lobbying for stricter censorship laws, and encouraging anti-abortion and anti-same-sex marriage legislation, instead of focusing on other possible family-related issues such as affordable child-care, contraception as a means of responsible family-planning, and improved

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parental leaves. Its mission statement is: “The American Family Association exists to motivate and equip citizens to change the culture to reflect Biblical truth.” In addition, part of its philosophical statement reads: “A culture based on Biblical truth best serves the well-being of our country, in accordance with the vision of our founding fathers.” There is a firm belief that the country has been founded on the Bible and that the nuclear family is a part of this founding spirit.

The fight to protect the biblical family as crucial to the health of the nation raises the contentious issue of how much of a wall really separates church and state in America. Schools are often the battleground upon which issues of church and state are fought. Randall Balmer argues that one of the reason why the Religious Right re-entered the political sphere in the 1970s, after the 1925 Scopes Trial prompted fundamentalist Christians to retreat to their own private affairs, was because of issues pertaining to education, not the overturning of anti-abortion laws.

Balmer describes his experience at a meeting of prominent leaders of the Religious Right in 1990, including the head of the Christian Coalition, representatives from Focus on the Family, the Southern Baptist Convention, head of the American Family Association, and Paul M. Weyrich, head of the Free Congress Foundation. Balmer recalls some of Weyrich’s comments:

The Religious Right did not come together in response to the Roe decision. No, Weyrich insisted, what got us going as a political movement was the attempt on

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the part of the Internal Revenue Service to rescind the tax-exempt status of Bob Jones University because of its racially discriminatory policies.  

Balmer reports that there was a common agreement with Weyrich’s statement that the Religious Right really came together as a political movement for the purpose of protecting the rights of private schools from government participation. However, if the government would not honour the rights of the evangelical subculture, then evangelicals would have to make their voices heard in government and on school boards. It was in this context that the Moral Majority took shape.

Editors Jim Wallis and Wes Michaelson wrote an article for their left-wing evangelical magazine *Sojourners*, in which they name Bill Bright, founder of Campus Crusade for Christ, and Arizona Representative John Conlon as having worked together to secretly galvanize “born again” Christians into taking public office in an attempt to Christianize the government. Wallis tried to meet with Bright to confirm his information and Bright reportedly told him that he would “destroy” him if he published the article. By 1979, however, the Moral Majority, formed by Baptist preacher Jerry Falwell, became a powerful collection of conservative evangelicals and fundamentalists that were transparent in their goal to politicize conservative Christianity.

In 1965, Falwell begged with those ministers and religious leaders who were supporting the civil rights movement to switch their focus to “the pure saving gospel of

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Jesus Christ.”¹⁰ Instead of worrying about changing societal conditions through social reform, the Moral Majority encouraged evangelical Christians to work at preserving the values of the traditional Christian family. It also believed that it represented the beliefs and values of most Americans. By 1980, it claimed a membership of more than 50 million evangelicals and social conservatives of other faiths and denominations, even Catholics and Jews, and claimed to have registered four million new voters for the 1980 election, therefore, it felt that it had the right to bring these beliefs and values to bear on public policy.

The Moral Majority was known as the “pro-family movement” that tried to fight against the “moral permissiveness” that had been degrading the American dream of a nuclear, suburban family with a bread-winning father and a stay-at-home mother. At one rally in 1979, the Texas televangelist James Robison told the crowd: “I’m sick and tired of hearing about all of the radicals, and the perverts, and the leftists, and the communists coming out of the closet. It’s time for God’s people to come out of the closet, out of the churches, and change America.” Ronald Reagan was in attendance at this rally and after observing this speech said: “I and many others have felt a new vitality in American politics…I endorse you and what you are doing.”¹¹

The increasingly vocal Moral Majority exercised its substantial influence on President Reagan during his two terms in office. However, once elected, Reagan

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prioritized economic concerns over some of the social issues of the Religious Right to
which he had promised to attend. In his first term, Reagan focused more on AIDS
treatment and prevention than on passing antiabortion laws. This incensed the Right, but
many of them kept supporting him. Before he ran for President, Reagan had been
divorced and remarried and did not attend church regularly, but many people took him at
face value when he made strong claims about his evangelical faith during his presidential
campaign.

By the end of the 1980s, parts of the Moral Majority had morphed into what came
to be known as the Christian Coalition. They appealed more and more to the Protestant
Christian community, hence the movement from then on could be called the Christian
Right rather than the Religious Right. Despite some of their claims of accepting that
America is a civil society with a pluralistic religious citizenship, the Christian Coalition
espouses a belief that America has a covenantal relationship with God, not unlike the
Jewish covenant with God.

The idea of a “Christian America” is steeped in nostalgia for former golden
moments in American history, in particular, the time of the Puritans and the founding
fathers, and the era immediately following World War II. Many historians of American
religion, such as Mark A. Noll, Nathan O. Hatch, and George M. Marsden, dispute the
idea that there ever really was a Christian America as such, since America has never

12 Dan Gilgoff, The Jesus Machine: How James Dobson, Focus on the Family and Evangelical
America are Winning the Culture War (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2007), 85-87.
13 Ruth Murphy Brown, For a “Christian America”: A History of the Religious Right (Amherst, NY:
Prometheus Books, 2002), 17.
“[reflected] the ideals presented in Scripture.”14 Christian Coalition supporters such as Pat Robertson, on the other hand, are firm in their conviction that any gap between religious “ideals” and “historical realities”, such as the egregious treatment of Native Americans, are “sinful aberrations”, not the norm in America’s past and present.15 When Robertson ran for president in 1988, his slogan was “Restore the Greatness of America Through Moral Strength.”

A Christian Coalition fundraising letter asked: “will America return to the vision of our nation’s founding fathers – of limited government, respect for family, reverence for God, and an affirmation of the moral and spiritual values which made America great?”16

The political arena has always been one that is fraught with ambivalence for conservative Christians. On the one hand, they want America, as a nation, to reflect their values and be “one nation under God,” but they also want “limited government” at the same time, so that they can conduct their lives and their institutions with freedom. This ambivalence is never more clearly expressed than when issues of religion and education arise, such as Bob Jones University’s right to racially discriminate against which students to admit and in later years which students were not allowed to date according to skin colour.

A large part of Ronald Reagan and the Republican party’s success in the 1980 and 1984 elections was due to the perceived breakdown of traditional family values,

16 Quoted in Justin Watson, 94.
including gender role confusion, and a backlash against the results of the civil rights movement. For example, the American South had historically been primarily Democratic in political alliance, but the issue of family values was one of the key factors in its swing to the Republican Party after Jimmy Carter’s presidency. Thomas Byrne Edsall and Mary D. Edsall write:

From 1968 to 1980, the white South had been the driving force in the realignment of presidential politics, the leading indicator of a national trend. In 1984, the precincts in white, working-class neighbourhoods in the urban North joined the South in propelling a presidential realignment, as the eroding Democratic loyalty of these voters transformed itself from ambivalence to outright rejection. The 1984 election demonstrated that the policy agenda developed by the Reagan administration once in office – an agenda designed to sustain the racial and economic polarization that had emerged in force in the 1980 election – had worked to nurture and enlarge the Republican presidential voting base established in 1980.17

Edsall and Edsall argue that racial and economic divisions already in place were widened during the Reagan years, but that the Reagan administration successfully did so without using blatantly racial rhetoric.18 This allowed certain prejudicial attitudes to flourish without recrimination precisely because they were not blatant. Many Southerners who had typically been Democrat, switched to Republican in the 1970s and 1980s as

18 Edsall and Edsall report that in 1986, 56% of black voters perceived Reagan’s policies as racist.
Republicans embraced conservative moral positions. By the end of the 1990s, 87% of Christian Coalition supporters voted Republican, while only 22% voted Democrat, a complete reversal of Southern party support after World War II.\textsuperscript{19}

In an attempt to understand how Republicans had gained so much popularity and managed to persuade historic Democrats to support the Republican party, Bill Clinton studied Edsall and Edsall’s book, and instead of making efforts to counter this mobilization of the white population by continuing to focus on the needs and voices of minority communities, he channelled much of his energy into winning back the white vote.\textsuperscript{20} One could argue that Democrats, until perhaps Barack Obama’s campaign, have spent the last three decades trying to catch up to and even imitate the methods and aims of the Republican party. One example of this is Clinton’s decision to allot an enormous increase in funds to abstinence education in public schools.

2. \textit{Ronald Reagan and The Adolescent Family Life Act}

In 1981, President Reagan and the U.S. Office of Population Affairs initiated the Adolescent Family Life Act (AFLA), which received 11 million dollars from the federal government to promote chastity and prevent teen pregnancy by funding the public teaching of abstinence as the sole sexual option for teenagers. The first curriculum

\textsuperscript{19} Brown, 23.
contracts were awarded almost exclusively to conservative Christian organizations.\textsuperscript{21}

In an interview with White House Newspaper Correspondents, in April of 1987, the last year of his second term, President Ronald Reagan was asked about his pronouncements about bringing back the teaching of moral values in public schools, particularly in light of the rampant spread of AIDS. President Reagan’s response was as follows:

How do you start talking about sex to children and to young people without the moral side of that question being brought up? Just treat it like a physical thing, such as eating a ham sandwich? And too much of this is going on. So, when it was proposed that such things as preventives and so forth should be recommended to the children, I said that along with that should go the moral teaching of what has always been a part of morality and that is abstinence. There is one of the Ten Commandments that deals with that particular problem. And at the same time, recognizing that there are those who are not going to abstain, all right, then you can touch on the other things that are being done. But I would think that sex education should begin with the moral ramifications, that it is not just a physical activity that doesn't have any moral connotation.\textsuperscript{22}

Reagan is clear that values should be taught in the school system when it comes to sexuality, and that those values come from the Judeo-Christian Ten Commandments. Furthermore, any mention of “other things that are being done” (perhaps referring to the


\textsuperscript{22} http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1987/042887e.htm July 2010 (accessed).
promotion of condoms) is thrown off as a side comment that does not warrant much attention.

In 1983, the American Civil Liberties Union filed a lawsuit against the AFLA for violating the separation of church and state, calling it “a trojan horse smuggling in the values of the Christian Right.” Since then, all AFLA sexuality education programs must by law: be free of religious content and references; be medically accurate; respect the freedom of teenagers to make contraceptive choices; and not allow the use of religious sanctuaries for any AFLA-sponsored activities. In response to the tightening of standards prohibiting the use of overtly Christian agendas in public schools, the Christian Right has made an increasing effort to obtain seats on public school boards. The Southern Baptist Convention spearheaded The Christian Sex Education Project in 1987 that provided its own sex educational resources and lobbied for an increase of the teaching of abstinence-only in public schools.

In 1992, a few conservative Senators managed to dictate a decision that denied funding for a survey called the American Teenage Study on adolescent sexual behaviour. Lisa Remez writes: “Despite warnings that ideology was dictating science, the conservative leadership succeeded in casting these endeavours as ‘reprehensible sex surveys’ only undertaken ‘to legitimize homosexuality and other sexually promiscuous..."
The lack of comprehensive sexuality education and funding is arguably leading to an increased, not decreased, rate of sexually transmitted diseases. Remez, among others, argues that only sexual intercourse is considered sex by teens, therefore, they can engage in oral and anal sex without giving up their physical and moral status as virgins. She suggests that more comprehensive sexuality education in schools would contribute to a decrease in STDs.

In 1996, during Bill Clinton’s presidency, Title V of the Welfare Reform Act allocated an additional 50 million dollars per year to abstinence-only school programs and George W. Bush more than tripled these funds during his presidency. Part of the funding arrangement is that the state must match every 3 dollars of 4 dollars contributed by federal funding. Both the AFLA and the Welfare Reform Act were accepted quietly without floor votes, hearings or public debate. Title V stipulates that for an abstinence-only curriculum to receive funding in public schools, it must:

A. Have as its exclusive purpose teaching the social, psychological, and health gains to be realized by abstaining from sexual activity

B. Teach abstinence from sexual activity outside marriage as the expected standard for all school-age children

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26 Remez, 298.

C. Teach that abstinence from sexual activity is the only certain way to avoid out-of-wedlock pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, and other associated health problems

D. Teach that a mutually faithful, monogamous relationship in the context of marriage is the expected standard of sexual activity

E. Teach that sexual activity outside the context of marriage is likely to have harmful psychological and physical effects

F. Teach that bearing children out of wedlock is likely to have harmful consequences for the child, the child's parents, and society

G. Teach young people how to reject sexual advances and how alcohol and drug use increases vulnerability to sexual advances

H. Teach the importance of attaining self-sufficiency before engaging in sexual activity

These stipulations are clear ideological statements about the normativity and ideal place of traditional marriage as the only acceptable context within which sex should be practiced. They do not educate young people about safe sexual options, but seek to disseminate very particular moral and social values that have their source in religion.

The Defense of Marriage Act of 1996 was also a part of welfare reform. The majority of Congress was Republican at the time, therefore Clinton felt pressed to sign this bill that defined marriage and spouse as follows:

\[28\] Title V, Section 510 (b)(2) of the Social Security Act.
In determining the meaning of any Act of Congress, or of any ruling, regulation, or interpretation of the various administrative bureaus and agencies of the United States, the word ‘marriage’ means only a legal union between one man and one woman as husband and wife and the word ‘spouse’ refers only to a person of the opposite sex who is a husband or a wife.  

In discussions around this bill, traditional marriage was held up as “the fundamental building block of our society”; that nature and the Judeo-Christian moral tradition commanded or comported with it; that it was the basis of ‘civilization’.  

In 1998, two men sued the state of Alaska for not allowing them their constitutional right to marry. Opponents of same-sex marriage appealed to the sanctity of the institution of marriage as bedrock of American society, while the judge, Peter Michalski said: “The relevant question is not whether same-sex marriage is so rooted in our traditions that it is a fundamental right, but whether the freedom to choose one’s own life partner is so rooted in our traditions.” This statement shows the tension in American constitutional debates between the ideological normativity of heterosexual marriage and the right to privacy and freedom of choice of marital partner. Proponents of same-sex marriage argue that freedom itself is an ideological value at the heart of the American identity. However, freedom of choice seems to be lower on the ladder of priorities than

traditional marriage, as evidenced by the failure of the legalization of same-sex marriage across almost every state in the union.

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act was also passed in 1996. It promoted marriage as a way to cut down on the government’s welfare spending by encouraging fathers to marry the mothers of their children and take financial responsibility for their families. This bill states: 1. Marriage is the foundation of a successful society. 2. Marriage is an essential institution of a successful society which promotes the interest of children.\textsuperscript{32} Marriage, here, is linked with both the health of the nation and the well-being of young people. Nancy F. Cott argues that this bill “[reinforces] normatively the husband’s and father’s responsibility to support his dependents.”\textsuperscript{33} In other words, not only is marriage grounded in traditional assumptions, but gender roles are also essentialized as fundamental to the health of the nation.

Federal abstinence funding was implemented under the Personal Responsibility Act, thereby connecting welfare and abstinence with traditional marriage under federal law. Over fifty percent of American public schools in Southern states and one-fifth in the Northeastern states have accepted money for abstinence-only programs.\textsuperscript{34} The government has spent just under two billion dollars on these programs in schools and in grants to private abstinence programs, despite the fact that surveys show that by far the

\textsuperscript{33} Cott, Public Vows, 222-223.
majority of American parents want their children to have a comprehensive sexual education.\textsuperscript{35}

The abstinence-only curriculum, Sex Respect headed by Coleen Kelly Mast, has been one of the most widely implemented curricula in public schools across the United States. Her public school program has been the recipient of numerous law suits for including “the suggestion that students take Christ on a date as chaperone,” for describing abortion as “killing the baby,” and for teaching students that “premarital sex can lead to anything from selfishness to death.” Homosexuality is referred to in the context of AIDS.\textsuperscript{36} One abstinence-only educator even made the remark that “safe sex (meaning using condoms outside of marriage) equals promoting the homosexual agenda.”\textsuperscript{37}

Patricia Goodson and Elizabeth Edmundson evaluated the content of the Sex Respect school curriculum according to the guidelines provided by the Sex Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS)\textsuperscript{38} and found that the “expected outcomes” of Sex Respect did not reflect SIECUS’ “primary goals” in some of the following ways: no expectation of health and development; no mention of the vulva, clitoris or labia in relation to anatomy; no information about masturbation; no expectation that students learn about childbirth, sexual abuse, or non-heterosexual sexual orientation (beyond the association of homosexuality with AIDS). In addition, there are no provided


guidelines on sexual communication beyond strategies for saying “no” to sex.\textsuperscript{39} Sex is defined as “the personal and physical act of male and female genital union, intercourse.”\textsuperscript{40} The ultimate expected outcome of sexuality education for abstinence-only programs such as Sex Respect, is marriage. The promotion of abstinence is all in the service of a good marriage. Sexuality outside of this expectation is deemed “unhealthy” and immoral.

Sex Respect also teaches that males and females are essentially different and provides a list of these differences in their student manual. It claims that for girls, “being level-headed helps them deal with the sexual aggressiveness of some males,” “tendencies for emotional warmth and closeness can be weakened by a poor father-daughter relationship,” and “girls who aren’t on good terms with their fathers feel an unmet need for male affection.” There is no comparative description of the effects of parental relationships on a boy’s sexuality.\textsuperscript{41}

Since 1996, all of the public school sexuality education programs are accountable to and reviewed by an abstinence organization that is chosen by the government’s Health and Human Services Department. One of the organizations that was awarded this contract during the George W. Bush administration is the National Abstinence Clearinghouse. One of its responsibilities is to develop and implement a program to provide medically accurate training and information to federally funded abstinence-only programs. This same organization that is responsible for the medical health of teenagers, has also led the


\textsuperscript{40} Mast. \textit{Student Workbook}, 6.

\textsuperscript{41} Quoted in Goodson and Edmundson, 206.
fight against making Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) vaccines available to all young girls for the sexually-transmitted virus which causes cervical cancer because getting the vaccine might encourage young girls to have sex before marriage.

Numerous organizations have protested or publicly disapproved of abstinence-only sexual education. SIECUS has done extensive studies on abstinence-only school curricula. It has found that these curricula: omit information on sexual identity and body image issues; rely on fear and shame to discourage premarital sex; present birth control as an alternative to abstinence only in terms of its failure rates; define the family as a married heterosexual couple with children; deem homosexuality “unnatural”; and treat gender stereotypes as scientific fact. For example, women are portrayed as needing financial support, and as being responsible for setting physical limits for men who are, by nature, aggressive and unable to control their sexual urges. In addition, The United States House of Representatives Committee on Government Reform found that 80% of abstinence-only curricula contain false and misleading medical information on reproductive health.42

The assumption that Christian values are common values is apparent in the abstinence-only public school programs, which are supposedly for everybody from any

cultural or religious background. For example, Sex Respect changed its curriculum wording from “God” to “nature” in their statement that “AIDS is nature’s way of making some kind of a comment on sexual behaviour.” Using the word “nature” instead of God does not erase the Christian Right’s agenda, it universalizes it. It says that everyone is in agreement that people should be heterosexual, should not have premarital sex, and should not use condoms, according to the laws of nature. In other words, certain sexual expressions are not only more acceptable from a Christian point of view, but universally healthier and more “natural” than others.

Nature is a socially constructed, ideological term that is used by the abstinence-only curricula to tell students what it means to be “normal.” The National Abstinence Clearinghouse is careful to never refer to itself as a Christian organization on its website or in its literature. If it did, it would not be legally eligible to oversee public school sexuality education programs. Instead, it has a large group of medical experts that help it in its mission to: “promote the appreciation for and practice of sexual abstinence (purity) until marriage through the distribution of age appropriate, factual and medically-referenced materials.” However, I think that it is more problematic to hide religious propaganda behind secular, medical terminology. As we can see from abstinence-only programs and in the research on virginity pledging in chapter 3, abstinence education is not particularly successful at improving the health of young people, in fact, studies show that it may contribute to an ignorance about sexuality that is harmful to health. Therefore,

44 http://www.abstinence.net/about July 2010 (accessed).
while health is promoted as one of the primary motivating factors behind abstinence education, it does not do what it proposes to do and makes no apparent effort to modify its methods. Health, here, is a secular term which masks a religious ideology.

3. Character Education and the Family

Character education programs which are popular in American and Canadian schools teach a “non-partisan, non-sectarian” philosophy to elementary and high school students. There is an effort by American curricula such as Character Counts!, developed by the Josephson Institute, to provide “an educational framework for teaching universal values” and moral guidance for young people of all races, religions and socio-economic backgrounds.⁴⁵

Alfie Kohn is a famous critic of character education because of a number of factors, one of which is that certain values based on conservative Christian principles are being taught, while other more universal values are not. In addition, these specific values are being universalized, like the Sex Respect abstinence curriculum changing “God” wording to “nature” in relation to its teaching about AIDS. Kohn criticizes one character education video for showing teenagers being arrested and taken away in handcuffs with the reason being attributed to the “erosion of American core values.” He writes:

The idea that social problems can be explained by the fact that traditional virtues are no longer taken seriously is offered by many proponents of character

education as though it were just plain common sense. But if people steal or rape or kill solely because they possess bad values -- that is, because of their personal characteristics -- the implication is that political and economic realities are irrelevant and need not be addressed. Never mind staggering levels of unemployment in the inner cities or a system in which more and more of the nation's wealth is concentrated in fewer and fewer hands; just place the blame on individuals whose characters are deficient...What is presented as common sense is, in fact, conservative ideology.  

Kohn argues that it is impossible to escape values in the school system, therefore there is no such thing as values-neutral education. He exposes the conservative ideology underlying character education that places obedience to authority as the highest moral good over a more progressive values education approach that might inspire young people to change unjust societal conditions.  

He uses increased standardized testing as an example of the kind of values currently being taught. Schools are “teaching to the test” and claiming to enforce “tougher standards” for learning and depressing any more innovative practices that challenge students to think independently, critically and creatively.  

While the Josephson Institute develops programs for other community initiatives as well, their rationale for instituting character education in schools is that children are


47 Ibid.

not receiving adequate guidance and that many educators have a bias in favour of “values-neutral approaches” and “may be uncomfortable with abstinence programs.”

The book *Character Education in America’s Schools* asks:

> Why educate for character? Because many homes do not...One half of all children live in non-traditional families, including single-parent families, and “blended” families, consisting of step-parents, grandparents, other relatives, and non-relatives. While many non-traditional families’ environments are no doubt exceedingly healthy, statistics nonetheless link the decline of the traditional nuclear family with rising teen pregnancy, school drop-outs, divorce rates, unemployment, poverty, and just about every other ill in our society.

The United States has had a long history of appealing to the fear that “every ill in society” is attributable to the changing nature of what is considered “family”. There is an assumption at the heart of character education that society is experiencing a kind of premillennial moral decline because the nuclear family is not the only kind of family that is raising children. There are single-parent, same-sex, and “blended” immigrant families whose “traditional” family structure is to include extended family members in their households. However, these families are seen as neglecting to provide moral guidance to the children in their midst.

The traditional Christian family is caught up in a culture war against those “out there” who do not adhere to the same values. The term “culture wars” comes from the

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German *kulturkampf* of the latter 19\textsuperscript{th} century, when German chancellor Otto von Bismarck failed to unite the German principalities into a nation-state. The main source of conflict was between Catholics and Protestants over the nature of public education and its role in determining national moral identity. This term became popular in the American context in the 1920s to describe the growing difference of the perceived values of rural and urban communities. Sociologist James Davison Hunter writes about the increasing polarization of political and cultural liberals and conservatives today. He argues that certain issues like abortion, homosexuality, immigration, popular culture, pornography, privacy, women’s rights and the separation of church and state, have come to define the ideological stances of these two fundamentally different groups of citizens.\textsuperscript{51} One could add sex education to these issues.

In 1992, Pat Buchanan made a speech that came to be known as the “culture war” speech at the Republican National Convention, in which he stated that “there is a religious war going on in our country for the soul of America.”\textsuperscript{52} And during his run in the Republican primary in 1996, he announced:

I pledge to you: I will use the bully pulpit of the Presidency of the United States, to the full extent of my power and ability, to defend American traditions and the values of faith,

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\textsuperscript{52} Pat Buchanan.
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family, and country, from any and all directions. And, together, we will chase the
pursuers of sex and violence back beneath the rocks whence they came.\textsuperscript{53}

Education and sexuality seem to be at the heart of the culture wars and morality is understood,
just as it was in the German \textit{kulturkampf}, as a public affair that should rightly involve politicians
and educators. The paradox is that political conservatives like Buchanan, believe that the
government should oversee and influence something as personal as laws regarding sexual
behaviour, marriage, and abortion, but the private family should be in charge of educating
children about sexuality, as long as they are the right kind of family.

In May of 1992, Vice President Dan Quayle made a speech in response to the rioting that
occurred that year in Los Angeles. He said, “I believe the lawless social anarchy which we saw is
directly related to the breakdown of family structure, personal responsibility and social order into
many areas of our society.” Near the conclusion of the speech, Quayle stated: “It doesn’t help
matters when prime-time TV has Murphy Brown – a character who supposedly epitomizes
today’s intelligent, highly paid, professional woman – mocking the importance of fathers, by
bearing a child alone, and calling it just another ‘lifestyle choice.’”\textsuperscript{54} The public outcry,
particularly from feminists, was enormous. However, this was not just an unfortunate opinion
born from the imagination of a sexist politician. It reflected a popular belief that children are
being raised in inadequate homes which do not attend to their moral development.

In August of 1992, family values was a feature theme of the Republican convention and
again in 2004, The Republican platform read:

(accessed).
Families are the cornerstone of our culture – the building blocks of a strong society. In families, children learn values and ideals, as well as the basic lessons that get them started on a lifelong path of education. We believe that every child deserves the chance to be born and grow up in a loving family. We also believe that while families exist in many different forms, there are ideals to strive for. Evidence shows us that children have the best chance at success when raised by a mother and a father who love and respect each other as well as their children. We also know that family breakdown makes America less stable. To create a sturdy foundation for the strength and success of our citizens and our nation, Republicans support policies that promote strong families… We offer an approach based on our common values and our common hopes. It will lead to a better America, one family at a time.  

While no overtly religious language is used in this statement, there is an underlying belief in the idea of a biblical marriage and what is called the “traditional” family. Conservative political rhetoric relies on the vagary of terms which sound universal such as “common values” and “common hopes” to convince Americans that they are all on the same page – one nation under God - when it comes to morality, particularly in regard to sexuality, marriage and children. Or, if they are not on the same page, they should be. 

The Republican platform also makes value judgments about the family, noting the difference between reality and what is ideal. For example, it states: “we also believe that while families exist in many different forms, there are ideals to strive for.” While this seems to acknowledge the existence of non-nuclear families, it does not condone them as being equal with

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nuclear families. This value assertion is often partnered with the appeal to the well-being of children. The overall message is that same-sex parents and single parents fail to raise their children in the optimal environment for their psychological health, and hinder their chances for success in life and proper moral development. This platform also proposed a doubling of funding for abstinence education in the public schools as a way of encouraging the ongoing inculcation of traditional family values in future generations.

Practicing abstinence is clearly the surest way to guard against sexually transmitted diseases and unplanned pregnancy. However, teaching abstinence as one of a number of sexually safe options provides young people with the resources to make informed decisions and respects their right to make their own sexual choices. If abstinence is presented as the only choice, then there is no possibility of an ethical decision-making process. The challenge, then, is to teach young people how to think ethically, not to dictate what those choices should be.
CHAPTER III

The Virginity Pledge:
Saying “yes” to sex, but not yet

“Sex is the most awful, filthy thing on earth and you should save it for someone you love.”

~ Butch Hancock

This ironic statement represents the contemporary evangelical Christian American attitude toward sex. On the one hand, children and teenagers are strongly encouraged to preserve the act of sexual intercourse until marriage because it is a sin to do otherwise and it will inevitably lead to suffering; and on the other hand, sex after marriage is promised to be an overwhelmingly positive experience, in accordance with God’s plan. Therefore, it is a misconception that evangelicals and social conservatives hate sex altogether. Marty Klein, in his book America’s War on Sex argues that there is a culture war going on between “erotophiles” and “erotophobes.” ¹ Jeff Sharlet also says that there is a “spiritual war against ‘sensuality’” in fundamentalist circles. ²

Evangelicals and fundamentalists who preach the benefits of abstinence are not erotophobes. At one virginity pledge gathering, a facilitator led the enormous group of young people who were pledging that day in the chant: “Sex is great! Sex is great!” ³ This

same message is featured on almost all virginity pledge websites. The wedding ceremony is seen as an event that redeems and sanctifies sexual activity in that something once seen as spiritually corrupt is transformed into something spiritually good and fruitful. In addition, abstaining from sexual intercourse before marriage determines whether or not sexual intercourse will be enjoyable after marriage. In her book, *Sex in Crisis*, Dagmar Herzog interprets this view of marriage:

> No sex is good sex. Marriage is the dividing line. Before marriage, sex will be very bad. After marriage, sex will be very good. An abstinence vow connects you to a promised land of bliss – have no sex before marriage and you will have outstanding sex after marriage.

Therefore, abstinence, in this particular context, does not constitute the opposite of sex – it is the first stage of the sexual experience of evangelical Christians.

In this chapter, I discuss the ways in which evangelical virginity rhetoric aims to protect adolescents from sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancy and to prepare them for successful Christian marriages and families. First, I outline the history of this specific pledge movement. Then, I explore the nature of the virginity pledge and define what constitutes a sexual act in this context. Next, I identify the young people among whom the pledge is popular, their professed reasons for pledging, and the conditions under which these pledges take place. I establish the pledge’s effectiveness at delaying sexual debut and the determinants that lead to either its failure or success and I highlight

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4 See www lovematters com for positive messages about sexual experience after marriage.

5 Herzog, 97.
certain social and psychological themes and issues that arise in connection to pledging such as identity formation, conceptions of in and out-groups, certain gender constructions, and conventional understandings of romantic love and marriage. Throughout the chapter, I argue that virginity pledging must be considered in light of the family, not simply as a private, moral decision that only affects the lives of individuals.

Christian virginity pledging reinforces the cultural normativity of the patriarchal, Christian nuclear family. In addition, the power of sexual abstinence, in its contemporary American context, cannot only be measured by the degree to which it successfully restricts adolescent sexual activity. The discourse of abstinence is active, not simply prohibitive. It aims to produce certain kinds of people and to reproduce certain kinds of families.

1. The History of the Pledge

Throughout the history of Christianity, the intentional choice to be chaste has indicated a high degree of religious commitment on the part of the individual. This choice is made by those who are ideally virgins until marriage and those who dedicate themselves to a lifelong vow of celibacy; a difference which has traditionally separated the laity from the clergy and members of religious orders, particularly in a Catholic context. In addition, purity, chastity, and modesty have been considered virtues that point to a person’s physical, spiritual and moral integrity. However, while celibacy has been important for priests and both monks and nuns, virginity until marriage has typically been valued as a virtue in females associated with the safeguarding of male property. A further categorical difference is that virginity projects its own loss in marriage as its
teleological end, while celibacy is an end in itself, or a sign of a lifelong spiritual marriage to Christ and the church. Therefore, virginity pledging, despite its religious roots, cannot be equated with celibacy, since it must be understood as a stepping stone to marriage and child-rearing and is a commitment meant to be honoured by all lay Christians.\(^6\)

In a culture where sexual promiscuity and an early age of sexual debut is common; in which sexually transmitted diseases like HIV/AIDS, Human Papilloma Virus (HPV), Chlamydia, Gonorrhoea and other issues such as teen pregnancy continue to be enormous problems; abstinence proves to be one solution – a solution which also suits the spiritual and moral agenda of the Christian church. Numerous faith-based, private and government-sponsored organizations have taken up the cause of sexual abstinence and spent billions of dollars on diminishing these various health and social hazards. In this chapter, I will focus on the private sphere and faith-based projects which sponsor virginity pledging.

In 1993, the Southern Baptist Convention and its LifeWay Christian Resources ministry initiated its sponsorship of the virginity pledge program entitled True Love Waits, a nation-wide and eventually international movement encouraging adolescents to publicly pledge their virginity until marriage. As of 2001, more than 2.5 million young people had made these pledges at rallies, local youth group events, college campuses and over the internet to this day.\(^7\) Parents are often invited to attend these events with their children and to witness their pledges, participating in ring ceremonies, similar to weddings, in which the parents place a ring on their child’s hand as a symbol of his or her promise to them, to God, to his or her future spouse and children and to

\(^6\) For a comprehensive, global survey of celibacy, see A History of Celibacy by Elizabeth Abbott (Toronto: HarperCollins, 1999).

Christian friends. The True Love Waits ring presentation within the commitment ceremony reads: “Believing that true love waits … I make a commitment to God, myself, my family, my friends, my future mate, and my future children to a lifetime of purity including sexual abstinence from this day until the day I enter a biblical marriage relationship.”

A biblical marriage, here, means a marriage between a man and a woman, as sanctioned by God in the Bible. In other similar commitment ceremonies, it is only adolescent girls who pledge their virginity to and receive rings from their fathers at events called purity balls.

These ceremonies strongly suggest that a young person’s virginity is not a private but a public affair and the fact that parents are so heavily involved further suggests that a young person’s virginity is also a family affair. One father, a jeweller, designed a one-of-a-kind ring for his daughter, decorated with two sapphires representing two watchful eyes. While this public and familial involvement, on the one hand, connotes community support and encourages a sense of accountability in the pledger, it also conjures up a more insidious atmosphere of surveillance and paranoia, exemplified by the sapphire ring’s ever “watchful eyes.”

Sociologist Peter S. Bearman co-designed the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, a section of which focused on virginity pledging and its effectiveness at postponing first intercourse. Bearman states that the pledge movement has been: “[h]eralded in the popular press as a movement of, for, and by adolescents” when it is actually “a movement organized by adults for adolescents.” In other words, while adolescents are attracted to this movement by the

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10 Bearman, Jones, and Urdry, *Add Health*.
11 Bearman and Brückner, 2001, 860.
millions, family involvement, particularly parental, is at the heart of the movement’s origin and continued success. This is apparent in the movement’s rhetoric, which emphasizes “family values.” There are numerous faith-based organizations other than LifeWay Ministry’s True Love Waits that also facilitate virginity pledging and abstinence until marriage programs and events such as the Silver Ring Thing, Project S.O.S., Everyone Is NOT Doing It, Club AC, Project Reality, Sex Can Wait, Teen-Aid and Abstinence Clearinghouse, to name only a few.

2. Pledging and the Nature of Sexual Activity

The issue of defining what constitutes sex is complicated in the pledge movement. True Love Waits says:

Sexual purity includes abstaining from intercourse until marriage, but that is not all it means. Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:27-28). By Jesus' definition, being sexually pure means not even dwelling on thoughts of sex with someone other than a spouse. Until you are married, sexual purity means saying no to sexual intercourse, oral sex, and even sexual touching. It means saying no to a physical relationship that causes you to be "turned on" sexually. It means not looking at pornography or pictures that feed sexual thoughts.13

12 Ibid.
Sex is defined here as something that permeates our thoughts and actions and encapsulates far more than genital intercourse between a man and a woman. 2 Corinthians 10:5 reads: “Take every thought and make it obedient to Christ.” One young man and his male friends wear black bracelets on their wrists called “masterbands” that reminds them not to masturbate or think lustful thoughts. They wear these bracelets as a sign of their accountability to one another and must take their bracelets off if they break their purity vow.¹⁴ Accountability among peers is one way of staying pure as well as group dating and developing relationships with predetermined boundaries and having a purity mentor. Sexuality and virginity, in this community, are not private matters, but are transparent. The wearing or not wearing of the masterband is an example of this transparency.

One popular young author, Joshua Harris, has written a few best-selling books including *Sex is Not the Problem (Lust Is)* and *I Kissed Dating Goodbye* in which he explains why part of his commitment to abstinence includes not even dating or kissing a girl before he is married. In both books he argues that lust is the root of sexual immorality and unhealthy relationships and that one’s focus should be on God and on preparing oneself for a biblical marriage.¹⁵ Jason Illian, another young Christian male abstinence author, disagrees with Harris, believing that there is a middle ground between promiscuity and a totally hands-off dating life and thinks of dating like a training ground for marriage and an exercise in masculine self control.¹⁶

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¹⁴ Sharlet, 325.
Much of the abstinence literature provides guidelines for how to curb lust and to stay out of situations which may lure one into breaking one’s vow of chastity. For example, the website Modesty Zone marketed for “good girls in hiding, everywhere” suggests various ways for girls to dress modestly in order to fend off lustful glances\(^\text{17}\) and Brio magazine for teen girls sponsored by Focus on the Family has numerous articles on how to dress in a pure way so as not to turn boys on.\(^\text{18}\) However, lust is an interesting problem in the pledge movement. Many of the popular websites feature celebrities such as numerous beauty pageant winners, former Sports Illustrated swimsuit model Kathy Ireland, Jessica Simpson and Britney Spears who are (or who were) spokespeople for abstinence until marriage. These stars also cultivate images which are precisely meant to invoke lustfulness.

Britney Spears, in particular, publicized the “jewel” of her virginity as a strategy to attract male attention. One businessman made an offer of $7.5 million to be Britney’s sexual “first.” Her agent, rather than keeping this private offer under wrap, advertised it in a newspaper. In other words, Britney’s agent acted as her virginity pimp for the purpose of selling records.\(^\text{19}\) The American pop culture image of virginity is not only one which attempts to modestly deflect prurient attention. It is also a sexy young body wearing skimpy clothes that says you should look and you should desire, but you cannot touch.

Focus on the Family also puts out Breakaway magazine for teen boys, which provides tips on how boys can develop character and learn how to strengthen their will power in the face

of temptation. The gender stereotyping is obvious, that boys can barely control their lust or their sexual advances when faced with a girl who is immodestly dressed; stereotyping, which we will see in the next chapter, finds its way into sex education in the public schools.

Despite the seemingly broad characterization of what constitutes sex or sexuality in the abstinence movement, sex is always ultimately defined as genital intercourse between a man and a woman. I come to this conclusion based on who appears to constitute a virgin in this context and who does not and on Bearman’s evidence of actual, not ideal, sexual behaviour among pledgers. It is clear from all of the abstinence literature, even the literature that warns against lustful thinking and even mild forms of sexual touching, that a virgin is someone who has not had sexual intercourse. And, a pledge is not considered broken unless sexual intercourse takes place. For example, a “born again” virgin who takes a vow of “secondary virginity” is someone who has had intercourse but makes a pledge to abstain from this behaviour in the future until marriage, thereby experiencing a renewal of his or her virginity. The label ‘virgin’ does not apply to young people who have had a few lustful thoughts or even experimented with varying degrees of mild or heavy “petting.” However, the word “purity” rather than virginity seems to apply to the range of sexual thoughts and expressions, i.e. “impure thoughts” or “pure fashion.”

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21 Brio and Breakaway magazines are currently going through a transition in ownership from Focus on the Family to Kor Ministries, run by Ryan Dobson, Focus on the Family founder James Dobson’s son. See http://korners.com
22 There are some problems with the Add Health longitudinal study by Bearman et al. which complicate (albeit not enough to change the overall conclusions) the accuracy of the findings. Janet E. Rosenbaum analysed the data for unreliability in regards to the retractions of virginity pledges of adolescents from waves 1 and 2 of the study. She found that 53% of pledgers taking having taken part in wave 1 denied having taken a pledge when surveyed in wave 2. Also, those adolescents who broke their pledge were 3 times more likely than those who did not in the 2nd wave. Therefore, the incidence of lying about having taken a pledge in the first place must be factored in when considering Add Health’s data. See Janet E. Rosenbaum, “Reborn a Virgin: Adolescents’ Retracting of Virginity Pledges and Sexual Histories.” American Journal of Public Health, 96, no.6, (June 2006): 1098-1103.
23 Bearman and Brückner, 2001; Rosenbaum.
Impure tendencies or habits in thought and practice are seen as leading to the loss of virginity, therefore those who push the boundaries of purity are in danger of breaking their pledge.

It is imperative to differentiate between what is considered ideal and what behaviours and attitudes are actually pervasive in this movement. Bearman and Brückner’s study of 2005, a follow up to their initial study, shows that there is a significant discrepancy between what it means to be pure, in a perfect world, and what is happening in reality. Their most shocking and interesting discovery is that forms of sexual activity other than sexual intercourse are rampant in the pledge movement. For example, oral and anal sex is more pervasive among pledgers than among surveyed non-pledgers. In other words, pledgers still technically consider themselves virgins even if they are engaging in oral and anal (penetrative) sex. This argument is reminiscent of President Bill Clinton’s claim that he did not in fact have sex with Monica Lewinsky, so technically, he did not cheat on his wife. There is a mixed message about what amounts to sex and what does not. This has implications for sexual orientation as well, in that genital intercourse between a man and a woman is what separates a virgin from a non-virgin. Does this mean that technically anyone who has only had sexual experiences with the same sex will still be a virgin?

3. Who Takes the Pledge and Under What Circumstances?

Bearman, Jones and Udry’s study for Add Health, which includes adolescents who took virginity pledges, was representative of American adolescents from grades 7-12. Their sample

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24 Brückner and Bearman, “After the promise,” 276.
25 90,000 students were surveyed from 141 schools between September 1994 and April 1995; 20,745 of these students were randomly selected for an in-home interview from May 1995 to December 1995;
was a selection of high schools across the country which were “stratified by region, urbanicity, school type (public, private, parochial), ethnic mix, and size.” This study takes into account that adolescents are imbedded in numerous social groups including families, schools, peer groups and romantic relationships which all have an effect on when first intercourse takes place. It also considers differences in gender, age, and ethnicity in relation to these social groups. For example, as teenagers get older, their peer group has more influence while parental influence decreases; girls tend to hit puberty earlier than boys; and different ethnic groups have different attitudes toward sexuality, gender and family relationships.

Other studies show that the family has a significant effect on the initiation of first intercourse, showing that adolescents who grow up in two-parent, biologically intact families with a higher socio-economic status (SES) tend to debut later than those who do not. This is partly due to less supervision in “non-traditional” families and to the possibility that adolescents may perceive that their parent(s) have more permissive approaches to sex. In terms of peer relationships, the earlier and the more frequently an adolescent dates, engaging in behaviour that separates him or her from a group in favour of an intimate relationship, the earlier the sexual

14,787 of these students participated in a follow-up interview between April and September 1996; and from August 2001 to April 2002, urine samples were tested for STDs from 15,170 of the 20,745 students initially selected for in-home interviews.

26 Bearman and Brückner, 2001, 871.
27 Ibid., 864-865.
debut. Other factors such as later onset of puberty, higher intelligence, higher self-esteem, higher degree of religious commitment, interests beyond dating and a higher level of extracurricular participation all contribute to later sexual debut. But which of these adolescents actually take virginity pledges as a way of deliberately postponing sexual debut until marriage? It appears, from Bearman and Brückner’s data, that pledging is mostly a white, middle-class phenomenon with a strong connection to involvement in religious organizations.

The pledges take place at church youth group events, at Christian rallies and music concerts, through the Internet, and due to the efforts of adolescents and adults involved in local pledge and abstinence groups, which are coordinated to some degree by centralized, national leadership. Bearman and Brückner attribute the popularity of pledging to the fact that it is an “identity movement.” They write:

[The pledge movement] provides a frame for self-understanding (and consequently action in pursuit of that understanding) effective only in the context of, and interaction with,
similar others who constitute a self-conscious community differentiated from others. The key to identity movements is that they need the other to induce the “self.”\(^{34}\)

In other words, the pledge community is not one that is homogeneously bound by race, class, gender, cultural ethnicity or geographical location (although certain patterns seem to arise in relation to these classifications, as I mentioned earlier), but by a common idea, set of values and commitment to certain behaviours (or non-behaviours as is the case with maintaining one’s status as a virgin). Similar to religion, this commitment to an ideal transcends such sociological factors to a certain extent, emphasizing, instead, the importance of a single vow, regardless of who one is.

Social identity theory (SIT), developed by Henry Tajfel and John Turner in the 1970s, is defined by “the individual’s knowledge that he/she belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him/her of the group membership.”\(^{35}\) This involves social comparison and the categorization of the world into understandable compartments, which helps the individual to define him/herself as both belonging to a certain group while being differentiated from other groups (i.e. pledgers and non-pledgers). Dominic Abrams and Michael A. Hogg write:

> Individuals’ desire for positive self-evaluation provides a motivational basis for differentiation between social groups [which] is likely to be greater on dimensions of general social value, or of particular importance to the in-group, especially dimensions on which the in-group is stereotypically positive. Thus, to the extent that the in-group is

\(^{34}\) Ibid.

perceived as both different from and better than the out-group, thereby achieving positive distinctiveness, one’s social identity is enhanced.\textsuperscript{36}

A virginity pledge signals a superior moral character to pledgers and non-pledgers alike. Despite the fact that young people are having sex relatively young in the United States,\textsuperscript{37} this does not radically alter the deeply rooted values that still elevate abstinence before marriage to a higher status than pre-marital sex. This is obvious in nation-wide sexual education programs that teach abstinence not only as the best but the only contraceptive option.

Pledgers, as the in-group in this situation, do not appear to fear being ostracized by the out-group – non-pledgers. One reason why this may be the case is that pledging gives adolescent individuals a sense of pride, accomplishment, and self-definition at a time in their lives when they are struggling with identity issues and testing their independence. Adolescence is also a time when peer influence is greater than parental influence. The feeling of belonging and of attaching one’s self-identity to a peer group is possibly the most powerful force in a teen’s life. This is why it is so important that teens perceive the pledge movement to be an adolescent-run affair, rather than something that is initiated and run by parents. However, who one’s friends are is often determined, to some degree, by the parents of virginity pledgers. Michael Farris writes:

\begin{quote}
Jayme, our second daughter, was getting involved in a very close friendship with a girl she knew at ballet. This girl seemed nice enough, but she came from a home that was in great spiritual confusion at the time. One parent professed to being a born-again
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{37} According to Bearman and Brückner’s statistics, 25% of non-pledgers had sexual intercourse before the age of 15, 50% by 17 years and 75% by 18 years of age. Bearman and Brückner, 2005.
Christian, and the other parent yo-yoed back and forth between our church and a church that most evangelicals would consider far outside the limits of biblical Christianity. There was a general lack of stability in the home. All this made me doubt whether I wanted Jayme to be spending a lot of time with this girl.  

Even if peers are a more important influence than parents during a certain period of adolescence, parents are still able to direct their children towards the right kind of friends and away from children who come from “unstable” homes or homes where children’s parents are not the same kinds of Christians as they are, or not Christian at all. It is common for any parent to want their children to have good friends and a positive social environment in which their children can grow in self-esteem and give and receive respect. However, children who are only encouraged to be friends with those who are the same as they are are in danger of developing xenophobic and discriminatory attitudes towards others.

A struggle that contemporary sociologists have noted in critical response to social identity theory is that group membership does not simply lead to a depersonalization and homogenization of individuals in the group. In most groups, there seems to be an equal pull between the need to define oneself as a part of a group and the need to assert individuality within a group. This is particularly salient in America, where patriotic nationalism unites people of all backgrounds under the flag and individualism is a leading social value. Jolanda Jetten and Tom Postmes discuss the “fundamental tension between the individual self and the collective or social

38 Farris, 92.
self” in their essay “I Did It My Way”: Collective Expressions of Individualism.\textsuperscript{39} They write: “group rules can encourage a person to be independent, and individualism (even anarchy) can therefore be a form of conformity.”\textsuperscript{40} They use Polonius’ counsel to his son Laertes “to thine own self be true” as an example of how an individual can be pushed to go his own way, knowing, either consciously or unconsciously, that this rope is tethered. In other words, Laertes knows, to some extent, that his father wants him to take advantage of his freedom within the bounds of what his father considers to be acceptable behaviour.\textsuperscript{41} Therefore, group rules still apply even when individuality seems to be encouraged.

Intentional virginity in the present American context illustrates the tension between individualist and collectivist tendencies perfectly. The familiar commands to “be yourself,” to “follow your heart,” and, in the case of evangelical Christianity, to have a “personal relationship with Christ,” all speak to the overall cultural message that we are free to be ourselves and that whoever these selves are, they are special and one-of-a-kind. The virginity movement says that you should save yourself until marriage and reminds members that each one of them is special and worthy of true love. This exemplifies a kind of collective individualism in which everyone is unique in the same way. Each person is special enough to save his or her virginity for someone else who is equally special, as long as they are similar enough to gain parental approval. There is a sense that if one has multiple sexual partners, that one is depleting one’s specialness.

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., 117.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid.
Optimal distinctiveness theory (ODT) provides a way of thinking about the tension in the dual need to belong to a group and to assert individuality. Attaching to and identifying with the in-group (intracgroup relations), while differentiating and separating oneself from others outside of the group (intergroup relations), satisfies both of these needs.\textsuperscript{42} This theory could account for Bearman and Brückner’s findings that pledges are more effective if the pledgers feel that they are a part of a special small group rather than a large one.\textsuperscript{43} If the group is small, individuals might also feel that their need for personal distinctiveness is satisfied. The strength of identification with the group tends to wane as it reaches too much normativity and popularity. As a group grows, it loses its uniqueness.\textsuperscript{44} Pledgers, as a positively perceived group, want to highlight what makes them extraordinary, while also alienating those that do not share their values. While the pledge movement does attempt to attract new members, promoting the message that abstinence before marriage is a universal commitment that anyone can make, it also suffers from a loss of efficacy and potency the larger it grows. Therefore, pledging works as a social identity movement as long as it maintains its minority status and members cultivate a distinct sense of group identity, while clearly determining boundaries which serve to exclude the majority of others. In this way, pledging participates in the kind of Calvinistic election ethos that I discuss in the preceding chapter.

One way that the boundaries indicating who is in and who is out are established is through branding. Advertisements for merchandise fill the margins of the True Love Waits and


\textsuperscript{43} Bearman and Brückner, 2001, 870.

\textsuperscript{44} For a discussion on the effects of group normativity, see Russell Hardin, \textit{One for All: The Logic of Group Conflict} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).
the Silver Ring Thing webpages. Pledgers are encouraged to purchase bumper stickers and wear logoed baseball hats, watches, bracelets, rings and t-shirts in order to visibly set themselves apart from non-pledgers.\(^{45}\) Pledgers are thus marked as separate and special, participating in a particular group identity which highlights their *difference* from others, while promoting *conformity* within the group. Self-expression and group-expression are often manifested in this way for teenagers through fashion statements.

4. The Effectiveness of the Pledge

On average, intercourse is delayed significantly for pledgers, as compared to non-pledgers, but only by 18 months. Also, of the surveyed adolescents, 25% of male pledgers were estimated to still be virgins by age 25, while only 7% of non-pledgers were. Similarly, for girls, 21% versus 6% were estimated to be virgins by age 25.\(^{46}\) Therefore, pledging does have a noticeable impact on delaying first intercourse. In response to Bearman and Brückner’s study, Marty Klein, a sexuality researcher, marriage counselor and civil liberties activist, writes:

Public ceremonies, Ring Thing, virginity pledges, and so forth sound good, and it’s easy to assume that kids are sincere when they do it. But the idea that 14-year-olds can make commitments that they will honor when they are 19 is ludicrous. Again, there’s no data to support this theory of human development. In fact, 88 percent of teens pledging

\(^{46}\) Bearman and Brückner, 2005.
abstinence have sex before marriage – that is, abstinence fails. And it fails at a far, far higher rate than condoms or any other contraceptive method.47

As a psychotherapist, Klein knows that breaking the pledge can be accompanied by feelings of guilt, shame, and low self-esteem. In addition, pledge breakers can suffer social consequences from their peers, even though many of their peers are also breaking the pledge.

Peer pressure does prove to act as a deterrent against pledge-breaking. Also, age has a great effect on sexual initiation rate. Pledging is simply more successful at inhibiting sexual initiation when the pledger is younger.48 This could be due to the fact that those in early adolescence are not physically or psychologically mature enough to handle sexual intercourse anyway or that their parents’ attitudes are more influential and their physical presence more apparent at this developmental stage compared to the later teen years. In addition, teenagers tend to enter more serious romantic relationships the older they get, which provides more opportunities for sexual initiation.

Other measures of the effectiveness of pledging need to be examined as well. In particular, there are some surprising and alarming statistics concerning the acquisition of STDs amongst pledgers. Pledging and abstinence are promoted as the safest ways to avoid STDs by the virginity movement, however, research shows that “there are no significant differences in STD

47 Klein, 15.
48 Bearman and Brückner, 2001, 897.
rates across any of the pledge groups compared with non-pledgers.”\textsuperscript{49} In other words, pledging does not work to resolve the growing STD problem in the United States.\textsuperscript{50}

There are a number of reasons for this confounding STD rate among pledgers. First, sex is largely defined as genital intercourse between a man a woman, therefore other forms of sexual expression such as anal and oral sex do not technically threaten one’s status as a virgin. In fact, pledgers have more oral and anal sex than non-pledgers. Second, condom use is less common among pledgers than non-pledgers. This is partly due to a lack of education concerning the need for condoms to protect against STDs during oral and anal sex; and partly due to the fact that there is a social stigma surrounding contraceptive methods other than abstinence. Therefore, pledgers are much less likely to use a condom if they spontaneously break their pledges and engage in sexual intercourse, since they are unprepared for this “getting caught up in the moment.”\textsuperscript{51} Another study shows that condom use at first intercourse is a significant indicator of condom use in subsequent sexual experiences.\textsuperscript{52}

Abstinence education which teaches abstinence as the only option to prevent STDs, without mentioning other contraceptive methods except in terms of exaggerated failure rates, fails to protect teenagers from these serious health risks. And, even though abstinence educators have been criticized openly and forcibly for this for years, they do not seem to be reforming their practices significantly. This could be because a concern for physical health is not as pressing an agenda as abstinence educators make it out to be. Abstinence in the private and public spheres in

\textsuperscript{49} Bearman and Brückner, 2005, 274.
\textsuperscript{50} Remez, 298-304.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{52} Shaftii Taraneh, Katherine Stovel and King Holmes. “Association Between Condom Use at Sexual Debut and Subsequent Sexual Trajectories: A Longitudinal Study Using Biomarkers,” \textit{American Journal of Public Health}, 97. no. 6 (June, 2007): 1090-1095.
the American context has more to do with family values and Christian morality than with health and well-being. It simply has to be packaged as a health concern in order to please the liberal population that wants to honour the separation of church and state, keeping religion out of the schools. Therefore, the ineffectiveness of the virginity pledge or abstinence education, in my opinion, is not the only major concern. What is at risk is not only the reproductive and physical health of a nation’s young people, but what kind of people they are being educated to become.

5. Purity balls and Traditional Constructions of Gender

We have seen that parents have a great impact on the timing of first intercourse. White families with two parents and a higher socio-economic status who instill a sense of religious faith in their children produce children whose sexual debut is later than others. Regnerus and Luchies also found that fathers, in particular, have a significant impact on the timing of their daughters’ sexual debut. The same does not seem to hold true for mothers and sons. In addition, girls who perceived themselves as having very close as opposed to moderately close or distant relationships with their fathers were even more likely to postpone first intercourse. Therefore, not just the presence of a father, but the quality of the relationship between father and daughter affects a girl’s sexual habits and attitudes. Girls who were close to their fathers at the time of the study also reported fewer romantic partnerships. This study does not provide much in the way of analysis and interpretation, but its findings are certainly provocative. Why is it that girls,

54 Regnerus and Luchies, 2006, 177.
55 Ibid., 178.
particularly girls who are close to their fathers, are staying virgins longer than others and why is it that they date less than others?

One widespread phenomenon in the United States that honours the relationship between father and daughter in connection to sexual abstinence is the purity ball. These balls are sponsored by numerous organizations such as New Life Pregnancy Centers, Generations of Light through the New Horizon Foundation and the Abstinence Clearinghouse. The latter sponsored one of many annual purity balls in Sioux Falls, South Dakota in 2006. Abstinence Clearinghouse also provides a handbook on how to plan a successful purity ball. It serves all 50 states and has offices in 109 countries other than the United States. The event flyer for the 2006 purity ball reads:

Studies show fathers hold the key to a better future for their daughters. Showing your love today will help her be a better-adjusted person with a successful life and family tomorrow. This night is a dinner and ballroom dance event which celebrates your “little girl” and her gift of sexual purity…Who should attend? This event is for fathers and daughters aged 11 and older. Stepfathers, uncles, godfathers, grandfathers and other significant male figures may bring the young lady in their life.  

Leslee Unruh, President of the Abstinence Clearinghouse said this of Purity Balls: “We believe…that it’s important for fathers to be the first ones to look into their daughters’ eyes and tell them that their purity is special.”  

The safeguarding of these girls’ sexuality is entrusted to

their fathers, who are also responsible for determining their overall sexual identity. Daddy’s sexually pure “little girl” is his most prized possession, her body emblematic of his paternal power and her loyalty to him insurance of the continued future of a “good” family for generations to come.

At the purity ball, fathers and daughters are dressed as if for the prom, or even a wedding. But, unlike either of these occasions, the daughters and fathers are each other’s dates. During the program, fathers are asked to make this pledge to their daughters:

I, (Daughter’s name)’s father, choose before God to cover my daughter as her authority and protection in the area of purity. I will be pure in my own life as a man, husband and father. I will be a man of integrity and accountability as I lead, guide and pray over my daughter and my family as the high priest in my home. This covering will be used by God to influence generations to come.  

In turn, girls are often invited to take virginity pledges, promising that they will abstain from having sexual intercourse until marriage. An example of a daughter’s pledge is: “I make a promise this day to God to remain sexually pure until the day I give myself as a wedding gift to my husband.” To seal the deal, their fathers put purity rings on their wedding fingers as a symbol of their promise. Many of the purity pledge websites, such as The Silver Ring Thing’s site, feature links to jewellers.

Earlier in the chapter, I discussed the feelings of specialness that come from joining the virginity pledge movement. Girls are made to feel that they are priceless gifts whose virginity should be saved as a wedding present for only their husbands. *Gift-Wrapped by God* is an inspirational book by Linda Dillow and Lorraine Pintus that gives young women the message that their purity is a gift from God that must be protected.\(^{61}\) The purity ball also emphasizes that each girl is special and that protecting her purity is a sign of her exceptional God-given qualities.

Another purity ball advertisement reads:

The purpose and vision of this event is for young women to realize how precious they are – that they are very much worth waiting for. With today’s peer pressure, high teen pregnancy rates, absent parental figures, co-habitation and epidemic levels of sexually transmitted diseases it is vital for us to protect our daughters from unhealthy relationships and offer them hope, love and security. A large portion of this hope, love and security is essential to come from their fathers. When that is missing, young women desperately seek to fill that emptiness in all the wrong places.\(^{62}\)

Above this caption there is a photograph of a ballroom filled with fathers in tuxedos or suits slow-dancing with their daughters in elegant dresses and professional-looking hair updos under the shadow of a large cross. The formality of the occasion underscores the import of each girl’s purity and communicates to them how cherished they are by their fathers and God.

Glamour magazine sent one of its correspondents, Jennifer Baumgardner, to Colorado Springs’ Seventh Annual Father-Daughter Purity Ball. She reported that the host, Pastor Randy

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Wilson, started the evening by asking the men “Are you ready to war for your daughters’ purity?” In 2001, Wilson, head of the Generations of Light ministry, co-wrote a book with his wife Lisa which features testimonies of fathers and daughters who have attended purity balls. One father writes:

I have been involved with the Father-Daughter Ball for two year with my daughters, Sarah and Anna. It is impossible to convey what I have seen in their sweet spirits, their delicate, forming souls, as their daddy takes them out for their first, big dance. Their whole being absorbs my loving attention, resulting in a radiant sense of self-worth and identity. Think of it from their perspective: My daddy thinks I’m beautiful in my own unique way…My daddy really loves me!

Lisa Wilson also tells Glamour magazine “I believe if girls feel beautiful and cherished by their fathers, they don’t go looking for love from random guys.” Fathers are encouraged to bring their daughters as young as possible. Many of the girls are at the age when they’ve just started menstruating. The movement believes that it is good to catch girls early before they are even tempted to look for love and affection outside of the family. But, instead of also taking the opportunity to curb the North American eating disorder-inducing obsession with beauty early on, these barely pubescent daughters are encouraged to dress attractively for their fathers and their fathers, in turn, are to foster a feeling of beauty and desirability in their daughters.

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64 Randy and Lisa Wilson, Celebrations of Faith (Colorado Springs: Cook Communications Ministries, 2001), 140-141.
On one purity ball website there is a section for comments from father and daughter participants encouraging others to attend the ball. One father says: “Fathers, it is up to us to plant that seed early and often. Let us take this opportunity to show our daughters that we care.” The metaphor of a father planting a seed early and often in his daughter is an unfortunate one to use in a context rife with incestuous overtones. And, it is astonishing how unself-conscious these organizations are about this outside construal of their beliefs and practices.

6. The Gift Exchange

The contemporary abstinence movement can be interpreted as a reaction against the sexual revolution and the growing prevalence of sexual promiscuity in the United States since the 1960s. This promiscuity is perceived as a symptom of the overall decline in the moral character of the nation and the crumbling of traditional family values by conservative Christians – signs that point to the second coming of Christ, according to premillennialism. Abstinence advocates are giving young people, particularly girls, the message that they are too valuable to be sexually exploited or to ‘give their bodies away’ to more than one person. This message seems positive at first glance. However, upon closer analysis, one could make the argument that the abstinence movement participates in its own sexual exploitation of girls. A girl’s virginity is considered the crown jewel of her metaphorical wedding dowry. Therefore, like the sexualized female body of popular culture, female virginity can be seen as a kind of sexual commodity that is subject to instrumentalization by the family and fathers as the heads of the family.

Jessica Valenti argues that virginity is an auctionable item in American culture. She writes: “Viewing virginity as a commodity – as it was back in the days in which daughters were exchanged as property – lives on...Now fathers participate in purity balls and virginity pledges to maintain ownership over their daughters, even if it’s only symbolic.”

On her wedding day, a girl is expected to give her purity ring to her husband as a sign that she has saved her virginity just for him (despite the fact that her virginity seems to have been preserved for her father previously). Pop-singer Jessica Simpson told her fans: “I promised God, my father and my future husband that I would remain a virgin until I got married.”

Freud writes: “The demand that a girl shall not bring to her marriage with a particular man any memory of sexual relations with another is, indeed, nothing other than a logical continuation of the right to exclusive possession of a woman, which forms the essence of monogamy, the extension of this monopoly to cover the past.”

A valuable, monogamous marriage, in other words, means that even a woman’s past life belongs to her future husband. The father guards a girl’s future legacy until this future husband arrives.

Virginity is saved for the sake of the hypothetical husband, not for the sake of the self. One’s virginity is something one keeps temporarily in order to give as “a wedding gift” to one’s husband. However, the pledge goes even further than promising one’s virginity, saying that a girl is to “give [herself] as a wedding gift to [her] husband.” The message is oedipal in nature -- that little girls are married to their fathers until they wed their husbands. Virginity, as guaranteed by

the token of the purity ring, is the commodity that is exchanged between men; between fathers
and husbands.

Marcel Mauss theorized that social interaction in primitive societies was based largely on
the politics of giving and receiving gifts. Anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss adds to Mauss’
work, contending that marriage is a form of gift exchange and that the exchange of women is the
foundation of kinship structures with women acting as the units of exchange by which men
establish kinship ties. Remnants of this structural system can still be seen in weddings other
than pledge weddings when the father of the bride “gives his daughter away,” essentially
handing her off to the next male figure who will take ownership of her henceforth. This may
seem like a quaint, sentimental tradition to some, but, to feminists, it signifies vestiges of
patriarchal structures which objectify women and treat them like property. Michael Farris
advises fathers:

As your daughter approaches the years when it is appropriate to have a relationship that
contemplates possible marriage, a father’s involvement in helping to check out a potential
suitor is particularly crucial. A father shouldn’t make the choice for a spouse – the
daughter should. But his insights and counsel are critical. Our daughters were well
trained; they knew any initial inquiries from a young man were to be directed to me.

This father has the paternal authority to weed out unsuitable men from dating his daughters.

Even though he appears to give his daughters the choice to choose their own husbands, he still

72 Farris, 84.
has to be the mediator of this choice by telling them which men they could choose from. Also, dialogue must happen between the men before the daughters are allowed to proceed with their romantic relationships.

Friedrich Engels, in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, defines the monogamous, bourgeois family as primarily concerned with legitimacy, protecting property and the preservation of inheritance. In addition, Engels argues that female chastity is essential to the propagation of the bourgeoisie, so that the legitimacy of children can be ensured. Purity ball rhetoric contextualizes a girl’s virginity within the sphere of the patriarchal, nuclear family and stresses that the protection of her virginity will not only serve to maintain her purity, but will contribute to the purity of her family line. The Generations of Light purity ball website reads:

One of the most memorable highlights of the ball is when the fathers stand in the middle of the ballroom and form a circle around their daughters standing all aglow in their lovely ball gowns. The fathers place their hands on their daughters, and together we pray for purity of mind, body, and soul *for generations to come* [italics mine].

Safeguarding the purity of the bloodline is hardly a politically correct concern these days, but the pledge movement, as we see in the above quote, appears to value the purity of future generations, which is ensured by the sexual purity of the females of this generation.

There has been a small attempt to organize an event similar to the purity ball for boys called an “integrity ball.” The Northern Hills Pregnancy Care Center in Spearfish, South Dakota

put on the first integrity ball for mothers and sons in 2007. The speeches encouraged the young men to “raise their standard of integrity,” but they also focused on the kind of girl that they should be choosing as a future wife. One of the speakers, Pastor Luke Baker, said that their mothers were also daughters and that the girls they date are someone else’s cherished daughters.

A “clean” comedian served as entertainment at the integrity ball, making the evening one of “fun and fine dining.” Toward the end of the night, the boys were invited to take a pledge which reads:

I, ______________, choose before God to remain pure in my lifestyle, as I grow toward the goal of manhood, and until such a time that I marry. I will be a young man of integrity and accountability as I strive to be an example to those around me. I will be bold and courageous, no matter what. Today, I choose to seek after the high calling of God in every area of my life.

A number of observations need to be made here. First, there have been thousands of purity balls and there have been only a handful integrity balls, which communicates that purity balls are more important for girls’ well being than integrity balls are for boys. Second, even when boys go to an integrity ball with their mothers, these mothers are portrayed as someone else’s daughter, placing them in a position equal or subservient to their sons. Third, boys are challenged to be grown men with a “high calling” from God who should “strive” for their goals with boldness and

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77 Ibid.
78 Ibid.
courage, thereby giving the message that boys are to be assertive and strong in the face of temptation, while girls are characterized as precious and needing protection from a male other. Finally, instead of invoking a romantic mood like the purity balls, the integrity ball described above featured a comedian who kept things fun and light. In other words, a certain amount of romance is considered socially acceptable for father and daughter relationships and not for mother and son relationships.

In *Every Young Woman’s Battle: Guarding Your Mind, Heart, and Body in a Sex-Saturated World*, authors Shannon Ethridge and Stephen Arterburn argue that evangelical teenage girls are caught in a war for their hearts, minds and bodies. They suggest strategies for how girls can protect themselves from the secular world that is fighting to “rob” them of their purity. They write: “As you get dressed each morning, try evaluating what you intend to wear. Ask yourself: Would wearing this outfit be a loving expression, not causing my brothers to stumble and fall?”  

Girls are given modesty tips on how to keep themselves safe and pure and how to help boys from giving into their sexual urges. They also write: “While a guy gets tempted sexually by what he sees, you are more likely to be tempted sexually because your heart is crying out for someone to satisfy your innermost desire to be loved, needed, valued and cherished.”  

In other words, it is a girl’s *natural* desire to be the object of affection and that is what fuels her sexuality, while a boy’s *natural* desire is to be the lover of the object that he sees.

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80 Ibid., 19.
Fred Stoeker and Stephen Arterburn have written a partner book for male teens entitled *Every Young Man’s Battle: Strategies for Victory in the Real World of Sexual Temptation*. If one compares the two titles of these books, one immediately sees the beliefs at work about how gender difference contributes to sexual desire and expression. Girls are encouraged to “guard” themselves from boys and to direct their desire to be loved into the proper channels. Boys are likened to warriors who must be victorious in their fight against their own lustful natures that are given to them by the “real world” but must be controlled nonetheless.

In a chapter entitled “When Men are Passive...Where are all the Godly Leaders?” Jason Illian writes:

In order to fit into a lot of churches today, a man has to be a khaki-wearing, Starbucks-drinking, minivan-driving, Bible-toting gentleman. He can’t be powerful – he has to be polite. And what testosterone-driven man strives to be polite?! The spirit of power that God has instilled in men has been lost amidst the floral arrangements and choir practices. We have become civilized, and through our gradual deterioration, men have become passive and lost our desire to lead.\(^1\)

Illian also describes being a hero as being a “tender warrior” and “servant leader,” but his description of essential masculinity is that men need to tap into their natural power, while exercising self control. And his description of the church is reminiscent of the Victorian era that suffered from a decrease in male interest in the church due to the church’s

perceived feminization, a trend that I discuss in chapter four. Young men, like Illian, are part of a contemporary move to remasculinize the church and bring strong, assertive, “godly” leadership back into their religious institutions. He argues that “women are looking for kings and we’re showing up as clowns.”

Therefore, he is not only trying to spur Christian men on to be more true to their natures. He is also saying something about women - that women desire men that they can look up to and admire as strong leaders.

Carol Gilligan, in her classic work *In a Different Voice* on the psychological and ethical development of women, asserts that women have a more collectivist or relational psychological make-up. In response to the psychoanalytic theory of gender differentiation, she writes:

For boys and men, separation and individuation are critically tied to gender identity since separation from the mother is essential for the development of masculinity. For girls and women, issues of femininity or feminine identity do not depend on the achievement of separation from the mother or on the progress of individuation…The quality of embeddedness in social interaction and personal relationships that characterizes women’s lives in contrast to men’s, however, becomes not only a descriptive difference, but also a developmental liability when the milestones of childhood and adolescent development in the psychological literature are markers of increasing separation. Women’s failure to separate then becomes by definition a failure to develop.

Puberty, according to this model, is a particularly problematic time for girls, since boys tend to individuate and separate on a profound level, while, as Freud writes, a girl’s experience of

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82 Ibid., 88.
puberty is “marked by a fresh wave of repression.” This limits her ability to form the same mature kind of distinct, independent identity that a pubescent boy forms. However, it is also a necessary stage for girls, since it initiates them into what Freud views as their normal adult feminine sexuality. Unfortunately for girls, their new feminine consciousness is accompanied by a lifelong feeling of inferiority, since they have come to finally recognize the fact of their castration (i.e. that they do not nor will they ever have the coveted penis). Castration is only feared for boys, while it is a reality for girls. In other words, a boy’s greatest fear is that he will become weak and lacking, like a girl. A girl, on the other hand, must accept that she is weak and lacking, placing her in a passive role.

Erik Erikson develops this gender model further, explaining that once a pubescent girl goes through this transformation, she can “prepare to attract the man by whose status she will be defined, the man who will rescue her from emptiness and loneliness” that is caused by the wound of her castration. Adolescent girls, then, come to define themselves through others. Gilligan writes: “the female comes to know herself as she is known.” Men, on the other hand, form their identity before they engage in intimate relationships, thus maintaining the boundary between self and other.

It is unfortunate that Gilligan does not radically challenge Freud and Erikson’s essentialist gender typologies, and that she can end up sounding like traditional gender essentialists like Illian. She accepts Freud and Erikson’s basic theories, only rejecting the

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86 Gilligan, 1982, 12.
prioritization of the male over female type and the view that women are not simply different but a deviation from men. In other words, her work is an effort to honour the relational nature of women as equally valid to the independent nature of men. However, while the theories of Gilligan, Freud and Erikson cannot be used to adequately address the complex nature of current gender difference, their descriptions of the differences between men and women uncannily mirror the current understanding of gender in the virginity pledge movement.

The South Dakota integrity ball encouraged power, self-control and self-knowledge in adolescent boys, while purity balls encourage fathers to be responsible for their daughters’ protection. Daughters, in this culture, are treated as the precious property of their fathers who are directed by the movement to be good managers of this property. Girls, in turn, are expected to be loyal to their fathers, as exemplified in the pledge, and to cultivate modesty in action and dress so as not to invite unwanted male attention (except from their fathers for whom they dress up at the ball). Girls, here, develop their identities, particularly their sexual identities, in relation to their fathers, reflecting their values and honouring their expectations. This method of identity development in relation to a man reflects a woman’s interdependent nature, according to traditional constructions of gender, including Gilligan’s. All this is sealed with the outward sign of a ring, which serves as a brand, like a livestock brand, which lets other men know to whom she belongs. At marriage, girls undergo a transition from being Daddy’s little girl to the good Christian wife. What is utterly lacking in purity ball culture is any sexual wisdom handed down from mother to daughter and female-centred, multi-generational initiation practices.
7. Pure Romance and the Promise of True Love

Heather Hendershot in her book *Shaking the World for Jesus*, notes that there is a fundamental problem in the logic of essentialist gender dichotomies in the discourse of the evangelical chastity movement. On the one hand, certain behaviours and instincts are seen as “natural” for boys, such as an overwhelming sexual drive which makes self-control nearly impossible, while others are “natural” for girls, like the impulse to be passive and to submit to male advances. On the other hand, boys and girls are taught that they should not give in to lust or sexual desire, despite it being a part of their natures.87 Hendershot reports that the True Love Waits conference in 1994 featured different sessions for boys and girls. Boys repeatedly chanted “we are real men!” in an effort to make chastity macho, while girls were “told a sentimental fairy tale about true, eternal love and the achievement of the feminine dream of romance through the preservation of virginity.”88 Separating boys from girls at these events serves as a reminder that even though they are all there to celebrate their commitment to chastity, chastity is categorically different for each sex. Chastity for boys concerns the will and the development of a good character, while chastity for girls ensures that they will be desirable marriage material.

A romantic convention that appears in fairy tales, romance novels and romantic movies in the West is the female fantasy of being “swept off her feet.” These stories often feature strong-willed women who secretly desire to have their agency taken away and

88 Ibid.
their wills tamed by love. They long to be ravished by a strong man who will make them feel beautiful, cherished and safe. This seems close to a rape fantasy, in that young women desire to have the responsibility for their actions swept away from them, so that they are not accountable for making sexually immoral choices. Ravishment can be defined as being “seized,” “carried off” or “removed from sight.” The word “ravish” is etymologically linked to the word “rape” and “rapture.” 89 It is interesting that the word “rapture” is used to describe religious experiences in which the divine comes upon or overpowers the individual, often without his or her consent or bidding. Rapture also has a very specific meaning for evangelical Christians who associate it with Christ’s second coming when the righteous will be whisked up to heaven unexpectedly, leaving their clothes behind, while the unsaved are left to contend with evil on earth. 90 Even the shedding of clothing in the Christian rapture has sexual overtones.

Words such as ravish, rape and rapture all indicate a kind of forceful abduction of the female by the male. In her book Bonds of Love, Jessica Benjamin discusses the reasons why men and women repeat the patriarchal cycle of master and slave in their relationships, arguing that this starts as early as birth, when children’s relationships to their parents as well as the Western psychological model of subject and object are formed, with men dominating as subject and women submitting as object. 91 This model is evident in the gift exchange between men of the woman in marriage.

Hendershot argues that gender essentialist chastity rhetoric that stresses the

89 Oxford English Dictionary.
90 See Tim LaHaye’s best-selling Left Behind fictional Rapture series.
“natural” aggression of boys and the “natural” passivity of girls, plays on perilous romantic stereotypes. She writes:

By constructing a teen body utterly lacking self-control, a body that can only be controlled or cured by a spiritual commitment to chastity, evangelical books, magazines, and videos may not only be dangerous to teen self-image by also may encourage boys to be sexually violent and girls to see submission to sexual violence as natural. Boys and girls who are repeatedly told that at a certain point they are no longer in control may as a result feel less in control, and it may actually be more difficult to stop sexual activity if one conceives of one’s body as a runaway train.  

Of course, evangelical literature openly condemns rape and any obviously violent sexual behaviour, and dedicates a sizable amount of energy in finding ways to honour a girl’s purity, but it is in these subtleties of traditional gender constructions that cause for concern arises. These romantic conventions are so commonplace that they are not sufficiently deconstructed by teenagers, particularly evangelical teenagers.

What happens when these intentional virgins, with all of their romantic ideals, finally get married? They are promised great, mind-blowing sex if they wait, but are not given instruction on how to communicate sexually with their partners in order to form a good sexual partnership that will lead to enjoyable sex. Organizations such as Focus on the Family have been criticized by their own supporters in the past for concentrating too much of their efforts on the prevention of adolescent sexual activity and not enough on

92 Hendershot, 93.
educating engaged couples on what to expect from marriage and sexuality and married couples on how to have a good marriage and meaningful sex life. They have since remedied this to some extent by publishing dozens of Christian marriage guides and how-to books on marital sexuality.

Virginity pledgers still seem to rush into marriage at a young age before they are ready, with unrealistic expectations of marriage and less established finances and careers, which could all lead to higher divorce rates.\textsuperscript{93} Bearman and Brückner found that 52\% of female pledgers who kept their pledge were married by age 25, compared with 34\% of female non-pledgers. Similarly, 45\% of male consistent pledgers were married by 25 compared with 26\% of male non-pledgers.\textsuperscript{94} Social conservatives in the United States are the ones who want to protect the notion of traditional marriage, particularly against same-sex marriage. Yet, in 2003, the Census Bureau reported that it is the liberal blue states that tend to have lower divorce rates, with Massachusetts having the lowest divorce rate of 5.7 divorces per 1000 marriages (a state which has historically been more supportive of same-sex marriage).

The idea of “soul mates” is popular among virginity pledgers.\textsuperscript{95} If there is only one person that one is supposed to marry, then one must wait until one finds that person to have sex. A wedding acts as a kind of guarantee of this idealized, unique relationship. Laura Winner, a chastity advocate, questions the enormity of the expectation placed on the wedding night and honeymoon by young people who wait until they are married to

\textsuperscript{93} Bearman and Brückner, 2001, 861.
\textsuperscript{94} Bearman and Brückner, 2005.
have sex. She argues that one cannot simply “flip a switch” and easily turn off one’s ingrained negative attitude toward sex. She says that a more realistic approach to the potentially mediocre quality of sex in the beginning can guard against disappointment. \(^{96}\)

**8. The Production of Purity**

Gender identities in the virginity pledge community claim to be based on true masculinity and true womanhood, revealing the real God-given natures of men and women. Sexuality and sexual expression are also considered in light of what God intends for human relationships. Unruh of Abstinence Clearinghouse says: “We want authenticity... We want what’s real.”\(^{97}\) What is real and authentic is what is in compliance with God’s plan. If one falls into unreality through society’s corruption, one strays from the right path and from one’s true essence as a human being. In Wendy Shalit’s book *Girls Gone Mild*, she argues that girls really desire to be chaste and to dress modestly, but that the outside world imposes sexual temptations and feelings on them.\(^{98}\) Therefore, the quest for purity is really a quest for what it means to be truly female.

There is a tension in the purity movement between understandings of essence and education. On the one hand, God and nature are given credit for these universal patterns and on the other hand abstinence educators, virginity pledge promoters, fathers and churches are all charged with the task of instilling these naturally given values in young

\(^{96}\) Winner, Lauren F., *Real Sex: The Naked Truth about Chastity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2005), 95.

\(^{97}\) Sharlet, 327.

people. Therefore, what is deemed *natural for* people is also what is constructively *taught to* them. The whole point of evangelism is telling people what they should believe and effecting a fundamental, conversional change in people that causes them to be born again as new people. Shalit posits the current purity movement as a revolutionary rebellion against the new normality of promiscuity in the secular world. However, there is an emphasis on being “natural” and conforming to the group’s internal norms in this movement that seems to contradict any real claim to rebellion or antiestablishment thinking.

Foucault’s trilogy on the history of sexuality was a revolutionary work in that it proposed a new method for looking at sexual practices and patterns. He did not necessarily uncover new historical facts or information, but introduced a new way of interpreting them. Stephen Garton writes: “Rather than accepting sexuality as natural and roles as social, Foucault argued that both sexuality and sexual identity were historical.” For example, Foucault opposes the view that with Freud came a liberation from the Victorian fascination with the science and categorization of sex and perversion, arguing that in fact Freud participates in the Victorian obsession with finding out the “truth” of sex. In addition, Foucault disputes the common understanding of Victorians suffering from a repression of sexuality, when in reality there was a “proliferation of discourses about sexuality” in the 18th and 19th centuries that involved speaking about and categorizing sexuality in myriad ways. He also contends that the categorizing of sexual

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99 Ibid.
101 Ibid., 11.
natures and behaviours by the schools, the church and the medical community made sex into an observable science. This led to an obsession with the surveillance of young people’s sexual habits.

In the early 1900s, Freud convinced the Western world that children are sexual beings. In response, parents, teachers, doctors and religious leaders watched over children to make sure that they were sexually socialized in a proper way. The bourgeois family, Foucault argues, was not so much concerned with controlling the sexual behaviour of the lower classes, but with managing and maintaining and reproducing itself. One of Foucault’s most radical observations is that sexuality as an idea is formed and reformed by historically situated discourses about sexuality. Therefore, even cultures that seemingly repress sexuality are producing a certain kind of sexuality. Victorian sexuality, as an example, was constructed by the bourgeoisie, which aimed to reproduce and protect class structure and proper kinship relations and alliances. The “deployment” of proper sexuality was overseen by the family, which, if successful, would guarantee the reproduction of legitimate bourgeois families.\(^\text{102}\)

The productive theory of sexuality is based on the assumption that identities are socially constructed, rather than “natural” or essential. And socially constructed identities are contingent upon power relations. For example, where sodomy used to be seen as simply an act, it became a symptom of an aberrant homosexual nature in the modern era thereby propagating a belief that sexuality is an essential rather than social aspect of

human beings. However, the Victorian era, through this discourse that moved from sodomy to homosexuality, in effect, created the homosexual person.

The LaHayes and other proponents of today’s abstinence-only-until-marriage programs argue that even talking about condoms or other forms of birth control in school is the same as condoning sex before marriage. The message is that if an educator provides information about safe sex in the classroom it must mean that she agrees with sex before marriage. The LaHayes have lobbied for keeping sex education in the home and out of the schools. This attitude seems to suggest that the act of talking about something has an almost magical causational effect on behavior, which is an ironic perspective for evangelicals with an essentialist, not constructionist, view of human nature.

Gender, sexual behavior and even sexual orientation have been historically created, according to theorists like Foucault. Through a recapitulation of belief and action, historically constituted bodies have become what Butler calls fields of “sedimented” attitudes and practices. It is this process of sedimentation and repetition that has contributed to what conservative Christians see as “natural” dispositions, behaviours and family structures.

I would argue that the conservative evangelical community has created the new virgin and that it has created this virgin to look as if it is a natural and universal archetype that was created by God. Virginity is not an essential state of being, but a socially

constructed status of the unmarried, pure, white, middle-class evangelical young person. The aim of the current abstinence movement is to both protect and reproduce certain types of people and families, namely white, middle-class Christians and to do this it must ensure that young people, especially young women, do not have sex with the wrong people. The incitement to discourse is also felt in the contemporary abstinence movement. It is talked about endlessly at school, at church, at home and with friends. Through this perpetual discourse about virginity, young people learn to create themselves in the image of a virgin, the way God intended it to be.
CHAPTER IV

The Narcissism of Major Differences: Gender and Narcissism in the Culture of Purity

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own; you were bought with a price.

~1 Corinthians 6:19-20

At the purity ball, fathers and daughters attend a ceremony that affirms the place of the father as guardian of his daughter’s sexual purity. The positive attention that is placed on the daughter is meant to add to her overall sense of self-esteem, while providing the father with the satisfaction that he has fulfilled his parental role. However, some psychologists have found that a certain form of overvaluation can lead to unhealthy narcissism for a child later in its life. I would argue that in the purity movement there is a detrimental overvaluation of the virgin daughter, mixed with unresolved father-daughter oedipal dynamics, which both contribute to a particular form of female narcissism.

The purity ball and the larger virginity pledge movement are about more than sexuality. This movement, situated within the religious culture of American Christianity, is about the formation of identity. Bearman and Brückner found that young people who take the pledge do so because it comes with an immediate acceptance into what they call an “identity movement” that builds their self-knowledge and self-esteem, makes them feel that they belong somewhere, that they are special, that they are worthy of true love and that they are a part of an elite group of like-minded individuals. They also found that pledgers tend to associate with other pledgers – both in friendships and dating relationships. This promotes an insider/outsider dichotomy with the peers in their broader
communities that are not pledgers. Finally, they uncovered a paradox: that pledgers feel unique and at the same time unified with other pledgers. All of these aspects of Bearman and Brückner’s comprehensive study lead me to the conclusion that this movement is defined by a narcissistic perception of selfhood and identity.

In this chapter, I apply a psychoanalytic methodology to the phenomenon of purity balls and the new virginity movement. I briefly outline the relationship of evangelicals to psychology in the U.S., including the evangelical respect for psychological “experts” combined with their historical mistrust of Freud’s psychoanalytic methods. I continue my description of purity balls, with reference to firsthand descriptions by involved family members. I challenge the belief that the purity ball is a coming-of-age ceremony, arguing that it resembles what anthropologist Charles-Arnold Van Gennep calls a “negative rite” that seeks to prohibit certain behaviours because of societal taboos, which, in this case, are taboos surrounding female sexuality. Ironically, these prohibitive measures end up producing certain subjectivities rather than inhibiting subjectivity formation. Next, I explore the concept of purity as it is used by proponents of abstinence, and apply psychoanalytic theories of narcissism to their notions of virginity and purity, including Freud’s foundational argument, Lou Andreas-Salomé’s concept of narcissism as simultaneously desiring fusion and individuality, and Lacan’s mirror stage. I argue that instead of being at odds with one another, evangelical virginity advocates and Freud both view the oedipal complex as a “normal” stage in psycho-social development. Finally, I consider penis envy as a possible unconscious motivation behind female narcissism and female virginity and discuss how penis envy is not based on biology, but on a desire for the power that accompanies the symbolic phallus.
1. Psychology and Christianity in the United States

There exists a misconception that all evangelical Christians see psychology as a scientific rival to faith, however Jon H. Roberts makes the distinction between positive Christian attitudes to various psychotherapeutic models and negative Christian responses to psychoanalysis.¹ Early American psychologists such as William James (1842-1910) and G. Stanley Hall (1844-1924), sought to use psychological theories to “refute materialism and preserve at least some role for spiritual values.”² Previously, physicians had mostly attributed psychological pathologies to physical causes, but with the new science of psychology, the mind became a powerful determinant of all manner of behaviours and even physical ailments. This appealed to many Christians who grounded aberrant behaviour in sin or in spiritual distress. There was a divide between liberal Christians and more conservative evangelicals and fundamentalists in regard to the psychology of religion in the early 1900s. Liberal Protestants responded favourably to works such as The Varieties of Religious Experience by James, seeing it as a scientific confirmation of the positive effects of religion on the psyche. Fundamentalists, on the other hand, saw the psychology of religion as a secular, scientific attempt to attribute the roots of religion to anthropology rather than God. The latter is certainly true of Freud’s theories.

Rachel B. Blass claims that the shift to bring harmony between psychoanalysis and religion in the last two decades has been “misleading”. She argues that the question of the truth of religion, which was a fundamentally important question for Freud and has been for Christians, has become irrelevant in certain discussions of religion and psychoanalysis that are more interested in the function of religion – in other words, its therapeutic effects on the lives of believers.³ Freud saw religious belief as an illusion based on human wishes and childish needs.⁴ Therefore, Freud and most forms of Christianity have competing truth claims which are essentially irreconcilable. However, in The Future of an Illusion, Freud’s analysis of religion does not completely deny the possibility of the truth of God’s existence as such, but sees the institution of religion as stemming from human psychology. But, in Civilization and its Discontents, published 3 years later, Freud moves from calling religion an illusion to calling it a delusion – a complete distortion of reality.⁵

Even though Freud and Christian believers seem diametrically opposed in their approaches to questions of truth, they are analogous in their mutual search for the truth. Blass argues that psychoanalysts who only focus on the benefits of religion for well-being deny this quest for both religious and psychological truth.⁶

At the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century, liberal Christians saw “self-realization” - the goal of reaching one’s personal potential – as a good goal.

⁶ Blass, 624.
whereas “conservatives described their goals in terms of eternal salvation.”\textsuperscript{7} This discrepancy has since changed, as evangelicals and fundamentalists have become avid consumers of self-help literature. Clinical psychology and counseling have become well-respected among many evangelical Christians who find insight in the works of such evangelical psychologists as James Dobson, Larry Crabb, and Clyde Narramore. The psychological goal of each of these men is not so much to theorize about human nature, but to provide guidance for Christian families. In other words, they are more interested in putting psychology to use for practical purposes.\textsuperscript{8}

In the United States, there is a common trust of psychological and medical “experts” who are called on to provide insight in private counseling sessions, on talk shows and even when public policy is being decided.\textsuperscript{9} Evangelicals also participate in this culture of experts. Organizations that sponsor and support abstinence-only education, such as Abstinence Clearinghouse, appeal to psychologists and other health and well-being experts in their claims of the efficacy of abstinence on mental health. For example, in their position statement on masturbation, they state: “Sex therapists consider masturbation the first stage of sexual addiction for sex addicts. This practice should not

\begin{itemize}
\item [\textsuperscript{7}] Ibid., 505.
\item [\textsuperscript{8}] William James would have approved with the practical focus of these Christian psychologists, as he was more interested in the pragmatic uses of religion, than with the metaphysical, theological, or material causes of religious phenomena. See \textit{Varieties} (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1902). For a collection of articles written by Clyde Narramore see: http://www.ncfliving.org/index_relationships.php, January 2011 (accessed). See also Larry Crabb’s website: http://www.newwayministries.org, January 2011 (accessed). For more on James Dobson’s psychological influence, particularly on women, see Colleen McDannell. “Beyond Dr. Dobson: Women, Girls, and Focus on the Family,” \textit{Women and Twentieth-Century Protestantism}, eds. Margaret Lambs Bendoroth and Virginia Lieson Brereton (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002).
\item [\textsuperscript{9}] For a comprehensive survey of the influence of psychology in America, see Ellen Herman, \textit{The Romance of American Psychology: Culture in the Age of Experts} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).
\end{itemize}
be encouraged as a “safe” sexual practice.” On homosexuality, they write: “Research shows the homosexual lifestyle is not a healthy alternative for males or females.” And on the use of images in sexuality education classes, they say:

Neurochemical science affirms all imagery is real to the brain whether the setting is scientific, educational or pornographic. Diagrams of internal organs are acceptable, but images or pictures of external genitalia in any form, whether diseased or healthy, can be determined [sic] to the health of young men and women’s minds.

Sex therapists, research and neurochemical science are all listed as valuable expert sources that give credibility to Abstinence Clearinghouse’s stance on abstinence education.

In its mission statement, The Medical Institute states:

MI is the only organization in America that is backed by a highly qualified team of nationally recognized MDs and PhDs dedicated to providing science-based sexual health information. Through its work in the area of sexually transmitted infections, the Medical Institute has identified risky sexual behavior and its consequences as one of the top obstacles preventing individuals from leading a physically and emotionally healthy life. MI’s research, educational materials,

products and conferences offer a critical message to a society that is inundated with false and misleading information about sex.¹³

This organization determines the usefulness of scientific facts upon whether or not these facts correspond to their ideological values. Concerning STIs and the HPV vaccine in particular, MI disputes other research that confirms the efficacy of the vaccines against viruses, alternatively promoting: “abstinence for unmarried persons as a primary method to prevent pregnancy [and] STIs, and the emotional consequences of sexual activity. [We] promote monogamy as a primary method to prevent STIs.”¹⁴ Emotional well-being and monogamy are treated as scientific categories that are presented as medically relevant and the medical and academic credentials of the staff and board of directors lends credibility to their findings.

The Family Research Council is another organization that relies on psychological experts in its promotion of abstinence and family values. On their website, they write:

The idea of the Family Research Council originated at the 1980 White House Conference on Families. Among the conferees, James Dobson stood out because of his rare combination of Christian social values and academic and professional credentials.…. In 1983, the Family Research Council incorporated as a nonprofit educational institution in the District of Columbia; its founding board included Dobson and two noted psychiatrists, Armand Nicholoi Jr. of Harvard University and George Rekers of the University of South Carolina.¹⁵

Psychologist Dr. James Dobson and two other “noted” psychiatrists make up the board of this council as a way to build respect and authority within the community. Therefore, science is not just viewed as a monolithic enemy with a worldview opposing that of Christianity. If the science supports the claims, it is used, if it does not, it is disregarded.

2. The Purity Ball Event

Purity balls are touted as being psychologically beneficial for young girls by attendees and supporters because they help these girls to gain the self-esteem that will keep them strong in their quest to remain sexually pure (therefore physically and emotionally healthy) until marriage. Facebook has numerous pages dedicated to various purity ball events. One site entitled “Redeeming Purity: A Purity Ball 2010” advertises a purity ball that took place in Shreveport, Louisiana. The description of the ball reads:

"The Princess Within" Purity Ball - Shreveport's first ever dads and daughters Purity Ball! fathers (or significant male protectors) and daughters (grades 9-12), from all across the Ark-La-Tex region, will gather for an event of fairytale proportions. This is a night for fathers to pledge themselves to love and protect their daughters and share the truth that she is a princess who is “worth waiting for”. This incredible event reaches to the very heart of young women, sharing the benefits of “abstinence until marriage” and encouraging purity in a sacred way that will be remembered forever.\(^{16}\)

 Fantasies of being a princess in a fairy tale, accompanied by their prince charming in the form of their father, give girls the sense that they are special beyond measure because of their “sacred”

purity. The protection of the father adds to this feeling that they are special enough to be protected.

Pastor Randy Wilson hosted the first purity ball in Colorado Springs, Colorado in 1998 through the Generations of Light organization and is still hosting these events today. There were 1400 purity balls held in 2006, growing to approximately 3000 in 2009, according to Abstinence Clearinghouse president Leslee Unruh. Today, many of these balls have long waiting lists. At one of these events, Pastor Wilson told the men: “Fathers, our daughters are waiting for us...They are desperately waiting for us in a culture that lures them into the murky waters of exploitation. They need to be rescued by you, their dad.” Again, the fathers are placed in the position of rescuers, like white knights shielding their daughters from a competing culture. This other culture is described as something out there, threatening to coerce young Christians, but kept at bay by vigilant parents, pastors, and other concerned Christians. He implies that those kept pure manage to remain somehow separate from culture, as those who must live in but not necessarily of the world.

Arizona Baptist Children’s Services sponsors a number of purity balls each year. On their website, they provide reasons for why a father should take his daughter to one of these events:

1. Your daughter will see how much you value her when you dress up and take her out for an entire evening.
2. Your daughter will learn how a gentleman treats a lady.
3. You will create special memories with her that she will remember forever.
4. This event will give your daughter the opportunity to make a public commitment to purity in her life.
5. 

17 Valenti, 10.
18 Daddy I Do, Cassie Jaye, director. (Jaye Bird Productions, 2010).
Your daughter will see that there are other girls who are making the same commitment, and they won’t feel that they are alone. 6. This could be the first of many special date nights with your daughter.\(^{20}\) This website specifically instructs mothers not to attend, therefore mothers are excluded from this rite. The goal of the event is for fathers to model for their daughters how men and women ought to relate to one another.

A 2008 documentary entitled *The Virgin Daughters* reports that one in six American girls between the ages of twelve and twenty-eight pledge to remain virgins until marriage.\(^{21}\) Pastor Wilson and his family play a prominent role in this documentary, as he has been a key player in the success of this virginity movement. The purity ball is one way to encourage girls to commit themselves to purity by strengthening their bond with their fathers. The idea is that if girls are close to their dads, they will not want a boyfriend, a belief that has some merit, according to the research I outline in chapter three. When asked about the significance of the father for a daughter, Wilson says: “You look at that in the young girl that’s 5, 6, or 7 years old: who would you like to marry when you grow up? Well my daddy! He is in her life the significant individual. The father is everything.”\(^{22}\) Pastor Wilson reflects a fundamentalist Christian attitude that the patriarchal head of the family is both the chief authority figure and a model for what type of future husband his daughter should choose.

*The Virgin Daughters* shows Pastor Wilson’s five daughters serenading and praising their Dad at the beginning of a purity ball. The youngest says: “I adore being your daughter. When I


\(^{21}\) “The Virgin Daughters,” *Cutting Edge*, Channel 4 documentary series (Sept. 25 2008).

\(^{22}\) Ibid.
spend time with you I feel like a beautiful princess.” Another daughter tells the audience that when she gets married she’ll marry a man exactly like her father. The eldest daughter, Lauren, was recently married by her father. Therefore, he acts as the father, the high priest, and the husband model in the family. At the purity ball, Lauren could hardly speak through her tears. She managed to whisper: “Dad, you’re just so amazing.” Lauren and her husband Brett only knew each other for 8 weeks before he proposed and were engaged for 6 months, with 5 of those months seeing Brett called away for military service. They never held hands or kissed before their wedding day, even though Lauren admits that Brett had a number of girlfriends before her.23

The television show Everywoman also conducted an interview with a Sioux Falls, South Dakota family preparing for and attending a purity ball. The father, Mr. Merkel, who identifies his family as “fundamental, born-again believers,” displays a white board chart in his home that his five daughters have signed that has five boxes to choose from with titles ranging from “I love my daddy much” to “I love my daddy very, very, very, very much”. Mr. Merkel explains:

The beliefs that we have are that young women should remain virgins and pure sexually. My daughters were growing up rapidly and during this time my wife and I saw that there was a need for me as a father to be able to be close with my daughters. So, one of the things that we came up with was that I would take them out on dates.24

Mr. Merkel, on witnessing his daughters’ maturation, feels the need to assert his influence on their burgeoning sexual selves in the form of an exclusive one-on-one

23 Ibid.
24 Everywoman, the Al Jazeera English channel (May 18, 2007).
“date.” His fourteen-year-old eldest daughter Angela describes the first of these experiences: “We went in a limousine and he gave me this ring and that was the first time we talked about me being and staying pure. I’m going to keep the ring until I get married and then take it off and then put the wedding ring on my finger.”

3. The Normativity of Oedipal Dynamics

When asked for her perspective on her husband’s relationship with his daughters, Mrs. Merkel replies: “Honestly, I’m not jealous that he gets to go out on dates with his daughters. It’s something that is so natural for our family.” Who is the mother not to be jealous of -- her daughters or her husband? Any jealousy of her daughters would point to a rivalry for the father’s romantic affections and any jealousy of her husband would suggest that the mother feels left out of the process of raising of her daughters.

Mrs. and Mr. Merkel say that it is “natural” for a father and his daughters to go on dates. The Merkels, like the Wilsons, seem to think that the oedipal situation, in which a girl is romantically attached to her father, who is the husband prototype, is the way God made families to be. Mr. Merkel says: “God created men and women separate, even though in the world today we want to think they’re the same. But, we are different, thankfully. A woman needs to feel loved and accepted by her father. She was created by God to feel that.” What is “natural” here is that daughters will be morally, sexually, and

25 Ibid.
27 *Everywoman.*
spiritually clean if they look to their fathers for the love that they need that they might otherwise get from boys outside of the family.\textsuperscript{28}

Freud would agree that the oedipal situation is natural. He provides what he deems a description of oedipal family dynamics, but is also to some extent responsible for the normalization of narcissism and the Oedipus complex in the Western psyche. The evangelical purity ball subculture exhibits this normalization of narcissism and oedipal father-daughter relationships by believing that they are natural and good. One Christian father tells this story about his son: “I took my son Michael, who was about four years old, to buy a pair of shoes. The shoe salesman asked Michael, ‘Who’s your girlfriend, boy?’ I replied, ‘Mommy’s your girlfriend, right?’”\textsuperscript{29} This same father advises other fathers to give their daughters bouquets of flowers on Valentine’s Day.\textsuperscript{30}

The fundamental difference between the normativity of the oedipal complex for Freud and the father-daughter relationship of purity ball attendees is in the resolution of the oedipal situation. For these virgin girls, they never resolve their oedipal feelings, merely transferring them from father to husband without relinquishing their childish oedipal affection for their fathers before they get married. The wedding is the rite of passage that signals the shift from father to husband. For Freud, it is necessary that a child resolve her oedipal feelings while she is still a child, long before she considers marriage.

Freud discusses incest in the context of a taboo – a cultural prohibition that is imposed on forbidden, but naturally occurring, desires. Incest is looked upon with horror by virtually every culture in the world and even many animal species avoid incestuous mating. However, Freud

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{29} Farris, 79.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 44.
implies that oedipal desires are normal, while incestuous acts are not. The same appears to be true for conservative Christian families such as the Merkels, who most likely do not engage in incestuous relationships, but still exalt and nurture the oedipal bond between father and daughter as the precursor to all good sexual relationships. In regards to the oedipal desires of adolescents, Freud writes: “The sexual life of maturing youth is almost entirely restricted to indulging in phantasies, that is, in ideas that are not destined to be carried into effect.”

Freud distinguishes between the fantasy world and the world in which one acts. This distinction is what separates childhood from adulthood.

For Freud, the mark of maturation in an adolescent is the proper installation of the super ego within the psyche, which is easier for boys than girls for reasons that will become apparent. The super ego is comprised of all of the familial and societal prohibitions and moral laws that enable an individual to live as an effective and “good” member of society. The super ego also represents the imprinting of civilization upon the internal world of a person. If the super ego is successfully introjected, then what was once an external voice of authority feels like one’s own voice.

According to Freud, as a child grows into adolescence, the fantasy life of the child which is subject to the infantile pleasure principle is obstructed by the reality principle, which not only inhibits the transformation of pleasurable desires into realized impulses, but transforms desire itself into socially acceptable fantasies. Freud writes:

In these phantasies the infantile tendencies invariably emerge once more…Among these tendencies the first place is taken with uniform frequency by the child’s sexual impulses towards his parents, which are as a rule already differentiated owing to the attraction of

31 Freud, “Three Essays”, 149.
the opposite sex... At the same time as these plain incestuous phantasies are overcome and repudiated, one of the most significant, but also one of the most painful, psychical achievements of the pubertal period is completed: detachment from parental authority, a process that alone makes possible the opposition, which is so important for the progress of civilization. At every stage in the course of development through which all human beings ought by rights to pass, a certain number are held back... They are mostly girls, who, to the delight of their parents, have persisted in all their childish love far beyond puberty. 32

Freud universalizes the maturation process claiming that “tendencies” occur with “uniform frequency” and that heterosexual attraction is normative “as a rule.” Furthermore, “all human beings” “by rights” must overcome their oedipal fantasies even though many fail to do so to the secret satisfaction of their parents. This universalizing is problematic for today’s readers because it does not consider the multiplicity of family structures that are becoming more and more normative in Western society. However, Freud’s model is still applicable to many traditional nuclear families.

The Merkels appear to be the kind of family that might have daughters who find it hard to let go of their attachment to the home and to their fathers. Their daughters are encouraged to “persist in all of their childish love” for their fathers until they are of marriageable age, even though Freud suggests that the Oedipal complex should be appropriately overcome before

32 Ibid, 150.
puberty. This failure to overcome a female oedipal fixation is due in part to an insular, narcissistic family structure which resists what Freud deems important for the “progress of civilization,” namely “detachment from paternal authority.”

Angela Merkel admits that when she sees other young people with boyfriends, she would like one, but she just asks for the Lord’s help in those situations and he gives it to her. Since the Merkel children are all home schooled, the risk of temptation is lessened somewhat. And, with homeschooling, there is less of a chance that the formation of the super ego is confused or diluted by outside influences that clash with the authority of the parents. Michael Farris writes: “A dad must soberly realize that if he wants his daughter to remain pure, he is not going to get any help from society.”

He also writes: “Teach your daughter to save her heart for her husband and you will have little trouble convincing her to live a physically pure life in the midst of a thoroughly rotten world.” These statements reflect the protective attitude that some fathers have toward their daughters and their suspicion of the outside world as a place that might tarnish his daughter’s purity and loosen her attachment to him. Young women like Angela, who are home schooled, take a virginity pledge, and attend the purity ball, adhere to the belief that if they are sheltered from what is “out there” in “culture,” they will be safe from sin and impurity and keep their fathers’ affections.

Christian fundamentalist husband and wife authors Tim and Beverly LaHaye co-wrote a book entitled *Raising Sexually Pure Kids: How to Prepare Your Children for the Act of Marriage*, which serves as a guide for parents on keeping their kids abstinent until

34 Farris, 81.
marriage. In the introduction they state that “our culture is one of the most sex-crazed this world has ever known”\textsuperscript{36} and that “for about the last 19 years, there has been a culture war going on in this country between the entertainment industry and the church. Sexual permissiveness has been at the core of that culture war.”\textsuperscript{37} The LaHayes argue that sex education in public schools is also to blame for the rise of sexual promiscuity and liberal attitudes toward sex in America. They write: “Sexual permissiveness and experimentation have gone up in direct proportion to the amount of time students spend in sex education classes. Children are curious, they want to experiment with what they learn.”\textsuperscript{38}

The purity ball is both a public event, involving a community of like-minded fathers and daughters, and a private form of family-run sex education. It seeks to safeguard girls from the dangerous influence of an outside culture that runs counter to the values of their Christian families. \textit{New York Times} reporter Neela Banerjee attended the 2008 Colorado Springs purity ball. She described the ballroom as having a seven-foot wooden cross at one end. Pastor Wilson and another father stood in front of the cross, making an arch over their heads with two large swords. Each father and daughter couple was invited to walk under the arch and kneel at the foot of the cross as Christian hymns played in the background. The fathers made their vows, some whispering additional private prayers to their daughters, and the daughters each placed a white rose representative of their purity at the foot of the cross. Many girls, wearing purity rings placed

\textsuperscript{36} LaHaye and LaHaye, 10.  
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid, 15-16.  
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid, 16.
on their wedding fingers by their fathers, whispered their own vows to be pure in thought and deed until marriage. \(^{39}\)

Both Pastor Wilson and the LaHayes mention a country or a culture that is at war over their little girls’ sexuality. Jordyn Wilson, Randy and Lisa Wilson’s 19 year-old daughter, told the reporter: “Something I need from dad is affirmation, being told I’m beautiful...If we don’t get it from home, we will go out to the culture and get it from them.”\(^{40}\) “The” culture is spoken about as a monolithic thing out there from which a girl must be guarded. Another Wilson daughter, Khrystian, said: “The culture says you’re free to sleep with as many people as you want to...What does that get you but complete chaos?”\(^{41}\) While it is tempting to protect your children from the culture out there where everything is “chaos,” it perpetuates paranoia about those perceived and constructed as the “others” who inhabit this culture. It is interesting that sexual temptation is perceived of as an external rather than internal threat. Girls at the purity ball are protected from the sexual advances stemming from the aggressive sexual instincts of others, namely boys, but are not recognized as sexual beings with appetites of their own.

A female attendee of another purity ball received a bracelet from her father. The bracelet had a lock and the key is held onto by her father until her eventual wedding day. She explained: "On my wedding day, he'll give it to my husband...It's a symbol of my father giving up the covering of my heart, protecting me, since it means my husband is now the protector. He

\(^{40}\) Ibid.
\(^{41}\) Ibid.
becomes like the shield to my heart, to love me as I’m supposed to be loved.”42 The language for the role of father and husband is the same. They are both the girl’s “protector” and “shield”.

The pop music boy band The Jonas Brothers proudly told Details magazine that they “promised ourselves and God that we’ll stay pure until marriage.”43 The promise to stay pure is a direct one between these boys and God, not between these boys and their mothers. Fathers, for pledging girls, are the priestly intermediaries between their daughters and God. The rhetoric of the integrity ball for boys is diametrically opposed to that of the purity ball. Integrity ball attendees are encouraged to build up their will power so that they have good self-control and can develop a strong moral character, while purity balls do not seem to expect the same moral agency from girls, but instead encourage fathers to be responsible for their daughters’ purity. Daughters, in this culture, are treated as the precious property of their fathers who are directed by the movement to be good managers of this property.

One must ask if there is a psychological script for young women who must make the transition from the protected virgin daughter to the sexually open wife. In The Taboo of Virginity, Freud writes:

Whoever is the first to satisfy a virgin’s desire for love, long and laboriously held in check, and who in doing so overcomes the resistances which have been built up in her through the influences of her milieu and education, that is the man she will take into a lasting relationship, the possibility of which will never again be open to any other man.

This experience creates a state of bondage in the woman which guarantees that

possession of her shall continue undisturbed and makes her able to resist new impressions and enticements from outside.\textsuperscript{44}

For proper bonding with a new husband to take place, a young woman must somehow release her resistances to the sexual advances of men. However, Freud explains that this is not always possible. He identifies a fixed resistance on the part of a woman that psychologically prohibits her from giving up her initial love for her father as one of the causes of sexual frigidity in subsequent love relationships. He writes:

\begin{quote}
We have learnt from analytic researches how universal and how powerful the earliest allocations of libido are. In these we are concerned with infantile sexual wishes which are clung to (in women usually a fixation of the libido on the father or a brother who takes his place)…The husband is almost always so to speak only a substitute, never the right man it is another man – in typical cases the father – who has first claim to a woman’s love, the husband at most takes second place.\textsuperscript{45}
\end{quote}

Female frigidity, then, is sometimes the result of an inability to exchange love for the father for love for another man. With so much emphasis placed on loyalty to the father and the family in the purity movement, one wonders if it is difficult for young women to suddenly make the change from daughter to wife.

4. Rites of Passage and Negative Rites

Pastor Wilson and his wife Lisa co-authored a book about raising Christian girls in the midst of today’s promiscuous “hook-up culture.” They write that they spend much loving energy

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\textsuperscript{44} Freud, “The Taboo of Virginity” [1917] \textit{On Sexuality}, 265. \\
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid, 276-277.
\end{flushright}
safeguarding their girls from the outside influences of this culture, while fuelling their daughters’ dreams of true love to come. 46 Fathers of virginity pledging girls are encouraged to teach their daughters to wait for true love. As I have mentioned, there is a glaring lack of coming of age rites for mothers and daughters. I would argue that this is because any mother-daughter rites would involve a passing on of wisdom from one generation to the next in celebration of a girl’s coming of age as a sexual being. The purity ball is not really a coming-of-age ceremony. It does not celebrate a girl becoming a sexually mature, fertile woman, but is more of a negative rite, or an inhibiting ritual based on the taboo of female sexuality. The young girls here are not supposed to grow up into independent young women, but to stay little, pre-sexual girls until they are married.

There are many coming of age rituals around the world that celebrate female initiation and a girl’s entrance into adult society. Two of these rituals that take place in the North American context are the Jewish Bat Mitzvah and the Amish Rumspringa. In the Bat Mitzvah, for example, a 13-year-old girl often celebrates her coming-of-age with a party and a religious service in which she is invited to speak about her new obligation to Jewish law and what it means for her to take responsibility for herself within her community and in the world.47

During the Rumspringa, which means “running around” in the Pennsylvania German language, 16-year-old boys and girls are allowed to step out of their community and its ethico-religious norms, to lead a so-called secular life for a period of time. Their experimentation includes everything from drug and alcohol use, to discarding their modest traditional dress,

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46 Randy and Lisa Wilson, Celebrations of Faith (Colorado Springs: Cook Communications Ministries, 2001), 140-141.
including female head coverings, in favour of more modern clothes. Some of these teens even explore their sexuality outside of the bonds of marriage. The Rumspringa ends when the teen chooses to come back to be baptized into the church as an adult and to re-enter the community. The other option is to be shunned from their family and community from then on. The Rumspringa stresses the voluntary nature of adult baptism and community membership.\footnote{See John A. Hostetler, \textit{Amish Society}. 4\textsuperscript{th} edition (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); Thom Schachtman, \textit{Rumspringa: To Be or Not to be Amish} (New York: North Point Press, 2006).}

While I am sure that there are particular criticisms of the way that these coming-of-age rites are conducted, such as the amount of pressure there is to “voluntarily” choose to take on more responsibility within their respective communities, the importance here is that both the Bat Mitzvah and the Rumspringa work to symbolize the choice and the responsibility of becoming an adult for the individual. The purity ball, on the other hand, marks female adulthood through marriage. A young woman, then, does not come of age in her own right, but always determines her subjectivity through the man to whom she belongs.

Erik Erikson warns that adolescents and teens who do not rebel in some way will fail to mark their separation from their parents; a separation which is crucial for healthy identity formation.\footnote{Erik H. Erikson, \textit{Identity: Youth and Crisis} (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.,1968).} Rebellion, by its very nature, even instituted rebellion, such as the Rumspringa, has its attendant dangers such as the contraction of sexually transmitted diseases, the possibility of teen pregnancy, the health risks involved in drug and alcohol abuse, as well as the psychological dangers that accompany the dissolution of childhood identity and the fears that come with a new sense of independence. But, rebellion, while being dangerous, is also a time of immeasurable creativity and growth. A coming of age rite of passage, should, therefore, not pull the young person back from rebellion, but
provide her with the freedom to experience all of the confusion, ambiguity and exhilaration of independence, while hoping that the foundation that has been provided for her throughout childhood by her parents and community will guide her back to her community along with a new sense of commitment that is, to some extent, her own.

Anthropologist Arnold Van Gennep, in *Rites of Passage*, his classic text on ritual theory, classifies all rites of passage, such as birth, puberty, marriage, etc., as having three stages: the pre-liminal, or separation stage, in which the initiate is removed from his community either physically or metaphorically; the liminal, or transition stage; and the post-liminal, or re-integration stage, which sees the initiate re-incorporated into society as a new person.  

Van Gennep introduced “liminality” to the field of anthropology. This word comes from the Latin “limen,” meaning threshold. Van Gennep likens the liminal to a no man’s land that must be traversed in the midst of a journey from one’s home to one’s future destination. Victor Turner further develops Van Gennep’s theory of liminality, describing the liminal initiate as “at once no longer classified and not yet classified.” The liminal one is both no more a child and not yet an adult, but caught in the unclassified world between worlds. Life and death metaphors are often used to depict this stage. Turner writes:

The metaphor of dissolution is often applied to neophytes – they are allowed to go filthy and identified with the earth, the generalized matter into which every

specific individual is rendered down... The neophytes [are also symbolized by] processes of gestation... likened to... embryos... [for they are] both living and dead... Their condition is one of ambiguity and paradox, a confusion of all the customary categories... Liminality may perhaps be regarded as the Nay to all positive structural assertions... but... more than that, as a realm of pure possibility whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise.  

The initiate’s former childhood identity, which has been established to a large part by the parents, is fragmenting, like a decomposing body. But, the initiate is also like a foetus that is growing in potential and forming a new identity. This intermediary stage can be seen as a microcosmic symbol of the falling apart and the rebirth of all social constructions.

Liminality is a central aspect of a rite of passage that perforates the boundaries of purity and makes vulnerable the social structures and individual entities that purity protects. Mary Douglas describes the danger that is associated with liminality as pollution. She argues that what is “unclear” is generally seen as “unclean.” The pure, virgin body is what Douglas would call a “natural symbol” of social boundaries that remain intact, since she treats the individual physical body as a symbol of the greater social body. However, the menstruating woman is also a natural symbol of the blurring of boundaries or of liminality, since menstruation is often associated with what is unclean. For many cultures, body “leavings” like feces and blood are deemed impure and contact with these things poses a threat to one’s purity. However, these leavings are not simply

52 Ibid., 7.
unhygienic, but take on a moral meaning, as they are representative of society’s perception of social purity.\textsuperscript{54}

Amy Mullin examines early Greek, Jewish and Christian notions of purity and observes that all of these communities value both personal discipline as well as compliance to authority. She writes:

In each of these conceptions…purity was associated with social order, and in each case threats to the community led to calls for increased self-examination and self-control in order to ensure loyalty to a community of like-minded thinkers. These calls for self-control are also increasingly associated with demands for obedience to an elect and especially pure cadre of believers.\textsuperscript{55}

When a group founded on religious principles feels that its social identity is at risk, it is more likely to resort to an intensification of purity and piety within its own community. We see this not only in the ancient world that Mullin describes, but in the American religious context as well. Civil and women’s rights are examples of phenomena that threatened the social and familial order and caused an increase in the need for a purification of the community.

The purity ball is another example of a culture that perceives a threat coming from another culture – the secular world. Purity balls fit Van Gennep’s category of a “negative rite” better than a rite of passage, since they are more about avoiding external pollution through the preservation of virginity. Van Gennep writes:

We may draw a distinction between positive rites (or volitions translated into action) and negative rites. The latter, now known as taboos, are prohibitions, commands “not to do” or “not to act.” Psychologically, they correspond to negative volitions, just as positive rites are the equivalents of positive volitions. In other words, taboos also translate a kind of will and are acts rather than negations of acts.⁵⁶

Van Gennep makes a very important point here about how a not-doing is experienced psychologically as an act. Chastity is an act. It is a purposeful not doing which psychologically shapes who a young person is. In this way, it participates in the production of identity, not the negation of identity. The purity ball is a ritual performance of this identity.

Unlike a rite of passage, the purity ball celebrates a continuity of identity, not an initiation into a new mode of being via a period of liminality which institutes discontinuity. There is no real sense of independent self-seeking. There is only a perpetual union with the father until marriage, when a new man becomes the patriarch of the home.

5. The Narcissism of Minor Differences

The idea of an American culture war exhibits a concern with issues of physical and social purity and where boundary lines are drawn. Virginity pledging and purity balls are a sign of an in-group that distinguishes itself from the outside world and its inhabitants by virtue of its internal purity and fortified boundaries. Part of this

⁵⁶ Van Gennep, 8.
fortification is an exaggeration of the differences between this in-group and those who do not belong. Freud calls this social phenomenon “the narcissism of minor differences.”

In *The Taboo of Virginity*, Freud first mentions the narcissism of minor differences with reference to Ernest Crawley’s 1902 book on primitive forms of marriage. Freud writes: “[Crawley] declares that each individual is separated from the others by a ‘taboo of personal isolation’, and that it is precisely the minor differences in people who are otherwise alike that form the basis of feelings of strangeness and hostility between them.”

Freud applies this idea first to relations between the sexes, in an attempt to explain why men are antagonistic toward women. He claims that men dread women because they represent men who have been castrated. Men unconsciously project this fear onto women, thereby distancing themselves from women in an attempt to absolutize their differences. Once this essential difference between the sexes is established, the male fear of castration is reduced because it has been cast out upon a different group. Sexuality, for young girls, is seemingly cast out or exorcised in purity ball rituals. If they are sufficiently protected, then they will not be coerced from the outside world of sexual exploitation.

Later, in *Group Psychology*, Freud writes: “In the undisguised antipathies and aversions which people feel towards strangers with whom they have to do we may recognize the expression of self-love—of narcissism. This self-love works for the preservation of the individual.”

He is arguing here that one’s identity is formed in contrast to another’s identity. It is therefore the difference between people or groups that

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57 Freud, “Taboo,” 199.
crystallizes who they are. Finally, in *Civilization and its Discontents*, Freud explains that in order for cohesion within a group to be successful, the group must take out its aggressive tendencies on those who are on its margins resulting in alienation and racism, like the German Nazis with German Jews.59 The Jews were cast out in order to preserve the social and racial lines of purity of the Aryan Germans, therefore, much of the disparaging language toward the Jews was made up of metaphors of impurity and filth. This drawing of lines is also prominent in premillennial eschatology that predicts that certain types of elect insiders will be saved and removed from the polluting, unsaved presence of outsiders. Narcissism, for Freud, is linked to the drawing of both individual and collective boundaries, between what is considered safely part of the self and all that is unsafe due to its dissimilarity.

6. Dread of the Feminine

In *The Taboo of Virginity*, Freud refers to the dread of the feminine in certain “primitive” cultures in Australia and Malaysia and the lengths these people go to preserve themselves from the horrifying consequences of coming into contact with hymenal or menstrual blood.60 In an earlier essay, Freud explains that defloration is a kind of branding that signals that the woman in question is the property of the one who deflowers

60 This essay is an example of Freud’s interest in anthropology and continues the problematic argument he presented previously in *Totem and Taboo* that the evolution of the individual mirrors the evolution of society, comparing neurotics to so-called primitives. Sigmund Freud. *Totem and Taboo: Some Points of Agreement between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics*. [1912-1913] ed and trans. James Strachey. (New York: Norton, 1952).
her. However, in *The Taboo of Virginity*, he cites instances when the actual deflowering was displaced onto a holy person who was psychologically prepared to deal with hymenal blood. This ritual was intended to preserve the immature psyche of the young male groom from the harm associated with blood. Turner too, describes the horror many cultures associate with female blood because of its believed association with miscarriage and death.

Freud extends the taboo from virgins to include women in general who were believed to be able to paralyze “seminal” male power. For example, sex with women was to be avoided before a hunt, so that male hunters would not be weakened. It was feared that the hunter would become the prey if he was in contact with the feminine. Or, as Freud puts it: the man could become “infected with passive femininity.” The paradox of female purity is that the purity of a group like a family or caste rests on the purity of its women, while at the same time, women are associated with the taboo of liminality, and are therefore dangerously unclean.

There has been a long-time debate in professional sports about whether or not sex is beneficial for male athletes before a game. Soccer teams are often prohibited from having sex before big matches. Mohammed Ali would not do it and Rocky Balboa’s trainer Paulie tells him in the movie that he cannot have sex before a big fight because “women weaken legs.” Horror films often rely on deep-seated mythical and religious

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62 Kathleen Gough studied communities on the Malabar Coast of India and their ceremonies that purified young girls through symbolic weddings before they menstruated so that when they did reach the age of menstruation, they would not pollute and endanger the rest of the community. See Kathleen Gough. “Female Initiation Rites on the Malabar Coast,” [1953] *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, 85, no. 1/2 (1955): 45-80.
63 Freud, “Taboo.”
archetypes for effect, like the Exorcist, Carrie, Ginger Snaps and the more recent Jennifer’s Body, showing pubescent and teenage girls as portals of evil. These films play on the convention that there is something horrifying and wild about female sexuality – something that can disrupt the established order and unleash chaos. The film Teeth features the myth of the vagina dentata. A teenage girl, upon the defloration of her virginity, discovers that her vagina has teeth which castrate men upon contact. Freud discusses the fear of the castrating effect of women in his work Medusa’s Head.64

A contradiction arises here in our discussion of women and purity. On the one hand, women are associated with the powers of pollution, and on the other hand, women are treated as pure and passive objects in need of safeguarding from pollution. Sherry Ortner provides a way of resolving this problem. She suggests that all of the groups that are concerned with female purity belong to “stratified state-type structures,” in which the patriarchal clan is central, while pre-state societies tend to separate the women from the men to avoid the defilement of sacred male space.65 Ortner summarizes various psychoanalytic and structuralist arguments for why the control of women’s sexual purity is crucial to the maintenance of the family, but finds these accounts lacking what she calls “time depth” perspective, lumping pre-state and nation state societies all together, while also assuming that all families, castes and classes are closed systems that are not bound to the influence of the broader societies to which they belong.

Before the development of the state as a socio-political entity, women were segregated from male society because they were impure and associated with disorder, 

64 Freud, “Medusa’s Head,” [1922] Freud on Women.
chaos and ambiguity, qualities men deemed dangerous. Women were not allowed inside sacred male huts and lived on the margins of the village. As the state emerged, the relationship between men and women changed. Ortner writes:

There is a great shift in ideology concerning women. Before they were dangerous, and now they are said to be in danger, justifying male protection and guardianship. Before they were polluting, and this had to be defended against, but now they are said to be pure, and to need defending.67

Women became subsumed into the identity of the men to which they belonged and men became liable for women’s behaviour as their behaviour reflected directly upon them.

Ortner mentions psychoanalysis as having contributed to the discussion of female purity, but does not pursue this contribution since it deals with “elusive unconscious factors” that cannot be proved or disproved.68 This is a valid concern that has been raised about psychoanalysis by many social anthropologists. Freud’s meta-historical treatment of religion has also come under a somewhat justified attack for its reductionistic and at times historically inaccurate approach. Freud’s genius, I would argue, lies in his astute insight into the potential unconscious motivations behind cultural patterns. It is therefore not my intention to look at narcissism from a clinical perspective, or to diagnose purity ball attendees with some kind of a medical disorder, which I am not qualified to do, but to employ the varied psychoanalytic theories of narcissism as cultural interpretive devices through which to understand this socio-religious phenomenon.

66 Ibid., 25.
67 Ibid., 26.
7. Freud’s theory of narcissism

Freud makes the radical statement that narcissism is not only a pathology, but is also part of a normal course of psychological development. In this way, he does not distinguish as clearly as some between who is sick and who is well, but posits mental well-being and illness along a continuum. Narcissism belongs on this continuum between what is healthy and unhealthy.

In *The Other Freud*, James DiCenso points out that Freud participates in the “normalization of pathology and the pathologizing of normality.” This radical approach to human behaviour erases the categorical disparity between what constitutes good and disordered mental health. DiCenso explains that while this goes far in reincorporating the mentally ill into the perceived sphere of “general” human society, it also pathologizes all of culture, including religion. While this may seem to be a negative way to approach the rich and multi-faceted phenomena that are “religion” and “culture,” DiCenso sees this rather as a “creative catalyst” through which to explore questions of subjectivity and meaning.

It is clear that Freud sees narcissism, a term generally associated with pathology, as a normal part of psychological development. It helps in the formation of the ego through early identification and object love. As long as narcissism is manifested in a way that is appropriate to each developmental stage, it is considered “healthy” narcissism. If it

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70 Ibid., 13.
71 Freud, “On Narcissism” [1914], *SE*, 14, 73.
becomes fixated on one particular stage, thereby hindering maturation, or causes regression or crippling repression due to multiple factors, it becomes pathological.

In 1914, Freud published his work *On Narcissism: An Introduction*. He gives credit to Paul Näcke, who, in 1899 introduced the term “narcissism,” using it to describe a kind of sexual “perversion” in which an individual treats his own body as a sexual object. But, for Freud, narcissism is not only about the way the psyche relates to its physical body, it is about the way the self relates to itself and how it draws its boundaries. *On Narcissism* is a landmark book in that it reshapes Freud’s libido and object relations theory, as well as ideas such as the ego ideal. These concepts form the basis of Freud’s future theories, such as the structural model of id, ego, and super ego, which does not take its final form until 1923 in *The Ego and the Id*. Later theories such as the life and death drives also rely on Freud’s early narcissism hypothesis.

Before *On Narcissism*, Freud had assumed that the libido was only an outward expression of energy that became invested in external objects, but here, Freud claims that the libido invests first in the self, and then turns outward. Freud calls this primary narcissism.  

Perhaps the most important aspect of this work is Freud’s explanation of object relations, of how the ego interacts with the objects in its world, including taking itself as an object. In other words, it is here that Freud’s concept of the ego changes from the control centre for the drives to an object.  

Freud argues that an infant has no initial concept of itself as separate from the rest of the universe and is therefore “auto-erotic”; feeling that it self-sufficiently satisfies its

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72 Ibid, 74.
own needs. Even the breast is understood by the infant to be a part of its world, not a distinct entity unto itself. The union of self and object is called primary identification. No one exists for the infant but itself. Like in the womb, the infant perceives itself as omnipotent and continuous with its environment.

According to Freud, the infant initially identifies itself with its surroundings. It has no ego boundaries as such. He suggests that it is only later that the sexual instincts diverge from the ego instincts. At first, the infant has no imperative but the pleasure principle and has no capacity for judging reality because it does not have a clear understanding of itself as a differentiated ego. Jung and others criticized Freud for insisting that even the early ego instincts are sexual instincts instead of simply instincts bent on survival. This is an unfortunate reading of what Freud means by sexuality or sexual instincts. I would argue that Freud’s use of the term sexuality goes beyond simple sex, encompassing means of attachment, a person’s outwardly focused psychical energy, the way a person relates to other people, or objects, in her midst and the human desire to connect with one’s environment. Sexuality, according to Freud, is a part of the broader life drive, Eros.

The sexual life drive transforms as the child develops. At first, the infant’s only goal is to seek pleasure in the elative state of union with the parent which manifests in the immediate satisfaction of every need. Nikolaas Treurniet writes:

This primitive self…is a product of the undivided pleasure principle in that the infant attempts to maintain all that is pleasurable as part of the self, in addition to the pleasurable aspects of the object. This fusion of the pleasurable aspects of the

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self and object is called primary identification and results in the “purified pleasure ego.” The process of primary identification causes the state of primary narcissism.  

A successful primary identification with the parent happens when the child does not suffer a narcissistic trauma or injury too early. In other words, the parent should be adequately available to the child in the early stages, so that the child can learn to separate itself by degrees over time. The child eventually feels that the breast does not come as quickly as it once did and that there is a growing distance between itself as a distinct individual and its parents.

The good experience of a reliable parent builds a “reservoir” of healthy narcissism in the infant so that it can safely perceive the parent as an external object without feeling abandoned. The parent, then, becomes the first love object to whom the infant attaches itself. Any disturbance in this process contributes to later narcissistic pathologies, where the adult takes him or herself as a love object, because the adult was not able to form an initial proper attachment to its parents in infancy. Unhealthy narcissism makes up for early parental alienation in this context.

The infant’s first “ego instincts” are bound up with the satisfaction of needs. Therefore, ego instincts are self-preservation instincts (dealing with feeding and protection). The child is utterly dependent on the parent, or parent substitute, for serving these needs, thereby forming an “anaclitic” type of attachment to him or her. Marie Bonaparte writes that the oral stage which characterizes the first 18 months of a child’s

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76 Ibid, 79.
life can be divided into two sub-stages. At first, the infant’s orality is manifested in the urge to suck. This eventually evolves into a more cannibalistic urge as the infant starts to distinguish itself from the mother. The infant still desires union with the one who feeds her, and this desire becomes the desire to devour the object in order to maintain unity with her.\footnote{Marie Bonaparte, \textit{Female Sexuality}, [1953] trans. John Rodker (New York: Internatinal Universities Pess, 1973), 16.} This sucking and devouring are early manifestations of healthy narcissism, in that they have to do with the infant’s desire for the power to utilize its environment in the service of its own needs. However, this urge to consume the other can also become pathologically narcissistic if it is not resolved properly, leading to an exploitation of others to suit one’s own needs throughout the child’s life.

In \textit{Group Psychology} and again in \textit{The Ego and the Id}, Freud argues that early identification with a parent precedes any object-cathexis as an almost immediate event in the infant’s life.\footnote{Freud, “Group Psychology,” 105; “Ego and Id” \textit{SE} 19, 31.} The infant’s parents provide the first mirror through which the infant begins to see itself, another aspect of the primary identification that leads to primary narcissism. This is the very earliest form of ego development. The ego, then, is not simply an isolated object, but an “internalization of relationships” that is comprised of identifications with those in its midst.

Child development research by attachment theory psychologists such as John Bowlby, L. Alan Sroufe, Will Fleeson and Jude Cassidy indicates that a child’s “early learning about the self occurs principally within the context of relationships.”\footnote{Jude Cassidy. “Child-Mother Attachment and the Self in Six-Year-Olds,” \textit{Child Development}. 59, no. 1 (Feb. 1988): 121-134, 122. See also John Bowlby, \textit{Attachment and loss: Vol.2. Separation} (New York: Basic, 1973); L. Alan Sroufe and Will Fleeson, “Attachment and the construction of relationships,”} Heinz Kohut also claims that children...
receive a sense of self in part from the kind of empathic mirroring that parents do back to the child. Therefore, a child’s self is initially given to them by those to whom they are most closely attached.

The infant’s parents mimic the facial expressions of and react to the infant’s behaviour, thereby giving her a sense of herself as her parents see her. This initial identification of the self with the other comes before the self even knows itself as such. Freud writes:

The first identifications made in earliest childhood will be general and lasting.

This leads us back to the origin of the ego ideal; for behind it there lies hidden an individual's first and most important identification, his identification with the father in his own personal prehistory. This is apparently not in the first instance the consequence or outcome of an object-cathexis; it is a direct and immediate identification and takes place earlier than any object-cathexis.

In On Narcissism, Freud distinguishes between the ideal ego and the ego ideal. The ideal ego is the perfect image we have of ourselves that we strive to emulate throughout our lives. It is comprised of our very first images of our parents and the image we have of ourselves from the way our parents mirror us back to ourselves.

The ideal ego becomes the object of self love later in the child’s life, which makes up for the “narcissistic injury” that the child experiences when it realizes that its real ego

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81 Freud, “The Ego and the Id,” 31. Freud takes the male as normative subject and the father as the most important figure with whom to identify in a boy’s life.
is not identical with that image of perfection that it once had of itself that was also based on its idealized image of its parents with whom it identified. This disillusionment triggers a need for the libido, which was once narcissistically invested in the ego itself, to reattach itself to a new image of the self that is yet to be attained. Like Narcissus, the new object of love is not the man himself, but the beautiful reflection he sees of himself. Furthermore, the child, now knowing its own limitations, both idealizes this new self-image while continuing to idealize its parents.

This idealization of the parents can eventually take on a religious function, as the child projects this idealized image onto an all-powerful parent-like figure, God. However, it can also be broken down and transformed from an image of an ideal person into a set of ideal values that the maturing individual then internalizes. Imogen Tyler writes:

Freud’s concept of narcissism suggests that social norms and values are internalized within the formative structures of the psyche by the incorporation of ideals that control the subject by directing his or her desire. Narcissism, in this sense, describes a process of self-management; it is the means by which the subject adapts to sociocultural ideals...This sociocultural theory of narcissism has potential as a means of theorizing ‘subjection’, that is, how dominant ideological norms reproduce particular ideal selves in accordance with familial and social ideals.
This ego referent, or model self, then, is comprised of a composite of societal and parental regulatory morals and principles that dictate the subject’s desired selfhood. Narcissism, in this case, is not based on the singular image that the self creates for itself, but conforms to the script that society has written upon the psyche. Female purity ball attendees are subjected to values centred on sexual purity, which they must live up to if they want to reach their ideal potential as people. The ego ideal, that has been written upon their psyches by their parents and society, helps them to do this.

Purity balls not only feed the narcissism of the girls, but also the parental narcissism of the fathers. The daughters’ participation in the ritual is an affirmation of the authority and an assurance of the continuation of the fathers’ ideals. Freud writes:

If we look at the attitude of affectionate parents towards their children, we have to recognize that it is a revival and reproduction of their own narcissism, which they have long since abandoned. They are under a compulsion to ascribe every perfection to the child...Parental love, which is so moving and at bottom so childish, is nothing but the parents’ narcissism born again which, transformed into object-love, unmistakably reveals its former nature. 86

The rhetoric of the purity ball event reveals this parental narcissism. Girls are told that they are special and worthy of true love (meaning a potential love that is a strong enough incentive to delay sexual intercourse until marriage). However, girls are also treated as their fathers’ most prized treasures that will be protected. Therefore, the worthiness of the daughter is a reflection of the worthiness of the father, as Ortner argues. In other words, the object-love the father has for the daughter is really an extension of the narcissistic

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86 Freud, "On Narcissism," 91
love he has for himself. In addition, the girl’s (partly unconscious) decision to adopt her parents’ values as her own exhibits her internalization of a proper ideal ego.

The ego ideal, as opposed to the ideal ego, is a dynamic force, not a projected image that is experienced as monitoring the ego. Freud writes: “Recognition of this agency enables us to understand the so-called ‘delusions of being noticed’ or more correctly, of being watched.” The result of this awareness is two-fold. On the one hand, the ego must keep itself in line according to the standard set by the ego ideal and exemplified by the ideal ego or else suffer guilt and shame. On the other hand, the ego gains a narcissistic enjoyment from the feeling that it always has the undivided attention of the ego ideal. It relishes the experience of having the undivided attention of an other within the self. This monitoring element in the psyche is a part of regarding the self as an object to which one narcissistically relates.

8. The Female Oedipal Complex and the Failure of the Super Ego

The super ego develops after the child overcomes the conflicts associated with the oedipal and castration complexes, and represents the internalized authority, moral values and social expectations of the parents and, by extension, society, as well as functioning as a kind of punishing tyrant armed with weapons of guilt and shame if the ego falls short of its goals. Therefore, as the child’s psyche develops, it takes on the characteristics of the parents which initially consisted of a combination of the ideal ego to emulate, the ego ideal that watches, and the super ego that has the power to reprimand bad behaviour.

87 Ibid, 95.
88 Freud, “The Ego and the Id.”
Freud writes: “[The super ego] is the vehicle of the ego ideal by which the ego measures itself, which it emulates, and whose demand for ever greater perfection it strives to fulfill.”\footnote{Freud, “Dissection of the Psychical Personality,” [1933] New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis, ed. and trans. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1965), 64-65.} In addition, the super ego came to represent the mark of adulthood that results from the resolution of the oedipal stage.

The super ego poses a significant problem for female development. Already in 1905, Freud claimed that children are sexual from birth. Freud believes that all children are born bisexual and “polymorphously perverse” which means that they simply live by the pleasure principle, forming attachments to anyone and anything that provides food, protection and love and take physical pleasure from oral, anal and masturbatory experiences which in adulthood can be perceived as neurotic. Infants, Freud claims, are also unaware of their sexual designation as male or female.\footnote{Freud, Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality.} Therefore, girls and boys are essentially the same in the early stages of life. And, for the most part, boys and girls both take their mother, who is often the primary caregiver, as their first love object.

The Oedipus complex typically appears between the ages of 3 and 5, and is a normal, universal phenomenon, according to Freud. It is marked by a sexual desire on the part of the child for the parent of the opposite sex. The boy comes to see his father as a rival for his mother’s affections and the girl sees the mother as a rival for her father’s affections. Children develop ambivalent feelings for their same-sex parents. Boys both admire their fathers, wanting to be like them, and fear them because they are stronger than they are.
Freud claims that boys fear that their fathers will castrate them, which will make them like girls, who are already castrated. This castration anxiety causes boys to ultimately give up their erotic pursuit of their mothers, which triggers the establishment of a strong super ego. Girls, on the other hand, because they are already castrated, do not have the same motivation to resolve their oedipal feelings, hence they have difficulty forming a strong super ego. However, Freud does suggest that instead of the threat of castration, girls fear the threat of the loss of love.\(^1\) This causes the girl to seek passive aims, such as the narcissistic need *to be loved*, while boys have active aims, such as the need *to love*. When girls realize that they are castrated, that they do not have a penis, they experience a narcissistic injury that results in feelings of low self-worth and penis envy.

There are a number of ways of interpreting the female oedipal position and penis envy. One straightforward interpretation is that a girl could naturally harbor a strong desire for passivity, while feeling an equally strong love for her father. However, Freud maintains that both boys and girls have natural masculine desires and this is why the girl develops penis envy.\(^2\) The oedipal situation, for the girl, is based, then, not on love for the father, but a covetous wish for the father’s penis. Since she has no penis or phallic power of her own, a girl attempts to acquire it from her father or other men. In other words, a girl is destined to seek out her subjectivity and her own phallic power through men or through “masculine” pursuits. She can therefore develop a “masculinity complex” based on the illusion that she can be just like men, or resolve her penis envy by accepting her passivity.

\(^1\) Freud, “The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex”, [1924], *SE* 19, 178.
\(^2\) Ibid, 178-179.
Passivity still has its aims, they are simply indirect aims. When a girl reaches the oedipal years, she still desires to have power, but because of her limited position, she needs to seek power through others, namely her father. Freud writes: “She enters the Oedipus situation as though into a haven or refuge.” Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel argues that this haven is uniquely experienced by girls because they have no fear of castration and no subsequent psychic pressure to individuate through the consolidation of a mature super ego. One manifestation of this refuge-taking in the father, is that the girl can wish to bear the father’s child. But, again, this desire does not stem from a romantic affection for the father, but to possess his penis. The child, in this case, is representative of the penis and its internalization within the girl. Through a child, particularly a son, a woman can achieve phallic power indirectly.

The female oedipal complex emerges out of a girl’s quest for identity and subjectivity and failure to achieve a strong super ego. Furthermore, the feeling of taking refuge in the father can be interpreted as a secondary experience of infantile narcissistic elation. In 1921, Freud commented on “the absolutely self-sufficient” nature of fetal narcissism, which is the root of all forms of narcissism. In the womb, the child enjoys a sense of unity with her environment that gives her a sense of omnipotence over her universe. Freud writes:

Originally the ego includes everything, later it separates off an external world from itself. Our present ego-feeling is, therefore, only a shrunken residue of a

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93 Ibid.
95 Ibid, 95.
96 Freud, “Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego.”
much more inclusive – indeed, an all-embracing – feeling which corresponded to a more intimate bond between the ego and the world about it.\footnote{Freud, “Civilization and its Discontents,” Civilization, Society and Religion 12 (New York: Penguin Books, 1991), 255.} Freud compares this experience of absolute unity to the “oceanic feeling” one has in a mystical or religious experience. The goal of much religious meditation is to receive this kind of reunification with the universe, or with God that is likened to the fetal state.

The fetus is fed, kept warm and protected; therefore it experiences a kind of elated sense of continual well-being without conflict or displeasure. Béla Grunberger calls this an “undifferentiated primal state” consisting of a “perfect homeostasis, without needs, since needs are satisfied automatically.”\footnote{Béla Grunberger, Narcissism: Psychoanalytic Essays, trans. Joyce S. Diamanti (New York: International Universities Press, 1979), 13-14.} Like a parasite, the fetus is attached to its host and does not consider itself as apart from its host. There is no inside or outside, no ego as distinct from the mother.

The sense of fetal elation continues on to some degree after the baby is born. However, by degrees, the baby feels that nourishment is sometimes delayed and that she is not in total command of her environment. This injures the child’s narcissism and the experience of desire for the initial state of unity is born and rules the infant in one form or another for the rest of its life. Grunberger writes:

Magic omnipotence, the longing for autonomy, and self-esteem are frequently cited characteristics of the narcissist. The fetus, it happens, is truly omnipotent
and sovereign (in his universe, which for him is one and the same as the universe); he is autonomous, knowing nothing other than himself.  

For the narcissist, there is a dual desire for both autonomy and oneness with her environment. This is evident in the desires expressed by the girls at the purity ball. On the one hand, the girls want to be loved because they are special and uniquely deserving of love, and on the other hand, they want to belong – to their father, their family, their church, their peer group, other virginity pledgers and eventually to their husband.

Lou Andreas-Salomé, a close friend, student and colleague of Freud’s, wrote a remarkable, but not particularly well-known, article entitled “The Dual Orientation of Narcissism” in which she discusses the paradoxical nature of narcissism as both desiring of fusion with the world and desiring of total autonomy from the world. She explains: “the dual disposition of narcissism…[is] turned on the one hand toward self-assertion and on the other toward abandonment in the passive boundless state.” The “boundless” state could, on the one hand, be seen as the opposite of narcissism, as the loss of self. However, Andreas-Salomé interprets this boundlessness as a kind of narcissistic totalitarianism in which the self encompasses its surroundings. In short, the self is everything.

Andreas-Salomé sees the mythical Narcissus as one who is captured by the unity of his image reflected back to him, which is more of a non-image, since the self dissolves into its own background. She writes: “The Narcissus of legend gazed…at the mirror of Nature. Perhaps it was not just himself that he beheld in the mirror, but himself as if he

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99 Ibid, 15.
were still All.”\textsuperscript{101} In unhealthy narcissism, the self gains all, but it simultaneously loses itself as a separate entity to which others can relate.

The distortion that is characteristic of the narcissist’s self-image is similar to the experience of being in love, as Freud describes it. The state of being ‘in-love’, for Freud, dissolves ego boundaries and results in an “over-valuation” and idealization of the object of love, which is simply a projection of one’s own ideal ego.\textsuperscript{102} Furthermore, being in-love destroys the distinction between selves and recapitulates the infantile feeling of originary fusion with one’s surroundings.

Freud describes how the infant is ruled by the pleasure principle which determines what the ego wants to incorporate into itself. The world, for the infantile pleasure-ego is separated by what is good and should be kept in, and what is bad and should be kept out. In other words, the internal world is identical with what is good and the external world with what is bad. Leonard Shengold characterizes this as “I” and “not-I” thinking.\textsuperscript{103} What is good is included in me and what is bad is what is expelled or separate from me. As the infant develops, it is capable of “reality-testing,” which consists of perceiving and judging what is real and unreal, not just good or bad.\textsuperscript{104} Along with this ability to distinguish what is real and unreal comes the ability to distinguish between others and the self.

\textsuperscript{101} Ibid., 9.
\textsuperscript{102} Freud, “Group Psychology,” 141-145.
\textsuperscript{103} Leonard Shengold, \textit{Father, don’t you see I’m burning}? (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991).
\textsuperscript{104} Freud, “Negation,” [1925] \textit{SE} 19.
9. Narcissistic Purity

Purity and virginity in the evangelical American context can be read as examples of personal and collective states of unhealthy narcissistic integrity which protect the ‘I’, which is perceived as good, and externalize the ‘not-I’ which is perceived as bad. The ritual pledge draws a protective barrier around the daughter and it becomes taboo to cross this barrier. Only the family is allowed close access to the daughter, with the father acting as high priest of the home and guardian of his daughter’s virginity. The marriage ceremony reinforces these boundaries, with the husband becoming the substitute father and new high priest of the home. Narcissistic virginity, then, can be seen as a rejection of externality.

The narcissistic virgin remains in an infantile position of fusion with her environment as eternally virginal. Even when she marries, she simply exchanges one father figure for another. Narcissism, in this case, is like a perpetual virginity that prohibits independent subjectivity. And the danger of unhealthy narcissism for a virgin girl is that she is raised to adopt an ideal ego that is dependent on the outside praise of first her father, then other men for feelings of self-worth and beauty.

This dependency on the father’s affirmation, in a traditional, patriarchal system could be born out of psychological necessity. The daughter’s love for the father could be interpreted as an unconscious envy of his phallic power – that power that constitutes her as a person of worth. The girl, like the boy, wishes to reclaim a sense of fetal omnipotence in which she was all-powerful, with dominion over her environment, but she finds herself in a situation in which her omnipotence is dependent on another.
The phallus is a symbol of personal power and subjectivity. For women, who have lacked a certain degree of self-determination because of oppressive societal factors and overdependency on their fathers, the phallus becomes a representation of the selfhood and agency that they do not have, but wish to possess. It is fitting that the American purity movement came up with an integrity ball for boys, which highlights their strength of will and character, and, above all, their self-sufficiency and ability to determine their own destiny. For boys, who naturally possess the phallus, there is no need to seek wholeness elsewhere, as girls must.

The father represents difference from the mother, from the world. The phallus does not contain the power to differentiate within itself - it has become associated with this power. It is therefore the phallus as a symbol of power that the little girl envies. The child also associates the father with the outside world in a traditional family constellation. The father embodies a transcendent, free agency that the developing child covets, particularly during the years when the child’s chief motivation is to exercise its will “in the context of the parents’ greater power and his limitations.”

The child, through witnessing the activity of the parents, particularly the father, “is becoming conscious of will and agency, of being the one who desires…each want expresses the desire to be recognized as a subject: above and beyond the thing itself that is wanted, the child wants recognition of her will, of her desire, of her act.”

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The father represents the ideal of power and separation and omnipotence. This omnipotence informs the male child of what he will become and the female child of what she cannot become. The oedipal situation of the son, then, is to somehow overcome his father’s omnipotence and the daughter to attach herself to the father’s power. Both the male and female child feel the desire for power, but they each quickly learn their options and limitations and develop strategies to obtain that power. In the conservative family structure, like the one exhibited by the Merkels, daughters are not engaged in an inappropriate vying for power by attaching themselves to their fathers. This kind of attachment is encouraged and deemed morally good.

10. **Phallus Envy: Biology and language in the construction of gender**

Jessica Benjamin argues that the importance of paternal identification for girls in the pre-oedipal period has rarely been discussed. She suggests that when a girl turns from the mother to the father she does so not only because of sexual oedipal motivations, but in order to achieve independence. Therefore, the love the girl feels for her father is partly identificatory in nature, since the father models and the phallus represents autonomy and separation from the mother and dependent infancy. She writes:

> In standing for difference and separation, the phallus becomes the desired object for children of both sexes. The meaning of the penis as a symbol of revolt and separation derives from the nature of the child’s struggle to separate from the

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original maternal power. The father’s independence is a hoped for goal that has real possibilities for boys, while it is a symbolic possibility for girls only insofar as they achieve a certain phallic status and freedom in society to both become weaned from the mother and transcend the social limitations experienced by their own gender.

As the girl develops and internalizes the interpretations of her gender given to her by her family and culture, she translates her preoedipal identification with the father into oedipal sexual desire, since she is not a boy (anymore) and cannot hope to become the father. She then reidentifies with the mother who models what she will become. Identification, then, is the primary drive in infancy while sexual desire is a secondary drive. The power of such a reconfiguration of Freudian theory, which tends to place the sexual drive in a primary position, is that it allows for the possibility that sexual desire may have a psycho-social and linguistic, not merely naturalistic or biological, component.

There are problems that arise from Freud’s configuration of male and female sexuality. His biological determinism is one particular problem that has vexed feminists. For Freud, the male subject is normative and the female subject represents a derivative, deformed version of him. She is wounded from the start because, by some cruel twist of fate, biology has failed to give her a penis. In fact, she is not only born without a penis, but has, at some point, prior to her own individual existence, had her penis removed through castration. Therefore, a woman is always already castrated. However, she does not know that she is castrated until she recognizes her sexual difference from the male. Her real castration happens in a moment of realization when she is struck down from her

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110 Ibid.
equal place among men. In other words, her castration is one of awareness, it comes into effect the moment she is made conscious of the reality that she is different from the boys around her and that this difference means that she lacks something that they have. A girl henceforth spends her life strategizing how she can regain the power she has lost through this given awareness of her castration.

If castration only becomes a reality when a girl becomes conscious of it, then it is not a biological fact, but a cultural situation which has been thrust upon the girl. Penis envy, then, should more accurately be called phallus envy, because it is not the penis, but what the penis signifies that is important. Freud does not ever recant his biological position but he does admit that there are other factors that may be at work. He writes: “We must beware…of underestimating the influence of social customs, which similarly force women into passive situations. All this is still far from being cleared up.”111 While we can grasp hopefully at Freud’s admission that social forces may have a role in the passivization of the female position, Freud ultimately leaves us hanging as to how, precisely, this might work.

Freud never explores the extent to which even a woman’s biological being is constructed. However, the potency of Freud as an innovator is that his theories have always been and continue to be seeds for continued transformations in psychoanalysis and beyond. For example, Jacques Lacan considers himself a dedicated Freudian, but reworks much of Freud’s theory and resolves a number of problems that Freud did not.

Lacan states: “Freudian biology has nothing to do with biology.”\textsuperscript{112} He means that Freud uses certain concepts from biology and reinterprets them in such a radically inventive way, that they cease to belong to the field of biology proper, even if Freud himself would not fully admit to this departure.

Lacan critiques Freud’s application of biology to psychoanalysis, claiming that Freud does not adequately distinguish between nature and culture. However, in \textit{The Future of An Illusion}, Freud writes:

> Having recognized religious doctrines to be illusions, we are at once confronted with the further question: may not other cultural possessions, which we esteem highly and by which we let our life be ruled, be of a similar nature?...is it not the case that in our culture the relations between the sexes are disturbed by an erotic illusion, or by a series of erotic illusions?\textsuperscript{113}

Freud applies the same analysis to religion and the relationships between the sexes. He argues that both are humanly produced, therefore culturally produced, phenomena. Furthermore, while he refers to biological aspects of the feminine as determining particular forms of behaviour on numerous occasions, he still admits that a person’s sex and the way that men and women relate are socially conditioned.

For Lacan, the symbolic order determines our understanding of bodies and how they function. This is why, for example, Lacan talks about the symbolic meaning of the phallus, rather than the physical function of the penis. Lacan makes great attempts to


\textsuperscript{113} Freud, \textit{Future}, 37.
detach the phallus from the male body and use it as a trans-gendered signifier of power.\textsuperscript{114} While Lacan tries to distance the cultural phallus from the biological penis, he does not take a completely “culturalist” stance which would deny the influence of the physical body on a person’s subjectivity. He complicates culture and biology by treating them as a series of interconnected functions which help to define the self. One can see these interconnections in Lacan’s formulation of the “mirror stage.” Here, he builds on Freud’s contention in that the ego is indivisibly configured in relation to a body.

According to Lacan, the infant learns to know itself through an early projection of an imaginary body. Therefore, the material world cannot be easily equated with reality or “the Real” for Lacan. Even the material world of the body is subject to social and imaginary influence. The body is therefore an object of reflection, according to Lacan. At approximately 6 months of age, the infant experiences itself as a bundle of poorly coordinated motor skills. However, in a moment of joyful revelation, or \textit{jouissance}, the infant sees a unified image of itself in the mirror. The child sees in its reflection an idealized self with which it prefers to identify, rather than the frustrating experienced physical self that cannot perform up to its own desired standards.\textsuperscript{115}

The infant’s conception of itself is mediated through an out-of-body experience that is found in its image, rather than in a frustratingly out of control in-body experience. The image in the mirror is identified as a “me”; the ego “I” that I come to recognize as

\textsuperscript{114} Some feminists applaud Lacan’s de-essentializing of gender with regard to his interpretation of biology and culture, while some feminists cannot accept his usage of the phallus as his primary signifier because it will always be associated, whether biologically or symbolically, with the penis. See Juliet Mitchell. \textit{Psychoanalysis and Feminism} (New York: Vintage Books, 1974). For discussion about Lacan’s failure to dissociate the phallus from the penis, see David Macey, \textit{Lacan in Contexts} (London and New York: Verso. 1988).

myself.\textsuperscript{116} The “fixity” of this image is also what others come to know consistently as me. However, Lacan argues that this ego or body image is an imposter; a fictional doubling of the real me. The “real” is therefore another mode that exists where the imaginary is lacking. For example, it is that part of me that is not represented by the image I have of myself, the part of me that is not projected onto the mirror and resists an imaginary or symbolic signification.\textsuperscript{117}

Following the logic of the infant’s identification with an imaginary body, one could argue that a woman’s body is not a \textit{real} entity either. Her body, as she comes to know it, is given to her by the imaginary reflected back to her. Feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray takes Freud’s body-ego and Lacan’s imaginary body as her starting point for a proposed feminist conception of sexual difference and subjectivity. Even though the Western world, according to Irigaray, favours a masculine imaginary body, if we ground our understandings of the body on the psychoanalytic theory of the imaginary, then we have the hope of \textit{re-imagining} the body.\textsuperscript{118}

Language does not simply describe reality as it is, but stands in the place of reality in Lacan’s model. Therefore, language is always political. For Louis Althusser, a former Marxist who was influenced by Lacan, ideology does not reflect reality in itself, nor does it convey a false depiction of real conditions, as Marxism would have it. Ideology

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{117} Lacan, “The Mirror Stage.”
\end{itemize}
symbolizes the imaginary relationship of people to reality. This is a result of the function of language, which determines our experience of and relation to reality. Reality, as such, is not directly accessible, according to Lacan and Althusser. We create a symbolic relationship with reality through language and ideology. However, there is a performative element to ideology. Ideology acts, it does not merely symbolize. Feminist philosopher Judith Butler exhibits Althusser’s influence when she argues that gender is constituted on the “performance” of ideology and language through the body. Acts and language are the means through which we live, communicate, and apprehend meaning.

Ideology enforces an imaginary fantasy of totality, like the totalized image of the reflected body in the mirror stage that unwittingly comes to identify with its representational body as if it were its real body. This totality is like a literal interpretation of reality that believes it represents reality as it is. The totalizing nature of the ideological imaginary is apparent in a fundamentalist understanding of reality.

The other linguistic mode that Lacan discusses in relation to the imaginary and the real is the “symbolic” mode of signification that constitutes the realm of language. Beyond the imaginary representation of the self, the child begins to learn the language that will enable her to attempt to re-present the objects present in her world. And, this linguistification of reality actually distances the child from, rather than brings the child closer to, reality. Ellie Ragland-Sullivan explains:

As soon as “reality” (the data of the word) is caught up in a symbolic network – that

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is, symbolized or given meaning – the thing becomes present in a word or concept rather than in any immediate experiential reality. Moreover, one cannot return to the thing-in-itself once language names the thing. Forever after, one can only know the thing through recourse to words. 121

There is a recognition built into the symbolic mode of representation that it is not representing reality as it is. The symbolic self-consciously represents itself as symbolic. There is a freedom in the symbolic mode to transform our understanding of the way that we are constituted as human beings through language and socialization and gender identity formation that allows us to escape the confines of essentialism.

11. Conclusion

Bearman and Brückner conclude that virginity pledgers are participating in an identity movement that provides a sense of belonging for some and exclusion for others. I argue that pledgers, many of whom attend purity balls with their fathers, display narcissistic self perceptions and draw xenophobic boundaries between their community and others who belong to other communities and make other sexual choices. Purity can be defined here in a narcissistic sense as that which concerns itself with sameness and conformity as exemplified by virginity pledging which encourages a collective individualism in which everyone is special and unique in the same way. That which is different is seen as a potential pollutant or corrupting influence. Furthermore, I argue that pledging and purity balls do not function as ceremonial rites of passage that mark the

transition from childhood to maturity, but fit Arnold Van Gennep’s category of negative rites which focus on the prohibition of certain taboo behaviours as a way of avoiding pollution.

Freud’s oedipal theory and theory of narcissism provide a helpful lens through which to examine this movement. Narcissism, for Freud, starts in infancy and describes the child’s experience of itself as the only being in existence. As the infant matures, it develops an understanding of itself as separate from the world of others, who function as objects in its environment. However, Lou Andreas-Salomé argues that the desire for both infantile fusion with one’s environment and the need to feel special constitute the paradoxical dual orientation of narcissism throughout a person’s life. Freud claims that the growing child forms an image of itself as an ideal ego which becomes a narcissistic object of self love with which the child comes to identify.

Narcissism, for Freud, is considered a normal stage in the development of a child which must be resolved as the child matures into adulthood. The oedipal complex is also considered a normal part of a child’s psyche for both Freud and for this movement that sees romantic attachments between fathers and daughters as normal. However, for Freud, the oedipal complex must be resolved through the formation of a super ego – a resolution that is not strongly encouraged in this movement. Freud remarks that girls have a hard time with this resolution because they are not motivated by the threat of castration but are already castrated. Therefore, vestiges of their oedipal attachment to their fathers continue through maturity and hinder independent, ethical self identities. This failure to reach adulthood, as Freud sees it, results in penis envy and a continued narcissism in which the girl comprehends herself as a lovable object rather than a lover of objects.
Lacan presents a cultural, linguistic interpretation of Freud’s biological explanations of concepts such as penis envy, suggesting that penis envy has more to do with status envy than with biology. The phallus, then, is symbolic of a culturally conditioned masculine power. Lacan also provides an account of how the infant comes to identify itself with its own image in the mirror stage, instigating a representational understanding of the self that is culturally mediated. This representational identification is in danger of falling prey to narcissism, when the self believes that it is identifying with its real self, instead of an idealized image. The purity movement exhibits such narcissistic self understandings when idealized images of culturally constructed virgins are taken as real, God-given selves.

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CHAPTER V

No Man’s Land:
Escaping the Cloister of Narcissism through Transcendence and Intersubjectivity

*The elite daughters of heaven long to hear God’s voice and revel in His embrace...Wrap yourself in His righteousness. Adorn yourself with the Jewels of His adoration.*

~ Lisa Bevere

In the preceding chapter, I argue that virginity pledging and purity balls are indicative of a narcissistic identity movement. In this chapter, I suggest an alternative possibility for identity formation based on the fostering of intersubjective transcendence and mutual recognition. Purity movements encourage an immanent rather than transcendent mode of being that locks the self, the family, and those who belong, into a homogeneous world of the same that renders intersubjective engagement with the Other impossible. Purity, I argue, is fundamentally opposed to ethics because it excludes, damns or assimilates the Other.

In the first section, I discuss the prelapsarian immanence of Eve and Mary that is also characteristic of virgin girls today. While there is no explicit connection between Eve, Mary and the current purity movement, there are thematic similarities that deserve exploration. Prelapsarian immanence denies a girl’s free will and ensures her purity and her place as object of affection in relation to the masculine subject. The mythologies of both Eve and Mary determine the way that female sexuality and the nature of sin have been manifested in Christianity. I compare Catholic and Protestant interpretations of these biblical women and the ways that they have factored into attitudes toward female
virginity and family in these traditions, arguing that perpetual virginity, or celibacy, is highly virtuous in Catholicism, while Protestants only honour virginity insofar as it serves the family. In the second section, I outline an ethic of transcendence in relation to the work of Simone de Beauvoir that takes the Other seriously, not as a threat to the Self, or as an object of the Self, but as something that calls the Self out of itself and into transcendent subjectivity. Virginity, I propose, can take on either an immanent or a transcendent quality, depending on how one relates to the Other. In the third section, I discuss the possibility that intersubjectivity as opposed to narcissistic omnipotence can be developed as early as infancy and that this possibility contributes to the mutual recognition between developing subjects and helps to overcome the subject-object model of relating that is prominent in the evangelical purity movement.

1. The Catholic and Protestant Mary

It is interesting, but not surprising, that the new virginity movement has not revived the Virgin Mary for evangelical Protestantism. It is not surprising because Protestants have always been suspicious of Marian veneration. There are a few possible reasons for this. First, much of the Marian mythology is based on extra-canonical source material. The New Testament has little information about Mary or her life, so Catholics look to deuterocanonical or apocryphal works to augment their Marian mythology. Protestants abide by the principle of sola scriptura, or scripture alone, for the word of God, therefore these sources outside of the Bible do not have authority for them. Second, Protestants have argued that devotion to Mary compromises the central and unique place
of Jesus as mediator between God and humanity. Third, Protestants seem to view Mary as a distinctly Catholic figure and wish to distinguish themselves from Catholicism.

The virgin birth is one of the marks of evangelical orthodoxy in Protestantism; therefore it appears negligent that Protestants have not given Mary more theological attention. The virgin birth is included as one of the fundamentals of belief that emerged with the fundamentalist-modernist controversy in the early 20th century. This tenet of faith is based on 3 biblical sources: Isaiah 7:14, which foretells the virgin birth; Matthew 1:23 which reiterates this prophesy; and Luke 1:26-35 which describes in more detail how the angel Gabriel announces to Mary that she will become pregnant by God even though she is a virgin. Despite these passages and the prominent place that the virgin birth holds in the fundamentals of evangelical faith, Mary has not received much consideration for Protestants. I would argue that this theological gap is partly due to the nature of Mary’s role for Protestants. For Catholics, Mary is a perpetual virgin with her own miraculous biography which exists on almost equal footing to Jesus’. For Protestants, Mary is only important insofar as her purity serves its function as a condition of Jesus’ perfection. In other words, Mary is only a preface to the central narrative of Jesus’ life and death. This attitude reflects the conditional nature of virginity as a means to an end, the end being marriage and the capacity to be a good mother. In other words, Protestants tend to see Mary in instrumental terms – not as the Queen of Heaven, but as the maternal means by which Jesus, the masculine subject, enters the world.

In Catholicism, Mary’s mother Anna conceives her immaculately, so that Mary can become venerable in her own life and be sinless, so that Jesus, by extension, may be
sinsless. Catholicism honours Mary, her mother Anna and numerous female saints, and Catholics commonly refer to the Church as the Bride of Christ. Protestantism, on the other hand, has virtually no female figures that it holds sacred. There are many female figures for Catholics to emulate and look to for spiritual wisdom within their religious mythology. However, it is not enough that these women simply exist in Catholicism. One must ask what these women model or represent to the believer and how their example has influenced the feminine ideal in Christianity.

2. The Apocryphal Mary

In the apocryphal account of Christ's birth found in The Protoevangelium of James, Joseph is portrayed as an old widow who has been chosen by the priests and elders to be Mary's "ward," or husband, in order to safeguard her virginity. In this version of the story, Mary grows up in the temple, where her virginity is protected until she reaches puberty. At this point, she is transferred to Joseph's care. When Mary becomes pregnant, a priest tests her purity by making her drink holy water, which was said to make sins appear on the visage of the drinker. Mary passes the test and is brought to a cave in which she gives birth attended to by a Hebrew midwife. During the birth, a bright cloud overshadows the entrance of the cave. The light from the cloud becomes so bright that the midwife is unable to visually witness the birth. The midwife runs to tell

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2 The author of The Protoevangelium of James is rumoured to be the brother of Jesus.
Salome of the miraculous virgin birth, the *parthenogenesis*. However, Salome insists on inspecting Mary's physical condition to test for herself whether Mary's virginity is in fact intact. It is the second time that Mary is tested physically. Salome's hand withers as soon as she touches Mary. She repents of her sin of unbelief and confirms the virgin birth. ³ It is interesting that Salome is punished for testing God, but the priests who test Mary's purity are not.

In 649 CE, at the Fourth Lateran Council in Rome, Pope Martin I declared Mary's perpetual virginity, saying: "As light passes through glass without harming the glass, so too Jesus left the womb of Mary in a miraculous manner without any opening of the womb and without any physical violation of her virginity." Mary's perpetual virginity means that she was a virgin before, during and after the birth of Christ. ⁴ Mary does not experience labor pains when she gives birth, since labor pains were given to women as a consequence of Eve’s culpability in the Fall. Mary was immaculately conceived; therefore she was not subject to original sin. ⁵

Although popular belief had already affirmed the Bodily Assumption of Mary into heaven for centuries, this final dogma only became official in 1950 under Pope Pius XII. Due to Mary's immaculate status, she is considered to be exempt from the corruption of death, rising body and soul into heaven, putting her on equal footing with Christ, who

experiences a physical as well as spiritual resurrection. Mary’s perpetual virginity can be interpreted as immortality. Her body remains intact for eternity because her physical form never dissolves in death. All of the Catholic church dogmas about Mary paint a picture of a perfect woman who has no experience of sin, sex, pain or death. This calls into question the humanity of Mary, who is supposedly the only source of Jesus’ humanity. What kind of an incarnation is founded on a human who escapes basic human experiences such as sin, sex, pain or death? This dehumanized Mary represents a docetic trend that only recognizes the spiritual elements of Jesus’ being.

3. A Psychoanalytic Interpretation of Mary

Psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva argues that the mythology of Mary is the product of a male oedipal fantasy that dissociates Mary from her own female sexuality. Mary, as ever virgin, is sexually removed from her husband Joseph, choosing instead to dedicate all of her loving energy to the realization of her son’s heroic potential, perhaps as a passive aim for her own phallic power. The virginal maternal figure is rooted in primary narcissism, according to Kristeva. She claims that this male fantasy is focused less on “an idealized archaic mother” and more on “the idealized relationship that binds [him] to her.” In other words, rather than simply worshipping a goddess figure, the male worships his relationship to her – what she is for him. In this dynamic, the child is only concerned with how the mother fulfills his needs. The Mary-Jesus dyad exhibits this. According to

Catholic tradition, Mary’s whole life - her immaculate conception, the preservation of her purity in the temple and by Joseph, and her sexual identity – is simply a precondition to Jesus’ life.

One could argue that Mary participates in the oedipal drama by becoming impregnated by a father God. In the Eastern Orthodox tradition, Mary experiences a Dormition instead of an Assumption. At the end of her mortal life she is depicted in iconography as falling asleep and transforming into a little girl. She sits on the lap of her son in heaven who has essentially become her father. In this way, all of the male figures in her life, including her guardian Joseph, become father figures.

The Catholic doctrine of Mary’s perpetual virginity exhibits narcissistic immanence on a grand scale. Forever virgin, untouched by any earthly lover, she is the most “highly favoured” one of God, the chief object of his affection who is “blessed among women.” Even her child is a singular product of her narcissistic pride – the only son of God. Amy Hollywood discusses the gendered narcissism implicit in various female mystics’ desire to be God’s sole object of affection. In reference to Beauvoir, Hollywood claims that, as a rule, male mystics desire to be all. She argues that these men seek to transcend themselves by striving to become like God. She argues that women also desire to be all, but that they have been “systematically thwarted” in their efforts by patriarchal culture and religion. This is because women are “constrained by their role as

7 This father God is also Mary’s grandfather, since he impregnated Anna, her mother.
8 Luke 1:28; 42. NIV.
man’s other.” However, the desire to be all does not disappear for women. It is simply rerouted into a desire to be “all for the other.” The woman, then, desires not to be the subject who loves, but the sole loveable object of the male subject lover, be it man or the masculine God. This is the root of her narcissism, since by desiring to be the only object, she desires to annihilate the desirability of other potential objects. This is also her passive-aggressive assertion of her desire for phallic power.

4. The Virgin Eve and the Virgin Mary

Mary is a perfect image of purity because she was not even born with the potential for sinning. It is not in her created nature. Her immaculate conception places her in the same position as Eve before the Fall – a woman without the stain of original sin. The fact that she never dies is also symbolic, because death is the result of Eve’s sin. Mary’s overcoming of death signals a return to a pre-Fall state of sinlessness. Mary is the new Eve and she is given the chance to correct Eve’s mistake. Eve’s mistake was that she used her free will and was thereby the catalyst for a categorically different, transcendent subjectivity marked by freedom and the potential for sin. Pope John Paul II said that Mary exercised her free will by saying “yes” to God’s divine plan, as opposed to Eve, who said “no” to God. It does not make logical sense that Mary’s obedience is somehow more free than Eve’s disobedience. This is like saying one has a choice

10 Pope John Paul II made this statement in a speech entitled “Mary, the new Eve, freely obeyed God” before a General Audience on September 18, 1996. See L’Osservatore Romano, (September 25, 1996), 19.
between two options as long as one chooses the first option. This is not to say that choosing to follow what one believes is God’s plan is not an exercise of free will. However, Mary does not exemplify transcendent subjectivity by virtue of the fact that she is born and continues to live immaculately.

Eve, because of her disobedience, has sex and bears children with pain and then dies. Mary, on the other hand, regresses to a prelapsarian femininity without any free will and no potential for sin. Marina Warner writes:

In Christian theology Mary's consent to the Incarnation, her *Fiat*, exemplifies the most sublime fusion of [humanity’s] free will with the divine plan. The free cooperation of [humanity] and God for salvation bears the metaphysical name of synergy, but this magnificent and lofty view of Mary's act of acceptance came to epitomize a restricted moral notion quite unworthy of the term: that of feminine submissiveness.\(^\text{11}\)

The idea of Mary's passive resignation is mirrored in Paul's idealization of the feminine attributes of submissiveness and obedience. In Paul's letter to the Ephesians he declares that a woman can only relate to God through her husband, who is also her master in social affairs.\(^\text{12}\) Because of Paul's unparalleled influence on Christian theology, Mary's acceptance fails to be interpreted as a "fusion of free will" and divine will. Instead, Mary is more often viewed as modest, humble, silent, self-effacing and reigns as the ultimate prototype of woman as the vessel through whom worldly masculine or divine power

\(^{12}\) 5: 22-33
gestates and is realized or as the intercessor through whom the world is purified.

The idea of Mary’s “free obedience” is found in the theology of 2nd century church father St. Irenaeus, who wrote in his treatise Against Heresies:

[Eve] was seduced by the words of an angel so that she turned away from God by disobeying his word, so...Mary...received the good news from an angel's announcement in such a way as to give birth to God by obeying his word; and as the former was seduced so that she disobeyed God, the latter let herself be convinced to obey God, and so the Virgin Mary became the advocate of the virgin Eve. And as the human race was subjected to death by a virgin, it was liberated by a Virgin; a virgin's disobedience was thus counterbalanced by a Virgin's obedience...

Eve was considered a virgin by early church fathers such as St. Irenaeus, Justin Martyr, Tertullian and St. Augustine because she was born without sin and was undefiled until she was seduced. This seduction was not a sexual seduction, but a seduction of the will, that was really a discovery of the will. Under the snake’s tutelage, or the angel, as Iranaeus calls it, Eve sinned against God by choosing a different path from the one God had laid out for her. Eve, in turn, becomes Adam’s seducer.

There is also a patristic belief that Eve did not have sexual intercourse until after she had instigated the Fall, even though she was already “espoused” to Adam. In the 4th century, St. Jerome declared that Eve was a virgin in Eden before the Fall and that


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sexuality only existed after the Fall. Therefore, for many church fathers and much of the Christian theology that followed, sexuality never escapes its association with sin. Through Eve, women were cursed and deemed seducers of men. Through Mary, women are redeemed. However, the figure of Mary sets up an impossible ideal: motherhood without sexuality.

5. Catholic and Protestant Virginity

Within Catholicism, starting in the Middle Ages, women could choose to be perpetual virgins like Mary and dedicate their lives to lifelong chastity in the convent. Protestants, on the other hand, have elevated marriage and family above lifelong chastity. American Protestants like 18th century politician Daniel Rogers saw marriage as the foundation of society. He writes: “[Marriage is] the Preservative of Chastity, the Seminary of the Commonwealth, seed-plot of the Church, pillar (under God) of the World, right hand of providence, supporter of laws…the ambition of virginity, the foundation of Countries.”16 In other words, marriage purifies sexuality from its association with sin.

Calvin argued that marriage, if it is ruled by fidelity, is a second kind of virginity. In similar fashion, True Love Waits, the abstinence ministry for young adults, says:

Sexual purity does not end with marriage. Marriage partners are supposed to experience sexual love with each other in a way that is fulfilling to both. However, purity means being completely faithful to your spouse in thought and deed. "Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral" (Heb. 13:4).  

This definition of purity is evidence of a Protestant understanding of purity as meaningful within the context of marriage and the family. Calvin and Rogers also reflect a typical American Protestant attitude toward traditional marriage – that it is a fundamentally pure institution upon which all aspects of society and nationhood are founded. This is partly why any changes to marriage, such as the legal recognition of same-sex marriage, are so contentious in the United States.

Even though there is no explicit reliance on the model of Mary for modern Protestant virgins, Mary’s perpetual daughterhood resonates with the expectation of these virgin girls. First, purity is achieved through paternity and oedipal dynamics. God is Mary’s father by virtue of her mother’s impregnation by God and this same God is the father of Mary’s child. For girls who attend the purity ball with their fathers, their purity is introduced to them by their fathers, they are taught that they belong to their fathers, and

their fathers take responsibility for the protection of their purity as a part of their own calling to be men of integrity. Males are the agents through whom Mary and these modern virgins receive their identity and purpose. They also participate in a prelapsarian identity ontologically similar to the pre-Fall state of purity of Eve and the renewed prelapsarian status of the virgin Mary. In other words, girls are not yet ethical beings who have free will because sexuality is depicted as an external influence that can penetrate them, but which they do not naturally possess as a part of their internal structure. Their purity needs to be protected, indicating that they are still pure, unlike boys who must control their sinful natures through acts of free will. Girls’ agency is limited by their compulsion to say “yes” to their fathers’ wills, therefore, they do not make independent decisions, but are guarded by others who make decisions for them.

6. The Angel in the House

The purity ball is reminiscent of the Victorian portrayal of women as pure and angelic and men as sexual aggressors. For Victorian women, like virgin girls today, the home is a safe haven from a world that is trying to seduce them and sully their purity. Before the nineteenth-century, North American Christian women were often painted as sexual seducers who embodied a sexual appeal that was alluring to men. Peter N. Stearns writes that women in the Victorian era “became passive partners with little sexual appetite. This was a basic ingredient of the pedestal image, a commonplace of Victorian

19 The angel in the house is a metaphor that comes from a narrative poem, published in 1854, by Coventry Patmore about the perfection of his wife.
culture in the United States.” He also writes: “Woman now symbolized purity. She alone was fit to rule the home, and Victorians considered the home the true centre of life.” The home, in this case, is also a kind of prelapsarian space that is a pure refuge from the sin and corruption outside the home.

Women were viewed, not only as passive, but as “passionless”- not even lustful thoughts or sexual desires betrayed them as potential sinners. The image of the passionless woman resurfaced in the 1960s and 1970s. Tim LaHaye characterizes the woman as a “receiver” of sex. Similarly, James Dobson describes “feminine inertia” as the sexual state most natural to the female sex. With Victorian men as the sexual aggressors and women as the passive, passionless angels in the house, even the church and Christian morality became primarily the domain of women. Eventually the church attempted to remasculinize itself through movements such as mid-nineteenth-century Muscular Christianity, which featured more male, athletic metaphors for religious belief. The integrity ball for boys finds its roots in movements such as muscular

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21 Ibid, 81.
23 Tim and Beverly LaHaye, *How to be Happy Though Married* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1968), 61.
Christianity which try to instill Christian values in men such as honour, strength of will, good character and integrity, as distinctly male virtues.

During the Victorian era in America, women were understood to enjoy a virtuous, pure quality that men did not possess and this made them uniquely qualified to establish the moral atmosphere of the home. This era saw a pronounced separation of male and female spheres and roles. Betty A. DeBerg writes: “Nineteenth-century America chose to place the primary burden of such order and stability on women, their moral restraint, and their confinement within the domestic realm.”[^27] Rigid gender roles contribute to a kind of societal, marital and familial stability. Everyone knows what they are meant to be doing and who they are meant to be and how they should relate to one another. After the Victorian era, women began to branch out into more public roles, and they also gained leverage in their marriages. This caused a certain amount of social and familial disorder.^[28]

Due to the demands of industrialization, practical matters contributed to a shift in gender roles in the Victorian era. Men were not available within the home to rule the household because of the rise in workloads and women had to step up to become the head of the domestic sphere. Among other domestic duties, women were left in charge of protecting and socializing children.^[29] Soon a gain in women’s rights and the increasing number of women in the workforce also led to a change in women’s status. More and more women decided to opt for divorce or to support themselves or they “gained a better

[^29]: deBerg.
bargaining position with the marriage relationship.” 30 In other words, women were able to assume a new kind of power in their own lives, within their marital relationships and within the public sphere.

Among those who supported the transformation of women in society were some evangelicals, including social reformers such as the leaders and members of the WCTU. 31 Women who participated in the WCTU and other reform organizations took part in both the quest for women’s empowerment and in further projects to ameliorate social conditions for the less privileged. These kinds of actions allowed women to redefine themselves as useful and powerful agents in the public sphere. All of this subverted the Victorian ideals of “true womanhood.” 32 This caused a backlash from the conservative Christian community that did not support the new direction that women’s roles were taking and there emerged the so called Cult of Domesticity. According to Barbara Welter, true womanhood consisted of four conditions: piety, purity, submission and domesticity. True women were considered more religious than men, pure of heart, mind and body, stuck in a “perpetual childhood,” and the creator of the home as a haven for husbands and children. Women who were not pure were called “fallen angels.” 33

After the 1960s in America, the “pro-family movement,” with Southern women at the forefront, tried to counter the socially progressive trends and the attendant breakdown of the traditional family. Ruth Murray Brown writes:

30 Ibid, 38.
32 Ibid.
It was inevitable that there would be a backlash against the fast pace of social change engendered by the liberal sixties movements... Sex education in schools and the Supreme Court decisions removing organized prayer from the schools were bad enough. But the Equal Rights Amendment would, from the Christian conservative point of view, allow the government to interfere in God’s plan for the family.  

God’s plan for the family meant that the mother would be the Victorian ideal of the angel in the house, and the father would be the family’s link to the outside world as the breadwinner. The Equal Rights Amendment was seen as a threat to this family structure.

The December 28, 1970 issue of *Time* featured an article about the radical changes in the structure of the American family entitled “Behavior: The American Family: Future Uncertain.” It reads:

"Put very simply," says Cornell Political Sociologist Andrew Hacker, "the major change in the family in recent years, and the problems of the future, are both summed up in one word: women. In the past and until very recently, wives were simply supplementary to their husbands, and not expected to be full human beings. Today, women are involved in much greater expectations and frustrations. For one thing, 40% of U.S. women are now employed. When a woman is working, she tends to have a new perception of herself. I see this most egregiously in those women who go to liberal arts colleges, because there the professor takes

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them seriously, and this gives them big ideas. The unhappiest wives are the liberal arts graduates. The trouble comes from the fact that the institution we call marriage can't hold two full human beings—it was only designed for one and a half."\textsuperscript{35}

Women who worked outside of the home were blamed for the disintegration of family values and morals in young people. This disintegration was believed to destroy the very identity of the American people, which was heralded as a nation founded on strong families. 1970 also saw the publication of Focus on the Family founder James Dobson’s book \textit{Dare to Discipline}, in which he chastises mothers for working because it has a deleterious effect on children’s morality.\textsuperscript{36}

When women left the interior domestic life and took on a more transcendent role in the outside world, this disturbed the very foundation of the traditional family and the female purity at its core. Transcendence for women meant that they did have free will and could therefore potentially sin and have active sexual passions, like men. This threatened the immanence of the home as a pure haven from the rest of the sinful world out there.

Men, children and civilization itself depended on the immanence of femininity. In 1972, Phyllis Schlafly, the American conservative political activist and self-professed anti-feminist, spearheaded a campaign to halt the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment. One of her chief concerns was for the institution of marriage. She writes:

\begin{quote}

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\textsuperscript{36} James Dobson, \textit{Dare to Discipline} (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, 1970).
\end{quote}
If marriage is to be a successful institution, it must likewise have an ultimate decision maker, and that is the husband. Seen in this light, the laws that give the husband the right to establish the domicile of the marriage and to give his surname to his children are good laws designed to keep the family together.  

The taking of the husband’s name is a sign of immanent, contingent subjectivity that suggests that a woman’s identity comes under the purview of her husband. Schlafly refutes the idea that marriage and motherhood can be oppressive for some women. She argues that marriage and motherhood are the spheres that give all women the highest degree of satisfaction because it is in their nature to inhabit these enclosed domains. Schlafly writes: “Society simply has not invented a better way of raising children than the traditional family with a father-breadwinner and a mother-home-maker. That division of labour is cost efficient, the environment is healthy, and the children thrive on the ‘object constancy’ of the mother.” Schlafly repeatedly accuses feminist women with careers and families of being selfish and thinking of their children as annoying burdens. Schlafly’s object-constancy of the mother reflects the narcissistic male fantasy at the heart of Marian mythology which says that a woman is only fulfilled if she finds her natural place as a wife or a mother within the immanent space of the home.

39 Ibid, 223.
7. Simone de Beauvoir on Transcendence and Immanence

The Victorian angel in the house, the post-1960s stay-at-home wife and mother, and the virgin girl at the purity ball, all belong to what Beauvoir calls a sphere of immanence. She writes:

The male is called upon for action, his vocation is to produce, fight, create, progress, to transcend himself toward the totality of the universe and the infinity of the future; but traditional marriage does not invite woman to transcend herself with him; it confines her in immanence, shuts her up within the circle of herself.  

It is interesting that she says that an immanent woman is trapped in the “circle of herself,” even though she lives for the Other – for her husband and her children. This being-for-the-Other quality of a woman, which demands her self-sacrifice, is a central element of female narcissism because it establishes her as an object of affection, rather than an affectionate subject. For example, Eliza Ware Farrar wrote in The Young Lady’s Friend: “Love, in the heart of a woman, should partake largely of the nature of gratitude; she should love because she is already loved by one deserving her regard.” This reflects a true woman’s place as recipient of love.

Beauvoir sees women who are limited by the confines of a traditional gender role as unable to fully exercise their human freedom through what she calls ethical “projects.” As an existentialist, Beauvoir characterizes ethics and the meaning of human existence as

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41 Eliza Ware Farrar, The Young Lady’s Friend: Practical Advice and Instructions to Young Females (London: John W. Parker, 1837), 197
one’s freedom to act in the world. Beauvoir appears to be critical of wives and mothers who stay at home to take care of the domestic life and children, labeling this lifestyle an immanent, narcissistic one. The masculine existence, on the other hand, is marked by a capacity for transcendent activity and is the only truly free and ethical form of subjectivity, according to Beauvoir. She argues that a woman needs to become free of her dependency on men in order to realize her own subjectivity and agency. This means that she must transcend her status as an immanent object – as someone who has passively resigned herself to or blindly accepted the role which has been assigned to her. Part of transcendence is the belief that one is capable of participating in the determination of one’s own destiny, in other words, one is capable of transcending what has been determined for one by societal norms and ideals.

Beauvoir’s devaluing of motherhood and rejection of the equal but different subjectivities of men and women is what some feminists have taken issue with, primarily since the 1970s. While Beauvoir is reacting against the domestic life of women that Betty Friedan later called the “comfortable concentration camp,” she is not simply saying that all mothers are doomed to immanence. She is criticizing the biological determinism of the view that women are by necessity destined for motherhood as a mark of true womanhood. Andrea Veltman writes that for Beauvoir transcendence refers “to constructive activities that situate and engage the individual with other human freedoms…[Immanence] refers to the negative labor necessary to maintain human life or

perpetuate the status quo.” In other words, immanence is a biological and social ‘function,’ not an ‘action’ characteristic of transcendent existential freedom.

One could argue that the female purity ball attendees and their mothers do exercise their transcendent, existential freedom by freely choosing their traditional roles. One would assume that they do not feel oppressed or that they are being forced into these roles. They participate in a belief system that says that women and men are different, but that their roles are equally important. Most of these women and girls identify themselves as “born again,” a religious status that is grounded on free will - a notion that is fundamental to Protestant Christianity. Confessing that one has been born again is a personal, voluntaristic event that signifies that one has chosen to accept conversion and to believe in and follow Jesus Christ.

These conservative women do not live in the late 1940s, when Beauvoir wrote this book. The feminist movement and women’s rights have become commonplace in the United States since the publication of Beauvoir’s The Second Sex. However, these women are still “perpetuating the status quo,” as Veltman puts it. Many of them believe that they have the freedom to choose their traditional lifestyles, but are simply living according to a cultural set of rules that has created their socially preferred choices. I do not think that Beauvoir’s use of immanence and transcendence is ultimately anti-mother. It calls into question the idea that women are naturally mothers. And, it can be a helpful

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tool in analyzing the purity ball movement and its oppressive construction of a narcissistic, enclosed and contingent female identity.

8. Between Biology and Culture

Part of the perpetuation of the status quo is the idea that women are destined for marriage and motherhood. Jane Gallop writes: “Women have been relegated to the outskirts of culture, kept close to nature, in biology, trapped in unwitting reproduction.”[^44] It is this plight of women that Beauvoir deconstructs in *The Second Sex*, when she draws the distinction between a woman’s biology and her psychology. On the one hand, women’s bodies are “biologically destined for the repetition of life,” or giving birth.[^45] On the other hand, they are not necessarily *psychologically* destined for this role. It is what women believe about themselves and their destinies that determine the degree to which they are constrained by this biological function. If they are raised only to be mothers, then they will be mothers or deem themselves failed women if they cannot bear children.

Beauvoir writes: “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.”[^46] Judith Butler responds to Beauvoir’s provocative statement saying: “[Gender is] a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, comes to believe and to perform in the mode of belief.”[^47] Beauvoir and Butler are invested in a feminist theory that disrupts any notion of gender that depends on

[^45]: Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 64.
[^46]: Ibid, 267.
naturalism. Social construction has been taken up by many feminists as the clear alternative to any deterministic understanding of a woman’s place in society. Butler writes: “The existence and facticity of the material or natural dimensions of the body are not denied, but reconceived as distinct from the process by which the body comes to bear cultural meanings.” Any essentialist views of gender saying that a woman naturally performs this role while a man naturally performs that role take on a literalistic interpretation, rather than symbolic interpretation of reality, as if symbols have a direct relationship with reality or that we can apprehend reality as it is.

The very idea that sex belongs within a system of heterosexual marriage with a reproductive aim shows that marriage and sex are founded on socially constructed ideals. In this case, sex is performed for the purpose of reproducing a certain social structure – the family. Butler writes:

Feminist cultural anthropology and kinship studies have shown how cultures are governed by conventions that not only regulate and guarantee the production, exchange, and consumption of material goods, but also reproduce the bonds of kinship itself, which require taboos and a punitive regulation of reproduction to effect that end. Gender, sexual behavior and even sexual orientation have been historically created, according to theorists like Butler. Through a recapitulation of belief and action, historically constituted bodies have become fields of “sedimented” attitudes and

48 Ibid, 155.
49 Ibid, 159.
practices.\textsuperscript{50} It is this process of sedimentation and repetition that has contributed to what conservative Christians see as “natural” dispositions, behaviours and family structures.

9. Self and Other

Woman, says Beauvoir, has been deemed man’s other by a patriarchal society bent on differentiating between men and women in an absolute way. But women are not born essentially Other, essentially passive, or essentially derivative, they are made thus by the culture that deems them so. She writes:

If, well before puberty and sometimes even from early infancy, she seems to us to be already sexually determined, this is not because mysterious instincts directly doom her to passivity, coquetry, maternity; it is because the influence of others upon the child is a factor almost from the start, and thus she is indoctrinated with her vocation from her earliest years.\textsuperscript{51}

Girls who attend the purity ball are subject to the kind of gender-role indoctrination that Beauvoir describes. They are led to believe that they are essentially different from boys. Girls reflect the patriarchal societal value that female aims are passive not active ones in the sense that their primary aim is to be loved, first by their fathers, then by their husbands.

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{51} Beauvoir, \textit{The Second Sex}, 268.
Being a woman, for Beauvoir, is determined by “Man’s Look.” The way that man sees her is the way she comes to be in her reality. She writes:

Woman sees herself and makes her choices not in accordance with her true nature in itself, but as man defines her. So we must first go on to describe woman such as men have fancied her in their dreams, for what-in-men’s-eyes-she-seems-to-be is one of the necessary factors in her real situation.  

Being-for-the-other, or being as men define her, means both being for men and being for the Other that is really one’s internalized ideal ego image that has been fashioned by men, or by patriarchal culture. It is because of this internalization of the other that being-for-men should not be understood as a self-sacrificing altruism, but as the root of female narcissism. Because she is constituted by the male and appears to herself the way she appears to him, she defines her worth by how much she is loved and by how much she lives up to the image she has been given of one who deserves to be loved. At the same time, woman is subsumed into the male. This incorporation of the Other into the self is characteristic of omnipotent male narcissism. Even the notion of woman as man’s Other defines women in relation to men, not as beings-unt0-themselves.

There is a fundamental contingency at the heart of a woman’s being if she is identified as man’s other and finds narcissistic fulfillment in being an object of affection. Her self is dependent on another for its definition and value. Beauvoir has been criticized for perpetuating the “masculine” value of independence, claiming that women can be just as independent as men. She promotes independence as a more worthwhile personal goal.

Ibid., 137-138.
than interdependence. Some feminist scholars, such as Carol Gilligan, argue that dependency is simply a different form of ethic that reflects a woman’s more relational subjectivity, it is not less developed or morally inferior to independence. According to Gilligan, independence has been overvalued in patriarchal culture and is antithetical to communal living.\(^53\) However, for Beauvoir, individual freedom is paramount to a transcendent subjectivity. The question becomes would Beauvoir honour a woman’s freely chosen option to live interdependently or dependently, for example as a mother that stays home to take care of her children while relying on her husband for financial support?

One complication in Beauvoir’s conceptual framework is her use of the word “Other.” On the one hand, Beauvoir criticizes the patriarchal narcissism which creates an Other out of woman. On the other hand, Beauvoir elevates the autonomy of the subject to a position of otherness. She writes: “It is only as something strange, forbidden, as something free, that the other is revealed as an other. And to love him genuinely is to love him in his otherness and in that freedom by which he escapes. Love is then renunciation of all possession.”\(^54\) Jean-Paul Sartre’s existentialist claim in Being and Nothingness is that self and Other are opposed to one another and “ontologically separated.”\(^55\) Therefore, they are incapable of any real mutual recognition of one another’s freedom. Ursula Tidd writes: “The subject constitutes itself as the subject by

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conceiving itself as not the Other by making him or her into an object.” The self, then, according to Sartre, is only a self when it denies the selfhood of the other, deeming the other self an object.

Beauvoir responded to Sartre’s radical individualism with an essay entitled Pyrrhus and Cinéas in which she argues that it is a person’s ethical responsibility to preserve one’s own freedom and transcendence while working for the freedom and transcendence of others because our own self is “sustained by identification with the Other,” not with denial of the Other, as Sartre would have it. Beauvoir insists that we exercise our own freedom partly through the project of augmenting the freedom of others. Without this, there is no freedom for anyone. Passivity and immanence are not simply inert, she argues, they constitute unethical activity which contributes to oppression.

Beauvoir’s acknowledgement of oppression shows that she is aware that some people have a privileged access to freedom, while others’ freedom is limited by their historical contexts. It is the ethical responsibility of the privileged to increase the freedom of those who are bound by their social, economic, racial or gendered circumstances.

There is a fundamental difference between viewing woman as man’s Other and recognizing the other as Other. Woman as man’s Other must be understood within a narcissistic economy in which the other is a part of the subject or a function of the

57 Margaret A. Simons, Beauvoir and “The Second Sex”: Feminism, Race, and the Origins of Existentialism (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 1999), 218; In later works such as Critique of Dialectical Reason, Volume 1 (1960), Sartre modifies his radical philosophy of individual subjectivity to include a more nuanced view of existential freedom as involving interpersonal dynamics.
58 Beauvoir, Pyrrhus et Cinéas (Paris: Gallimard, 1944).
subject. This object-Other is simply a fantasy of otherness that exists within the sphere of the masculine subject, for the purposes of the subject. The Other as other, is a subject-Other that exists outside of all other subjects and must learn to relate intersubjectively with other subject-others in order to avoid narcissistic instrumentalization of others or avoid falling victim oneself to objectification. Intersubjectivity between subject-Others is paradoxical in that it consists of both irreducible alienation and proximal intimacy – a paradox that will become clearer in the discussion of Emmanuel Levinas’ approach to the Other.

Beauvoir’s vision of love does not express a relational ideal of “two-becoming-one,” as reflected in the book of Genesis which reads: “a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.” Beauvoir had a lover named Jacques Bost in whose love she was tempted to lose herself. Margaret A. Simons writes: “Abandoning herself in her love for the Other is only possible by the conscious pretext of ignoring or refusing to take account of reality. Self-deception is an effort to avoid the anguished experience of her solitude, the reality of her separate existence as an individual.” Submitting oneself to this kind of love helps people to overcome loneliness, but it is a false overcoming, according to Beauvoir and Simons. It is a denial of one’s subjectivity and a shirking of one’s responsibility for one’s own freedom and the freedom of the Other. According to Freud, the experience of erotic love tends to dissolve ego boundaries, resulting in the feeling that two egos have fused into one. Freud is critical of this fusion as it diminishes an individual’s particularity and freedom. Feminists

59 2:24, NIV.
have argued that this type of fusion usually results in one person being lost in the Other and this is predominantly the woman in conservative Christian circles whose subjectivity is compromised for the sake of her marriage and family.

Fusion, Beauvoir argues, should not be the ideal goal of a relationship; in fact, the partners need to maintain their separate identities in order to have a relationship at all. Relationships are impossible, in other words, without some distance and differentiation between subjects. In a similar vein, psychoanalyst and feminist scholar Jessica Benjamin writes: “differentiation requires, ideally, the reciprocity of self and other, the balance of assertion and recognition.”\(^6^1\) It should be acknowledged that there is always something different and unknowable in the self and in the Other that cannot be grasped, a kind of virginity that cannot be lost as long as the self and Other are allowed their space to be apart while taking part in the relationship. Virginity, in this context, is representative of irreducible difference.

Beauvoir does not simply trade immanent female narcissism for omnipotent male narcissism. She does not want women to only be independent like men at the expense of the Other, but sets up the possibility of an intersubjective mode of relating that respects the difference between self and Other. She proposes that a subject must “assert” herself as a free individual while recognizing the individuality of others. When this balance between assertion and recognition is not sustained, we either fall into omnipotent narcissism with too much assertion of the self onto others, or subjugation with over-recognition of the Other at the expense of the self.

\(^6^1\) Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love*, 25.
10. Modesty and Intimacy

Emmanuel Levinas also uses the categories of transcendence and intersubjectivity in his ethics. He explains that the Other calls me or “summons” me out of my isolated, immanent or omnipotent subjectivity and this calling out effects a transcendence of the self. The call of the Other dislocates me from the inside and allows me to escape my segregated interiority in order to participate in a world that is populated by others. 62 Transcendence, in Beauvoir and Levinas’ philosophy is not only a state of being, but an ethical imperative. The subject is beckoned by the Other to transcend itself. Beauvoir writes: “My subjectivity is not inertia, withdrawal or separation but rather a movement towards the Other.” 63 This movement outward in the direction of the Other, is the command of ethical transcendence.

Roland Barthes describes a similar calling out of the Other to the self. He uses the medium of photography to explore this phenomenon. One can look at a photograph and observe its “studium,” its general appeal to the viewer that consists of deliberately presenting the photographer’s intentions to her audience. But there is another rare element in some photographs, which Barthes calls the “punctum,” that “shoots out of [the photograph].” 64 Barthes compares the studium to pornography and the punctum to the erotic. When the image/Other is seen as an object by the viewer/subject, then the Other is subjected to a pornographic consumption by the omnipotent subject. If, on the other hand,

63 Beauvoir, *Pyrrhus et Cinéas*.
the image/Other escapes objectivity and calls out to the viewer/subject, then an erotic, not pornographic, bond is created that connects the two while effecting transcendence.

Barthes writes: “The punctum, then, is a kind of subtle beyond – as if the image launched desire beyond what it permits us to see…”65 The beyond of the image is what calls to us in its transcendence, it is what commands us to respond, without knowing fully to what we are responding. If we would know something in its entirety, we could consume it, as an object, and this would annihilate its freedom. Barthes and Levinas both see Eros as something that enables connection without fusion with or possessive penetration of the Other.

Levinas explores ideal intersubjectivity as the interplay between the desire to encounter the Other intimately and preserve the difference between self and Other. This dynamic is described as a modest caress. He writes: “The seeking of the caress constitutes its essence by the fact that the caress does not know what it seeks. This ‘not knowing,’ this fundamental disorder, is the essential.”66 He compares the Other to the future, as that which is always still to come but never arrives. There is a virginity about the Other because it can never belong to the self. The minute virginity is apprehended, consumed by the gaze of the omnipotent subject, it disappears, like Eurydice when Orpheus takes his forbidden look which sentences her to death. The Other as alter “refuses to be tamed or domesticated.”67 The Other as other always escapes, is always

65 Ibid, 59.
mysterious, but is not totally beyond. We are still able to form a proximal relationship with the Other based on mutual respect and recognition that honours the modesty of otherness. Modesty does not shun intimacy, but prevents the Other from being overwhelmed by the penetrating violence of another subject.

In their Christian guidebook for male teens, Fred Stoeker and Stephen Arterburn write: “The impure thought life is the life of a thief. You’re stealing images that aren’t yours…When you had premarital sex, you touched someone who didn’t belong to you.”

Even thinking about someone possessively is in a sense stealing the idea of a person that is not yours. This command to avert the eyes and thoughts away from images that incur lust in the self would seem to coincide with the omnipotent violence of the self against the Other. However, marriage, for Stoeker and Arterburn, becomes the condition by which a man is sanctioned to take possession of a woman who is rightfully his. The Other belonging to the self is precisely what Beauvoir describes as immanence, Barthes calls pornographic and Levinas deems unethical.

The "erotics of engagement” is the term Jane Gallop uses to characterize a sexuality which is experienced in an encounter, rather than one that resides in an object of desire. In her essay entitled “Carnal Knowledge," she insists that the body as an object containing sexiness as a trait is about the desire to have power or control over another body. She distinguishes between the two French verbs connaître and savoir which both mean "to know." She writes: "The verb connaître, as distinguished from the verb savoir, 


is most often used for knowing people, not "having the goods" on them, but being familiar with them."\textsuperscript{70} Virginity can participate in this possessive "knowing" of the other when it is viewed as a pseudo-material substance that is "unwrapped" and given to another on the wedding night. The desire to possess intimate knowledge of someone comes from what Gallop says is "the wish to locate the arousal, the erotics in some object rather than in an intersubjective dynamic."\textsuperscript{71} An erotic encounter, then, can only exist when the Other is allowed to retain its otherness and Eros flows in an intersubjective space between self and Other.

A modest encounter with the Other permits a touching of the surface of the Other without any possessive or violent penetration of the Other. Like Beauvoir and Freud, Levinas rejects the notion of "fusion" as an ideal goal for love. A modest mode of relating preserves alterity, or virginity, while permitting intimacy with the Other. The caress, therefore, makes contact with the Other, but safeguards her difference from the self. Levinas writes: "The caress...is like a game with something slipping away, a game absolutely without project or plan, not with what can become ours or us, but with something other, always other, always inaccessible, always still to come."\textsuperscript{72}

Beauvoir and other feminist philosophers such as Luce Irigaray criticize Levinas for positing woman as man’s Other.\textsuperscript{73} At one point he refers to the Other, in its modesty,

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\textsuperscript{70} Ibid, 135. \\
\textsuperscript{71} Ibid, 139. \\
\textsuperscript{72} Levinas, \textit{Time and the Other}, 51. \\
\textsuperscript{73} For further criticism of Levinas on the feminine nature of the Other, see Luce Irigaray, "Questions to Emmanuel Levinas: On the Divinity of Love," \textit{Re-reading Levinas}, trans. Margaret Whitford, ed. Robert Bernasconi and Simon Critchley (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 1991); Luce
as the “eternal feminine” that needs protection from the overpowering penetration of the masculine subject that renders this feminine immanent.\textsuperscript{74} For Levinas, the other possesses a “sexed alterity” which posits the feminine other to the male subject. Like Beauvoir and Irigaray, I find this problematic. In addition, Levinas sometimes prioritizes the other at the expense of the self, thereby advocating for a kind of self-sacrifice that does nothing for a feminist ethic that fights precisely against the sacrifice of feminine subjectivity.\textsuperscript{75}

However, the fact that Levinas prioritizes otherness itself exhibits a desire to resist a totalizing hegemony of the same which says that the other should never be collapsed into or co-opted by the subject. There is a contradiction in Levinas’ thinking here, since, the male subject does, in a sense, co-opt the feminine by making her his other. This feminized other becomes an instrumentalized part of the masculine subject because it is her otherness that makes his subjectivity possible.

It is not impossible to reposition Levinas’ argument. Levinas himself admits that his language of the feminine as “essentially other” is “archaic” in a later text, but he ultimately refuses to abdicate his prioritizing of the alterity of the Other, no matter what gender, as central to ethics.\textsuperscript{76} Therefore, I do see the possibility for a feminist reimagining of Levinas’ notion of alterity which removes the feminine from its fixed position as man’s other.

\textsuperscript{75} Levinas, \textit{Totality and Infinity}, 258.
Levinas’ notion of modesty and the caress can be used in a refiguring of the traditional sexual ideal of fusion into a mode of sexual intimacy which respects the opacity of the Other and the otherness of the self. The irreducible alterity of the Other is like a perpetual virginity that corresponds to the part of every self that can never be grasped, possessed or co-opted by another. This ideal also permits a refiguring of power in heterosexual relations and includes the possibility of non-heterosexual modes of relating.

11. Escaping Narcissism through Intersubjectivity

The traditionally omnipotent (masculine) narcissist is driven by a colonizing need for power over the Other, while the traditionally immanent (feminine) narcissist is fuelled by a continual need for love, praise, admiration, and affection. She is ruled by a deep-seated fear that she does not exist, therefore she needs constant confirmation of her existence and the value of that existence. We see this need for continuous external affirmation in the yo-yoing of the narcissist between extreme self-loathing and extreme self-love.\(^77\) Benjamin suggests a way out of narcissism through intersubjectivity.

Using theories of child development by researchers such as Daniel Stern, Benjamin stresses the importance of a mutual recognition of parent and child that helps the child realize, from early on, that “there are always (at least) two subjects,” not just

Freud’s model is based on the normativity of infant omnipotence which means that the infant believes itself and experiences itself to be the only person in the universe with all others existing for its use within the framework of its own self-world.

Intersubjective communication starts with the infant-caregiver relationship. If the mother is understood as the infant subject’s object-Other from the start, then she is always primarily a love object and not a subject in her own right. Benjamin writes: “Denial of the mother’s subjectivity, in theory and in practice, profoundly impedes our ability to see the world as inhabited by equal subjects.”79 The world, instead, becomes filled with objects upon which the maturing child can enact its own desires, while also experiencing the world as filled with obstacles that can potentially hinder the fulfillment of its omnipotent pleasure seeking. Maturity, in this model, means that we have to adapt to the reality that other people, if they are not complying with our wills, are detracting from our pleasure. Pleasure, in other words, is seen as a selfish pursuit that cannot be enjoyed intersubjectively, but only individually.

Stern’s research has indicated that the infant does not go through a strict series of predetermined stages which are universally resolved, or if not resolved, lead to neurosis and pathology. He claims that subjectivity is a fluid thing that is uniquely acquired even in the preverbal period of infancy. He outlines a model called the “layered model of development” that suggests that we do not overcome and extinguish previous stages as we mature, but that each stage interacts dynamically with other stages throughout our

lives. Stern stresses that the infant is capable of acknowledging other subjects from the start, if he or she is also immediately nurtured in that direction. In response to Piaget’s leading model, at the time, Stern writes:

Piaget’s stage model...accounted for the infant’s encounter with the inanimate physical world (with space, time, number, volume, weight, etc.), for which task it had been constructed – but it was inadequate to conceptualize the encounter with the richer and more complicated socio-emotional human world composed of self and others.80

Stern’s conclusions have important implications for theories of child psychology and human development. He proposes that infants are able to relate differently to human subjects than they do to objects.

Instead of informing parents of the means to redirect an infant’s omnipotent, narcissistic impulses from the beginning, Freud’s theory encourages parents to see this as a natural phase in an infant’s life. Stern’s work, on the other hand, proposes that a newborn infant is not only capable of perceiving its own world of experience, but perceiving the world of others. Therefore, a child is able to develop its own identity intersubjectively from birth. If parents come to understand and adopt this model, then this might radically affect individualistic and narcissistic trends in society. According to Stern, there is awareness of the reality of the other from the beginning of infant consciousness. The real goal of maturation, he argues, is “the creation of ties with others

– that is, increased relatedness.” His view collapses the monistic universe of primary narcissism and presents an alternative mode of engaging and discerning other subjects in the infant’s perception of reality. However, he does not propose a decrease of separation in favour of “increased relatedness.” The infant has a sense of itself as a separate being right at the beginning of its life and this separation is precisely what makes it capable of healthy, non-narcissistic, intersubjective relationships. Without some differentiation, there is no potential for having relationships with others at all.

12. Purity and Intersubjectivity

The construction of the virgin body in the new virginity movement participates in the drawing of clear lines between purity and pollution, same and other, and integrity and disintegration. The loss of virginity participates in these same binaries. If the loss of virginity is enacted within a sanctified Christian marriage, pollution, otherness, and disintegration are kept at bay, while the opposite is true if virginity is lost outside of the marriage relationship. The very identity of the female subject, in particular, is dependent upon the situation within which first sex is initiated. In a sense, these binaries point more to the issue of sexual purity than sexual ethics, since they deal in matters of inside and outside rather than right and wrong. While ethics and morality do play a role in matters of Christian sexuality, I would argue that purity is more of a motivating factor for virginity – purity of body, family, and community.

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81 Ibid, xiii.
The word “pure” is defined as unmixed and guiltless, while the word “impurity” means mixed, contaminated, polluted, or lacking consistency.\textsuperscript{82} Purity requires that things conform to the class to which they belong and that different classes of things not be confused. In order to be pure, one must preserve one’s integrity, consistency, intactness, oneness and homogeneity. Amy Mullin writes that purity “idealize[s] unity at the expense of plurality.”\textsuperscript{83} To become impure means that one has somehow mixed with something outside of oneself, become heterogeneous, inconsistent, and that one’s boundaries have, to some extent, dissolved. Freud describes being in love as dissolving ego boundaries. Therefore, being in love is a polluting experience since one loses one’s intactness, separateness, and integrity.

Douglas argues that the personal body can be seen as a symbol for any bounded social system like a marriage, family, community or nation. Therefore, one can apply the rules of purity that pertain to the self to the social body. And, in order to stay pure, a community or a family must guard its borders from disruption or pollution from the outside. An intersubjective model of development influences the way in which we regard notions of purity, since the intersubjective self is a pluralistic self and purity implies oneness. This plurality at the core of identity disrupts the very possibility of purity.

Purity is too often equated with ethics, or the good, when it can be antithetical to ethics. Keeping oneself, one’s family or one’s community pure can lead to ethnocentrism, racism, homophobia, misogyny and xenophobia. If one only acknowledges the value and

\textsuperscript{83} Amy Mullin, “Purity and Pollution: Resisting the Rehabilitation of a Virtue”, in Journal of the History of Ideas, 57.3 (1996), 510.
existence of the self or unity with others who have essentially become a part of the self, then ethics is impossible. Levinas argues that the ethical is integral to subjectivity. And ethics starts with a “face-to-face” encounter with otherness, which simultaneously draws us close to the Other, while keeping the Other at a distance in order to preserve the difference between two subjects.\(^8\) The Other that is at once close and far, proximal but distinct, does not threaten my own existence; it allows my existence to exist. Without the Other, there is no one to recognize me or acknowledge my existence as another Other.

Self-transcendence and intersubjectivity challenge notions of purity through the recognition of multiple subjectivities. This chapter was an attempt to construct a normative theory of intersubjectivity as a solution to the problem of narcissism through the pluralization of narcissistic self-understandings and the promotion of a culture of mutual recognition between subjects and their communities. To this end, Beauvoir’s definition of transcendence is helpful because it defines a subject’s freedom as meaningful only in so far as it nurtures the freedom of others. The transcendent subjectivity of some of the girls that attend purity balls and take pledges has been thwarted, therefore, they seem to seek power in immanent, narcissistic ways that make the self into an object of affection that is protected by a paternal, masculine subject. In addition, these girls lack a strong ethical agency because they have a pre-ethical, or pre-lapsarian quality which defines their undeveloped subjectivity by virtue of the fact that they are protected from growing into mature, free subjects.

Barthes and Levinas both use erotic language to describe the interplay of self and

\(^8\) Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*. 

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other. For Barthes, any attempt to possess another is pornographic, while for Levinas, the co-opting of another is unethical. Benjamin and Stern’s alternative model of infant development, which suggests that infants are capable of negotiating their own subjectivity while acknowledging a world of other subjects ultimately moves beyond Freud’s model of psycho-social development that describes the infant as a single subject relating to a world of objects. Such a move from narcissism to intersubjectivity could be helpful when dealing with the problem of the self-sexualization or self-objectification of young girls, a phenomenon that is rampant in both the virginity movement, through the commodification of the virgin body, and in the overly sexualized so-called secular culture.
CONCLUSION

Conservative Christians, feminists and concerned parents share a justifiable outrage at the sexualization of young women in North American society. There is a public pervasiveness of arguably pornographic pictures and messages of women that girls cannot fail to encounter when they leave their homes. Even a visit to the toy store is fraught with sexual messages. The Bratz doll brand has sold padded “bralettes” to pre-pubescent girls at Target stores and Walmart has sold junior panties with the logo “Who needs a credit card…” printed over the crotch.¹ Thong underwear for seven to ten year olds is also available at select clothing stores, some marked with the slogan “eye candy” and others with “wink, wink.”²

Media sources may design and distribute these images and messages, but young girls also self-sexualize in the sense that they inherit and internalize these messages from the culture in which they live, which then seems to activate a desire to be sexualized. Through this process, called “self-objectification,” girls adopt an outsider’s perspective whereby they determine their own worth as objects of desire.³ Beauvoir sees this kind of narcissism as inflicted upon the girl who cannot “fulfill herself through projects and objectives” and is therefore “forced to find her reality in the immanence of her person.” Furthermore, her socialization has “prompted her to identify herself with her whole body and puberty has revealed this body as being passive and desirable; it is something she

¹ Valenti, 61-62.
can…contemplate with a lover’s eye.” Paradoxically, while the self-sexualized girl props herself up as a desirable object, this move is instigated by her insufficiency as an active subject. Girls receive cultural credit for adhering to the norm of self-sexualization, making its avoidance extremely difficult. The American Psychological Association (APA) formed The Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls in 2005 in response to rising public alarm over this trend.

The APA Task Force differentiates between healthy sexuality and sexualization, defining the former as an “important component of both physical and mental health” which “fosters intimacy, bonding, and shared pleasure, and involves mutual respect between consenting partners.” Sexualization, on the other hand, is seen as occurring when:

1. A person’s value comes only from his or her sexual appeal or behaviour, to the exclusion of other characteristics; a person is held to a standard that equates physical attractiveness (narrowly defined) with being sexy; a person is sexually objectified – that is, made into a thing for others’ sexual use, rather than seen as a person with the capacity for independent action and decision-making; and/or
2. Sexuality is inappropriately imposed on a person.

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A distinction must be made between sexuality and sexualization. Freud argues that people are born with internal sexual drives that interact with external forces to produce sexual identities. Infants, children, teenagers and adults experience sexuality differently, but they are all sexual beings nonetheless. Sexualization, on the other hand, is an act of exploitative power that diminishes a subject’s agency and personhood. It is therefore a culturally created ethical problem, not a fundamental aspect of being human, like sexuality.

Both sexuality and sexualization encompass more than sex. They have to do with how people’s identities are constructed in relation to others. Psychoanalytic theories conceptualize sexuality as an aspect of psycho-social development. For Freud, an infant’s early experience of its environment, its parents, and itself is a sexual one that differentiates between what is pleasurable and what is not. Freud contends that the infant is narcissistic in its aims, therefore it objectifies the other for its own use. The objectified other is depended upon for the fulfillment of the infant’s most basic needs and pleasure. There is a type of ownership that accompanies this dynamic, whereby the object-other is experienced as belonging to the infant self. However, in a sense, the infant is also given herself by the other, choosing to repeat behaviours that are mirrored back to her positively by the parents. This is part of the process whereby she forms an image of her ego ideal with which she attempts to identify.

Positive reinforcement of certain actions and not others gives a child signals as to what she must do in order to receive loving attention and affirmation. For example, if parents reward a female child for being pretty and happy and a boy for being smart and
strong, this will affect subsequent identity constructions and can introduce an objectifying tendency within the infant that can lead to later sexualization of others as well as self-sexualization.

Child psychologist Daniel Stern provides a model of infant development that suggests that infants are capable not only of objectifying the other, but of recognizing the subjectivity of others through empathy. If this potential is nurtured by caregivers, then children can construct their identities in an environment of mutuality which fosters intersubjective modes of relating that do not rely on objectification and sexualization. ⁷

The purity movement may be growing in part as a reaction against the sexualization of young girls, however, I would argue that instead of providing an alternative model, like Stern’s model of intersubjectivity that encourages a way of relating that does not rely on the subjugation of one subject to another, it participates in a culture of sexualization that reinforces the exploitation and objectification of women through the commodification of the virtuous, virginal body. Abstinence education, purity balls and virginity pledges promote the conviction that a girl’s sexualized body is a treasure that is meant to be protected until it can be enjoyed by her husband sexually and reproduce children under the ideal conditions of the Christian nuclear family.

Parents have a significant influence on the way a child comes to know herself in a gendered way. Research suggests that fathers’ attitudes, in particular, contribute to a

⁷ It would be too simplistic to see Freud and Stern’s models as opposing ones. Freud does adhere to the subject-object dichotomy to a certain extent, however, as discussed in chapter four, he also sees early ego development as an internalization of relationships between the subject and those with whom it shares significant bonds. Therefore, I would argue that Freud’s theory could also be considered intersubjective.
If fathers exhibit heteronormative, sexualized views toward women, then these messages translate to their daughters. And because these views are reinforced so early in a child’s life, characteristics of what it means and feels like to be a girl or a boy are experienced as being natural and normal.

I argue that the girls who attend purity balls do not technically go through a communal rite of passage from girlhood to womanhood. Their status is one of a perpetual daughter who, in a sense, remains a daughter, even throughout her married life by virtue of the fact that she never steps into the no man’s land – a liminal space outside of the protective circle of the family that is not occupied by a dominant male subjectivity.

In Lisa Bevere’s book Kissed the Girls and Made Them Cry: Why Women Lose When They Give In, she honours male chivalry for its response to women who just “long to be rescued by a knight in shining armor.” She argues that women have so much more to lose than men in sexual relationships outside of marriage, suggesting that men cannot lose themselves through sex, while women can. She does not see that in a sense women have already lost themselves in a system in which they are not raised to be autonomous, adult subjects. Fathers, in Bevere’s worldview, are the original knights who shield their daughters from the harms society has to offer. And future husbands provide the promise of true love and a traditional family. According to Bevere, “a bride wishes to be nurtured,

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protected, directed, and even gently corrected” by her husband, as she was by her father before him.\textsuperscript{11}

These essentialist views about gender and sexuality are not only fostered privately in conservative Christian homes. Public schools that offer abstinence-only education programs also contribute to the crystallization of what they deem to be natural and normal attitudes toward sexuality and gender. Abstinence education has been touted as an answer to sexually transmitted diseases and teen pregnancy, however, it has not produced significant positive results in response to these specific problems. Its curricula have been criticized for being more concerned with values education than health education and they seem to favour a narrow, white, heteronormative, Christian agenda. For example, the popular Sex Respect curriculum excludes information on aspects of reproductive health and safe premarital sex choices in order to evade the appearance of condoning any options other than ones that are in accord with the values of a traditional, biblical definition of marriage and the family. In other words, abstinence-only education limits the decision-making process to a choice between saying “yes” to the prescribed normative sexual path and “no” to everything else.

Since the 1980s, abstinence education has been generously supported by the American government. However, President Barack Obama radically altered the suggested budget funding for STD and teen pregnancy prevention. Instead of funding abstinence-only education, Obama proposes to fund what he calls “evidence-based,” comprehensive sexuality education programs and new research projects. He claims that there is no

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid, 192.
persuasive evidence that abstinence-only programs work to curb STD or teen pregnancy rates. In other words, Obama wants to fund programs that do what they say they will do: contribute to the sexual and reproductive health and well-being of young people.\textsuperscript{12}

Comprehensive sexuality education curricula, as distinguished from abstinence-only sexuality education curricula, “address media, peer and cultural influences on sexual behaviours and decisions and promote a notion of sexual responsibility that includes respect for oneself and an emphasis on consensual, nonexploitative sexual activity.”\textsuperscript{13} And, in response to the fears of more conservative parents, research has shown that “comprehensive programs do not increase the frequency of sex or the number of sexual partners, nor do such programs lower the age of first intercourse.”\textsuperscript{14} I see hope in President Obama’s vision for sex education, however there are numerous political obstacles and levels of government that may prevent the eradication of abstinence-only education. Part of the reason for these roadblocks is that sex education is not just about reproductive health, but reflects the religious ideology of many Americans who want to protect the Christian institution of marriage and the family and traditional conceptions of gender roles.

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