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Powerful submission: Popular texts and the subjectivity of Christian right women

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Powerful Submission:
Popular Texts and the Subjectivity of Christian Right Women

by

Ellen L. Flournoy

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Department of English
College of Arts and Sciences
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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to those peacemakers who stretch themselves across the chasm between different worlds. Your backs may be sore, but the view is divine.

And to Karl, who is my bridge from the world of the image to that of the real.

Acknowledgments

Creativity is a communal process. Although I am the author of this dissertation, I am certainly not the only person who has labored over its creation. I'd like to recognize my committee and external chairperson first and foremost because it is their expertise that verifies the viability of my own work. Were it not for their support, I would have neglected to recognize the importance of my own interests and talents.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	iii
Gender Negotiations: Essentialism and the Masculinity Crisis	1
Introduction of the Christian Right Woman	2
Popular Culture and the Christian Right: Essentializing Gender to Maintain Male Privilege	4
Oppressive Practices in “Transparent” Popular Culture	7
Essentialist Foundations of Christianity: Deriving Power from the Masculinity Crisis	10
Extending Feminist Criticisms of the Masculinity Crisis to the Christian Right Woman’s Support of Gender Coherence	15
Gender Coherence and Judith Butler’s Notion of Gender Performance	19
The Identity of Christian Right Women: Personal Insight and Critical Investigation	24
Accountability and the View from Within	25
In Theory: Research Conflicts	29
Christian Right Texts and the Construction of Feminine Subjectivity	35
<i>Left Behind</i> : The Madonna/Whore Paradigm and the Masculinity Crisis	40
The Ideological Evolution of the End Times	43
Left Behind: an Anti-Feminist Response to the Masculinity Crisis	49
Madonna/Whore: a Pervasive Gender Performance	58
Chloe and Irene: the Madonnas of <i>Left Behind</i>	59
Hattie: The Scarlet Whore	63
Christian Right Subjectivity Construction and the <i>Left Behind</i> Series	67
Women Readers of Left Behind: Negotiating Conflicts	72
The Blessed Assurance and Impossibility of Fixed Identity	74
Dangerous Marks: the Limits of Christian Identity in the <i>Left Behind</i> Series	77
Preparing for Sacrifice with Self-Help Books	81
Bestselling Christian Right Self-Help Texts: A Focus on Feminine Submission	85
Essentialism: the Foundational Argument in Christian Right Self-Help Books	89
A Dialogue: Judith Butler “Talks” with Tim and Beverly LaHaye	95

Responsibility Without Authority	98
Cultivating a Womanly Christian Appearance	102
The Depth of the Image in Christian Capitalism: Making it “Fit”	104
The Christian Right Woman’s Reframing of Submission	107
Powerful Caretaking: the Infantilization of Men	113
Incorporating the Therapeutic: a Further Accommodation to Postmodernism	119
The Power of Submission in <i>The Passion of the Christ</i>	124
<i>The Passion’s</i> Accommodations to the Culture Industry	130
<i>The Passion</i> and the Madonna Paradigm: Martyrdom, the Ultimate Submission	136
Jesus: a Feminized Martyr-Warrior and a Model for Christian Right Women	137
Mary, the Ultimate Mother (patterned after a man)	143
Mary’s Co-Martyrdom	145
Mary’s Reproductions in Other Female Characters	147
Mary Magdalene, the Reformed Whore	148
Satan, the Androgynous Whore	150
Secondary Mary Reproductions: Claudia and Veronica	152
Community and Entertainment: Beyond the Madonna Paradigm	153
Concerned Women for America: Proof that Christian Right Women are Postmodern Victims	160
Concerned Women for America and the Face of Christian Right Women	165
The Ethos of CWA and Modernism	166
The Ethos of CWA and Postmodernism	169
CWA and Feminist Frameworks	170
Pragmatic Spirituality	175
The Gender Code of Powerful Submission	177
Christian Consumers	178
Dominant Victims	184
Oppositional Ideologies and the “Victimhood” of Christian Right Women	188
Methodologies of the Oppressed and the Christian Right Woman’s Definition of “Family”	193
Christian Right Women: Strategic Victims	198
Notes	200
References	203
About the Author	End Page

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Ellen L. Flourney

ABSTRACT

The Christian Right exerts considerable influence over female identity, especially through its members who have emerged as one of the most powerful voting blocks in the nation—the Christian Right woman. American Christian women, especially those considered to be on the political fringes, are virtually ignored in academic endeavors. Given their power, which defies their categorization as a “fringe” group, this academic silence is a gross oversight, especially in light of the rise of the Christian Right, which has successfully recruited millions of women to its service.

This dissertation analyzes texts of Christian popular culture that contribute to the construction of feminine subjectivity—Tim LaHaye’s *Left Behind*, selections from the most popular of Christian women’s self-help books, Mel Gibson’s *The Passion of the Christ*, and various online materials available on the website of Concerned Women for America. The consumption of these texts acts as a means through which Christian Right women can support patriarchy through submission and affect their own personal transformations by reframing this submission in powerful terms. Most products aimed at and embraced by Christian women encourage a femininity that can be linked to Mary, the perfect mother of Christ. This Madonna paradigm and its accompanying subtext work with the aforementioned Christian texts to perpetuate an essentialized, yet contradictory portrayal of the feminine.

The theory of subjectivity for Christian Right Women offered by this study utilizes an interdisciplinary approach to reveal these women’s consciousness as a mixture of contradictions. These contradictions combine the ideologies of Christianity and capitalism, gender codes both archaic and contemporary, and the discourses of modernism and postmodernism into a force that simultaneously subjects these women and supports their personal agency. Ideas from Marxist and feminist thinkers—Louis Althusser, Valentin Voloshinov, Judith Butler, Frederic Jameson, Chela Sandoval, and others—contribute theoretical structure to the discussion, which culminates in an analysis of the identification Christian Right women have with the rhetoric of victimhood.

Gender Negotiations: Essentialism and the Masculinity Crisis

There are moments in my life when I feel as though a part of me is missing. There are days when I feel so invisible that I can't remember what day of the week it is, when I feel so manipulated that I can't remember my own name [. . .]. Those are the times when I catch sight of my reflection in store windows and am surprised to see a whole person looking back [. . .] when my skin becomes gummy as clay and my nose slides around on my face and my eyes drip down to my chin. I have to close my eyes at such times and remember myself, draw an internal picture that is smooth and whole [. . .].

-- Patricia Williams

Taken from "On Being the Object of Property," this striking narration of loss of self tells an all too familiar story. Although it is not explicitly connected to the creation of subjectivity, it is a frightfully accurate depiction of the confused reality women must constantly confront to keep up the prosopoeia, or face-making, often necessary in the creation and maintenance of self. This creation must be perpetually maintained and reconstructed because the webbed connections between all subjectivities require subjects to look to the projected images of others to reflect and prioritize cultural values. These "other subjects" are also involved in the process of prosopoeia, simultaneously gazing into other mirrors and reconstructing their own faces. There is no honest reflection.

Simply put, our efforts to “save face” can never adequately counteract the gendered production of our faces by our culture.

Introduction of the Christian Right Woman

One major cultural source of the gendered production of female identity is Christianity. Specifically, the Christian Right, the politically powerful fundamentalist branch of more mainline American Christianity, exerts considerable influence over female identity, especially through its female members who have emerged as one of the most powerful voting blocks in the nation—the Christian Right woman. American Christian women, especially those considered to be on the political fringes, are virtually ignored in academic endeavors. Given their power, which defies their categorization as a “fringe” group, this academic silence is a gross oversight, especially in light of the rise of the Christian Right, which has successfully recruited millions of women to its service. Voter turn-out for the Christian Right constituency is astounding, and their collective political work has transformed the cultural landscape in many ways so pervasive that these changes are virtually invisible to most Americans. Much of this transformation has been accomplished by Christian Right movements that are run by and for women who comprise groups considered even more academically abject than the Christian Right at large.

Part of the problem in theorizing this particular group of American Christian women is the multi-layered complexity of their identity politics and their accompanying experiential articulations; these articulations are often a tangled contradiction of emotional logic. These contradictions are what most clearly define the internal selves of

these women, and I think that their countless works in the world can only be understood within the context of these internal selves and their projections into public life, which can be analyzed as subjectivity and ethos.

Contemporary American feminine subjectivity can be illuminated through the study of the popular culture of Christian Right women, whose face-making is a complicated process of masking. This masking involves the patchworking of several subjective fabrics in order to construct both a public ethos and a private subjectivity that contribute to the conflation of American women at large as autonomous agent and directed object. Christian Right women utilize fabrics that are created from both modern and postmodern threads and combine them to form a complex web of subjectivity and ethos with a message that is counterintuitive but nevertheless successfully dispatched in American politics.

The Christian Right woman is a powerful force in her community, but most of the time, does not challenge the authority that prevents her taking a leadership role in her church. Often, whether or not she has a career, job training, or secondary education, she chooses to stay home to manage her household and raise her children and willingly subjects herself to the authority of her husband, even within the confines of the homespace only she knows best. This is misleading because her support of patriarchy lends to the common mistake of underestimating the Christian Right woman as a stereotyped submissive who is merely her husband's derivative; although this stereotype is part of the picture, it is only a small part that is intertwined with many other intersections of public and private versions of self that defy easy categorization. In fact, it could be said that she even projects a type of feminist aura most closely linked to

libertarian and cultural feminisms but one that cooperates with patriarchy, indeed, even vociferously supports it. Grass-roots movements led by these women have successfully targeted and transformed such current political issues as the Morning After Pill, embryonic stem cell research, the John Roberts Supreme Court Justice Nomination, and the public school debate on teaching evolution and/or intelligent design (“CWA: Family Friendly Victories”). These women have been underestimated and ignored long enough.

Popular Culture and the Christian Right: Essentializing Gender to Maintain Male Privilege

In many ways no different from the abjection of women in all spheres, the abjection of the Christian Right woman in the academic arena can be attributed to male privilege. Although there are chinks in its masculine armor, the Christian Right movement at large is dominated by masculine forces and desires that make it easy for anyone attempting to theorize it to discount the feminine currents that are often suppressed, but more powerfully resonant than the very masculine forces that “created” the movement. Often, it is the physical work of the Christian Right women that most effectively responds to the emotional tensions between the conservative movement and the rest of America, and it is most certainly the feminine voices that enunciate the goals and meaning of the movement to others. For example, the articulation of the “Family Values” slogan devastates the Democratic rhetoric so thoroughly only because of its links with the feminine hearth as wholesome and necessary and its pairing with the images and words of American mothers. However, it is the men who “take credit” for conservative victories in the public sphere, and it is mostly men who legislatively follow through with

“family values” policies; the contribution of the feminine to conservative victories is rarely recognized.

This masculine masking echoes what is the reality in Western culture as a whole, where masculine subjectivities are philosophically and practically privileged at the expense of feminine subjectivities. In *The Man Question*, Kathy Ferguson—political science professor, feminist, and anarchist—outlines Irigaray’s explanation of this privileging:

The subjectivity claimed by men and denied to women typically constitutes the self as bounded agent in the world. [. . .] This subject often designates itself ‘humanist’ [. . .]. Women in male humanist discourse have generally been among those others, consigned to the world of the acted-upon, of otherness colonized in the service of maintaining the sameness of the [male] subject [. . .]. (38-9)

Not only are women the philosophical others in the discourse of humanism, they have far less power in the more concrete and practical matters of life, as well. Although many strides have been made in efforts to rectify the imbalances between men and women, most American women are subordinated in one way or another in the masculinized climate.

As a result of inequities in America’s capitalist system, American women as a collective are financially subordinate. Often, married women who would choose to continue working must sacrifice their ambitions in order to have children because the workworld rarely rewards mothers for their contributions to society, and childcare is so expensive that some who try to continue working are forced to become stay-at-home

moms because of the impracticalities of a paycheck that cannot even cover childcare costs. And despite claims that America is the land of equal opportunity (and the forty-year-old Equal Pay Act), women still only earn seventy-three cents for every dollar earned by a man (“Facts About Pay Equity”). Even those women who are financially independent must live in a political and legislative world that is created and maintained by governmental bodies made up of the mostly white and moneyed males who can afford to play politics. Thus, the overall financial subordination of women causes a dearth of women-held resources and legislative offices that leads to a political subordination of even those with the money to participate because they cannot maintain a significant collective body.

The political subordination of women occurs in all realms of American society, from the private family to public policy. Despite national movements to change legislative inequities, domestic violence laws are slanted against victims, who are predominantly women, and often deaths occur as a result. Take, for example, the recent case of *Town of Castle Rock, Colorado v. Jessica Gonzales*, in which the Supreme Court, in a case made a states-rights issue by the Bush Administration, decided seven to two that Gonzales had no right to sue her local police department for repeatedly failing to enforce a restraining order she held against her husband, who eventually murdered their three daughters (“Gonzales Ruling Endangers Women and Children”). Another example of legislation adversely affecting women is credit legislation, which is designed around the credit report. Credit reports are meant to protect creditors and cannot reflect the financial responsibility of a single mother who cannot possibly churn enough income to accomplish the coveted “picket fence” rating. Because financial and political

subordination often occur as a result of highly visible practices, and these methods of subordination are recognized to have a deleterious effect on all American subjects, there are many ongoing effective movements reacting to these overt methods. The National Organization for Women is one of the larger activist groups dedicated to reversing the trends of financial and political subordination of women, and two of their core issues are constitutional equality and economic justice (NOW's Top Priority Issues).

Oppressive Practices in “Transparent” Popular Culture

It might be argued that highly visible oppressive practices such as the ones described here are actually less dangerous than less visible oppressive practices because the invisible foe is hard to spot and hard to fight. More dangerous than the visibly oppressive is the insidious subjection of women that occurs within seemingly innocent contexts. Often, though, it is precisely the “visible,”—the “average,” the “mainstream,” the “normal”—that is ignored for reasons of assumed visibility, which in fact, renders it a murky, theoretical demilitarized zone. Things that fall in this “average” zone are often considered too transparent to be worthy of analysis.

Because of its assumed transparent everydayness, most of popular culture is taken for granted as part of the capitalist enterprise and therefore, so visible that it becomes theoretically invisible. Popular culture bombards us daily in a myriad of ways that perpetuate the subordination of women to men. Take, for example, the archaic cultural ideas surrounding marriage and the marketing of this lucrative enterprise. Without even taking into account the subordination of women in the American dating ritual, begin with the engagement itself, in which the man has the power to make his choice of mate

apparent through his proposal and marks her with a piece of expensive jewelry that proclaims his financial viability and protects her from the solicitation of other men. There is no equivalent marking for the husband-to-be; he is apparently free to be solicited until the wedding day, and this often occurs during the legendary bachelor party, which encourages a “free” man’s final fling before committing to the marriage. Then there is the wedding, an expensive affair paid for by the bride’s parents, which is perhaps a throwback to the days of a dowry. The bride wears a costly dress in a color that publicly displays her sexual virtue, and she is “given away” by her father, who, in doing so, passes the responsibility of her upkeep to her spouse. Traditionally, she gives up her surname for her husband’s, and they are often announced as Mr. and Mrs. John Doe, *man* and wife.

Examples such as these both stem from and support the underlying message of biological determinism, one of the most reductive influences on feminine subjectivity. For over thirty years, scientific research in many fields has problematized biological essentialism, which is also called biological determinism. Feminist biologists, such as Lynda Burke and Ann Fausto-Sterling, have devoted much of their academic writing to critiques of biological determinism, and sociology has its own opponents of the conservative notion, as well, with renowned researchers Michael Messner and Michael Kimmel. Janet Sayers, a professor of psychoanalytic psychology, is also a well-known figure in the academic fight against this pervasive ideology, and she, as well as all of the others above, recognizes the political ramifications of biological essentialism, which is often presented as a “common sense” or “practical” viewpoint that makes gender relations easier to navigate. Patriarchal society desires the simplicity of creating and

relating to known and obviously gendered entities, “women” who are neatly categorized as the “other” side of the gender binary: emotional, social, nurturing. A woman’s role in society, according to biological essentialism—what she does, what she is, what she looks like—is strictly defined by her body and therefore, easy to enforce. Her created face, when compared to Williams’s face in the opening excerpt, is solid and unmalleable in its historicized collectivity, a mask that turns on its wearer should she try to alter her reflection by existing outside the given edicts of womanhood. The kind of stability offered by biological essentialism may seem like ideological comfort, but in reality, it is a stultifying trap for both polarized genders and all others in between.

Even though there exists a substantial body of sociological research counteracting this medical, political, religious, and now popular argument of biological essentialism, American culture has successfully reformulated these ideas in such supposedly transparent domains as secular self-help publishing, like the successful *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus* books. Often in these types of essentialized arguments, women are subordinate because it is their natural and biological role in relation to men. Because it is futile, according to these arguments, to fight the “natural,” women should relearn the traditional ways of relating to men as rational beings. Attempts to fight the “natural” feminine essence result in the general unrest American society witnesses in the divorce rate and the misunderstandings of the gender wars. These self-help books, assisted by the scholarly credentials that grace their covers, sell the methodology by which romantic relations between men and women can be simplified through a process of male/female recognition, decoding, and affirmation that can only be categorically reductive to both subjectivities.

Essentialist Foundations of Christianity: Deriving Power from the Masculinity Crisis

In Western societies, Christianity is the foundation for so much of culture that it is easy to trace the historical path of popular culture's biological essentialism back to Biblical antecedents. From the Eve of Genesis to Revelation's Whore of Babylon, women are separate and othered from men; they are represented only through their bodies, emotional propensities, and relationship to the hearth. The consistency of these representations holds rhetorical water only because of the perpetually derivative status of the female Biblical characters in relation to their male counterparts. Representations of relations between women and men are an integral part of such essentialist arguments, and these Biblical representations are nicely repackaged as new material for the seemingly secular American marketplace. This essentialism is reflected in American politics, which have undergone a shift to the right in recent years that is even more pronounced since the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001. Funding for social programs meant to fight the perpetuation of women's oppression is being withdrawn after decades of successful implementation. Even the separation of church and state is coming under attack as President Bush's faith-based initiatives take hold. His administration withdrew international support for Planned Parenthood's condom distribution programs, promotes abstinence-based sex education, and allocates taxpayer money to send Bibles with camouflage covers to soldiers in Iraq. Most recently, September of 2005 saw a landmark decision by the Supreme Court to uphold the right of religious organizations to hire and fire based on religious beliefs and practices, even if the salaries of those in question are derived from federal funding. In this particular case against the Salvation Army, one of

the institutional charges against the former employees was their refusal to name gay co-workers. These kinds of public policies are only possible because Evangelical Christianity is getting more “airtime” than ever before, and societal pressure is restricting the religious freedom of other religious groups that are not classifiably Christian. The evolution of world events, in conjunction with the American masculinity crisis and the discourse of feminism, has created a social sinkhole that the Christian Right hopes to fill with their vision of the world.

The masculinity crisis, which some historians think stems from a loss of purpose in the male workworld, has only furthered the purpose of the Christian Right as it seeks to opportunistically reshape America. Even as men rule the world, they begin to see themselves as vulnerable victims of forces beyond their control. Frightened young males are becoming more and more confused about “how to *be* a man” (xiv), at least according to Michael Messner, a leading sociologist in the field of masculinity studies. Messner asserts that instead of taking advantage of this historic opportunity to revamp the idea of masculinity, many of these men, young and old alike, are choosing to empower themselves by reclaiming “their ‘natural’ and ‘God-given’ positions as leaders [. . .] within organizations that have defined themselves as male only” (xiv). Their separation from women as they “organize to assuage their own fears” by joining popular Christian Right organizations like the Promise Keepers may result in a “[collective] positioning of women, especially feminists, as convenient scapegoats” (xiv). According to Pat Robertson, leader of The Christian Coalition, “Feminism encourages women to leave their husbands, kill their children, practice witchcraft, destroy capitalism and become lesbians” (“Christian Coalition of America: Right Wing Watch”). One can almost

understand how men in crisis can come to the wrong conclusions about their own situation when sensationalist statements such as this are commonplace in mainstream discourse; certainly these kinds of statements cloud the real issues men face in the twenty-first century world.

There have been several waves of industry downsizing, high levels of unemployment, and economic tremors that have contributed to the masculinity crisis, but the effect of them all have been legions of male subjects who feel emasculated, as documented by the feminist journalist, Susan Faludi, in her popular text, *Stiffed*. One man, fired from his longtime job at McDonnell-Douglas, explains it this way: “I. Feel. I’ve. Been. Castrated.” Faludi goes on to explain that most “downsized” men she spoke with are not able to directly connect their emasculation with their employer’s rejection of them, so their scapegoats are “another sex, another nationality, another race” (Faludi 65). These men who feel less than competent have sons, who re-experience their fathers’s crises in their own ways.

Thus, not only does the Christian Right have the advantage of the old rumblings of an implicit climate of fear due to the masculinity crisis, it is also working within a very explicit climate of fear due to the changing face of America since the inception of the War on Terrorism and Operation Iraqi Freedom. The masculinity crisis does not occur in a vacuum, so America’s explicit fear cannot help but affect the masculinity crisis in a way that allows certain religious political groups to assert an agenda that promises security through absolutism. By following the alleged commands of God through the fulfillment of paternal obligations to women, certain men can regain a sense of knowing what to do in their religion and in their relationships at a time when everything else is

fuzzy. Everything has become so dangerous in the current climate of fear that this point of view encourages men as family leaders to be even more actively decisive (read: unilateral) than before. Fulfilling this role gives them something to do other than ruminate on their helpless struggles with whatever situation is being heralded as the end of their world.

The security of a patriarchal jukebox and sockhop world that was so easy to navigate never existed, but that is beside the point. What is important is that it is now part of the American myth, and in this myth it is easier to relate to the “others” if everyone is bound by a classification that is coherently gendered. Even more important to any discussion of Christian Right politics and gender is the unbelievable fact that it is one of their most fervent assertions that gender issues are the paramount reason for all of the world’s trouble. This is explained by Linda Kintz, author of *Between Jesus and the Market* and a specialist in the logics of representation and cultural politics:

It is this confusion [of gender identities] that causes homosexuality, divorce, sexual abuse, promiscuity, social awkwardness, emotional distress, and suicide. It has also led directly to a much larger national crisis of identity, for just as individuals require a firm, stable identity based on absolute gender differences legitimated by God, so too does the nation. (19)

According to this notion, all sorts of social “ills” can be solved through a rectification of gender upheaval, and this conservative reordering will have a rippling effect throughout all of American society. For the Christian Right’s purposes, gender “confusion” is the best kind of scapegoat because it is a phenomenon that can always be

blamed due to its unshakeable permanence and visibility, but one that will never rise up and strike back as a unified force. Furthermore, gender confusion is a convenient scapegoat because resources need not ever be spent on actions that can never be taken against foes so entrenched in society that they are the root of all evils, even terrorism. In a statement that was later retracted, Jerry Falwell went so far to say that 9/11 was a punishment meted out by God to punish America for all of the gender upheaval of feminism and homosexuality.

We can find evidence of feelings of masculine vulnerability by looking at the behaviors they elicit, particularly consumer behaviors. Take, for example, the highly publicized admonitions to protect loved ones from airborne terrorist threats with plastic sheeting and duct tape (“Duct Tape Sales Rise Amid Terror Fears”) or the reaction to the countless truck and car advertisements (General Motors, Ford, Chrysler) that link auto buying with patriotism. Ward’s Communications, an international provider of auto industry information, cites the final months of 2001 as record breaking times for auto sales (“Ward’s Forecasts”). The federal government and its representatives indirectly constitute another such capitalist enterprise, and they, too, benefit from the hysteria felt by their subjects because it enables them to further their own hidden agendas through protective claims and an assertion of their own accessibility to solutions: the fueling of the economy through patriotic consumerism, terrorist alert notification systems, budget overhauls for defense, and pre-emptive acts of war, to name a few.

Iris Marion Young, who was a professor of political science at the University of Chicago, explains this phenomenon as the masculinizing of the state in her article titled, “The Logic of Masculinist Protection: Reflections on the Current Security State.” This

discussion relocates the subjectivity of the state within the realm of the patriarchal family unit, with the state performing the role of dominator and protector of the feminized citizens who, through their dependence and obedience, perpetuate its power: “We are to accept a more authoritarian and paternalistic state power, which gets its support partly from the unity a threat produces and our gratitude for protection. At the same time that it legitimates authoritarian power over citizens internally, the logic of masculinist protection justifies aggressive war outside” (2). This aggressive war can also be seen as an attempt to religiously globalize the world; the United States government is so linked with Christianity that its aggressive war is connected, for many Americans, to the paternal Christian duty to bring God’s freedom to the rest of the world. The Bush Administration’s rhetoric is also overtly religious, which proves the success of the Christian Right as the new dominant in mainstream popular culture at large. It can also be argued that the state’s paternally dominant role at home further confuses and infantilizes a society of men already in the throes of a gender identity crisis, if we believe the evidence provided us by Messner and Faludi.

Extending Feminist Criticisms of the Masculinity Crisis to the Christian Right Woman’s Support of Gender Coherence

Messner’s observation that young men are confused about the *practice* of manhood bears out in his studies of masculinizing movements of all sorts. What’s most interesting about his studies is that none of the movements he analyzes attempt a reformation of the masculine identity; all look for a way to reinstate an old ideal. This reactionary effort is truest of Christian men’s movements, like Promise Keepers. According to Faludi, Promise Keepers encourages men to surrender to Jesus in order to

then “reclaim a new masculine role in the family, not as breadwinners but as spiritual pathfinders” (240) who submit to Christ so that they can install themselves in their natural position of familial dominance. However, Faludi’s case studies of individual Promise Keepers portray men who are struggling to maintain control of anything, even themselves. One small group’s inspiration is Mike, a marital success story who allows Faludi to spend time with him and his wife, Margaret, at their home in Monrovia, California. Faludi discerns that the

organization’s injunction that women ‘submit’ to their husbands received only the barest of lip service [. . .] Margaret was clearly willing to play along with the Promise Keepers fiction of male ‘servant leadership,’ but what did she get out of the bargain? Like so many of the wives I met in Promise Keepers, she shaped the group’s tenets to fit her own needs, and while she might have 1950s-style expectations of support from her husband, she also wanted 1990s-style independence for herself. (246-7)

Margaret is actually the triumphant individual reborn from a dull chrysalis of physical abuse and domination; she is transformed into an independent woman who is in charge of herself *and* her marriage. Her husband’s performance as a Promise Keeper has cured him of his abusive behaviors, and although Margaret is not abusive, she and Mike have merely an inverted relationship instead of a new one. She allows him to talk about his role as their family leader, but she is the one at the helm, as she enthusiastically explains: “Now, I still balance the checkbook, but it’s his responsibility to make sure that I’m taken care of financially” (246). Mike and Margaret also speak of him giving up control of purchasing decisions that were once sources of conflict in their marriage,

although Margaret has not limited her pursuit of things that are against Mike's wishes. However, the reference to Promise Keepers as a marriage-saving institution is a constant motif in their lives, and Mike is revered at the meetings as a poster child for the empowering movement. The façade of Mike's empowerment is never openly recognized, however; it is revealed without the couple's discernment through Faludi's observations and interviews.

According to Messner and Faludi and many others deserving of the attention their research warrants, Mike and men like him are suffering under the yoke of a masculinity crisis created by a contemporaneity that endangers manhood. Although many of these researchers are pro-feminist theorists who do not excuse men for bad behavior due to their subjection under the limitations of this crisis, the mere term, "masculinity crisis," obscures the root of these men's problems. The environment of rapid change and destabilization (the postmodern reality of countless international individuals) is suffered by everyone, and calling this a "masculinity crisis" is just a new way of committing the old crime of framing the world in masculine terms. Doing so precludes the recognition of the fact that men are not the only ones suffering under these conditions, and to ignore this is to *create* the discourse of a crisis that is strictly a masculine one masking the reality underneath.

Current societal conditions require many subjects to rework their identities in order to function in a more fractured environment. That this subjective work is now a necessity for survival is either rewarding or ruinous, depending on one's worldview. Being in a position to widely disperse their own ideological discourse, the Christian Right is manipulating the masculinity crisis (and the wider identity crisis) as they

simultaneously incorporate it into the Christian consciousness. This occurs in conjunction with a recreation of Christianity itself meant to fill the holes of contemporary times so effectively that individuals are drawn to the ideology as an answer to all of the problems of the age. The simplification of gender roles through a reassertion of Biblical essentialized notions of femininity and masculinity is a part of this movement, which calls for a more dominant masculine role in the family.

The masculine subjectivity, whether or not it is dominant, is not created in a vacuum, and it is dependent on the performance of feminine subjectivity, which is also a conduit for capitalistic enterprise. This is especially true when that feminine subjectivity identifies with the Christian lifestyle, which provides yet another entry point into the subject as consumer. Christian consumerism has a profound effect on women of the Christian Right, who are usually the primary purchasers for their families. These women are constructing themselves as Christians in a society that classifies according to consumption patterns, and the ideology of Christianity has metamorphosed into a conduit through which billions of dollars are being made marketing and selling products, goods, and services. It is not a stretch to say that for many people, Christianity has become conflated with capitalismⁱ, and in order to be a member of the Christian ideology, members must adhere to its purchasing patterns. An example of this phenomenon that affects the construction of female subjectivity would be products used to gender an individual as female. Popular Christianity insists on a strict gendering paradigm, so many self-help books concerning marriage and sexuality counsel readers to traditionally gender themselves using makeup, hairstyle, and dress in order to solve spiritual problems.

Margaret and Mike are no exception. Margaret recites to Faludi a birthday poem she wrote for Mike, and it names him her knight, her rescuer, and she is the princess. Their revelations about their relationship, however, show Mike to be merely Margaret's monetary savior (246-7). Their spending preferences are secure once Mike is a Promise Keeper. His newfound financial success and responsibility secure him the princess, who allows him the Promise Keeper leadership role in name only. Margaret's performance as princess, then, allows him to continue as a knight, but in truth, Margaret rescues herself. Like Mike and Margaret, the Christian Right depends for its survival on a strict ideal of essentialized and coherent gender as a sacred and performative text, and this gender ideal is furthered through its confluence with consumption.

Gender Coherence and Judith Butler's Notion of Gender Performance

But what is coherent gender? And how can anything as contradictory as the gender relations between Mike and Margaret be called "coherent"? This is a concept best understood through Judith Butler's theoretical description of gender as a performance because it most effectively explains the ins and outs of gender fashion, so to speak. Butler, a Marxist gender theorist, utilizes the phenomenological discourse of acts—reality is created by subjects via their "language, gesture, and all manner of symbolic social signs" (415)—to assert that gender is a performative act instead of a natural behavior and could thus be performed differently. Her thesis calls into question the common misconception that gender status and gender experiences are givens depending on biological sex.

Basing her argument on the theses of both Merleau-Ponty and de Beauvoir, who argue that the body is an historical location and situation, Butler insists that “One is not simply a body [. . .] one does one’s body” (417). Historical ideas of gender change from generation to generation and from location to location, so a gendered body becomes a sign of culture at a particular time and in a particular place, and an individual who deviates from his or her culture’s idea of appropriate gender performance is punished. The act of gender, then, is a coerced performance with real consequences for deviants. Because this coercion is so much a part of society’s collective subjectivity, its origin as performance is shielded from view. Everyone’s performance is so credible that even they do not know that it is coerced and so often repeated that it is always already natural and so transparently average that it is invisible. This is not to say that individuals do not have some agency in choosing their individual gender performance but that their individuality is constructed within the confines of a powerful system of propriety. Part of this process is the system of compulsory heterosexuality, which guarantees the reproduction of the gender system. Butler calls for a theoretical foundation which recognizes that the gender act expresses nothing that is inside the individual but rather something that is outside in society.

This dichotomous, heterosexual gender system requires that contemporary men perform their roles in strictly prescribed ways that are historically cyclical. Even though women began to merge into the workforce several generations ago, and even though many households need two incomes to survive, often men still consider themselves solely responsible for the protection and provision of their families. Christian men’s movements, although they might tweak traditional roles (from breadwinner to spiritual

guide), are simply reinscribing the old ideals of performance that are nigh impossible for many men to accomplish but insisted upon just the same. The result is that these ideals often become meaningless symbols of masculinity, further highlighting the failures of the men who aspire to them. And women, like Margaret, are co-conspirators in the charade. Instead of encouraging a revolutionary transformation in their partners, these women figure out ways to resist within the confines of this ideological system and are so successful that the experience transforms them while simultaneously imprisoning their male counterparts within the fiction. In many cases, the derivative status of women to men is reversed, although this is never revealed on the open stage but rather has to be inferred from Christian Right texts. Butler's theory of gender performance is enacted in such an exaggerated fashion in this scenario that the dramas of Christian couples like Mike and Margaret are almost parodies of Butler's ideas.

An important part of many feminine performances is gendered consumerism, such as appearance maintenance, the financial requirements of certain stereotypical roles (Margaret's princess), and in the case of Christian Right women, the purchase of certain products that mark the buyer as an evangelical. Many commodities marketed to Christian women have particular themes that work within the confines of the ideal performance of fundamentalist femininity and construct subjectivity through these narrow paradigms, which are essentialized versions of womanhood. Christian Right women embrace these strictly disciplined identities as welcome subjective models to strive toward, even though the choices are limited and inter-related. Most products aimed at Christian women encourage a femininity that can be linked to Mary, the perfect mother of Christ, or one of her saintly attributes, namely submission and martyrdom. Although the masculinity

crisis encourages the perpetuation of these identity themes and is the background for much of the current gender performance of Christian Right women, their's is the true story for my purposes, and the men who seem to be in charge are only analyzed in light of their reference to the women who prop them up.

Christian Right women transform themselves largely through American-style consumerism. The pressure to consume is compounded by a requirement to mark oneself as Christian by consuming Christian-themed products, and this pressure merges with the considerable pressures of outdated gender performance and the support of patriarchy. These pressures have enormous affects on subjectivity construction and create a psychic confluence in Christian Right women that deserves to be unpacked. One of the most influential ways these women buttress both patriarchy and the masculinity crisis is through the consumption of popular Christian texts that not only empower men and construct feminine subjectivity, but also create a form for unspoken resistance like that we see in the case of Mike and Margaret.

Most of these popular texts provide particular subjective building blocks that very often support one or more of the three aspects of the feminine Christian identity: the Madonna paradigm, submission, and martyrdom. The Madonna paradigm is the ethereal epitome of woman that is mythologized in the persona of the mother of Christ. Its perpetuation in Christian texts constructs the ideal against which all women, especially Christian women, are measured. Like most examples of essentialism, the Madonna paradigm is portrayed as a simple and natural role, when it is in fact a complex and oxymoronic identity to which no earthly woman can successfully aspire. The Madonna is a virgin-child, yet a mother, both supernatural and earthly. She is supplicant and

protector, follower and leader, always obedient, but supremely powerful. She embodies only everything that is good and holy, and that is why it is impossible to become like her. Most often, she is dichotomously paired with the Whore, who is lewdly sexual without a trace of the virgin's innocence or the glow of motherhood. The Whore is shrouded in lustful desires meant to deceive and sway innocents from their chosen path. Christian Right texts often portray these two paradigms as the only choices for feminine identity; anyone who does not choose the Madonna must choose the Whore.

The achievement of the Madonna's feminine ideal can only be accomplished through submission and martyrdom, which are focus of many Christian Right texts, although often not explicitly so. Ultimately, all Christians are to submit totally to the will of God because the Christian faith usually teaches that one's purpose can only be met after a surrendering of one's own will to that of the divine power. In a Christian marriage, however, this becomes complicated, because according to many interpretations of Christian texts, a woman's submission to God occurs within the context of her marriage through her submission to her husband. According to many, a wife who refuses to submit to the will of her husband cannot be surrendering her will to God; husbands are earthly representatives of the divine.

Martyrdom is the ultimate submission and is modeled for Christians in the story of Christ, who is often provided as the figure for women's emulation. Women who seek martyrdom are not actually seeking literal death, but rather a figurative death of the self meant to strip one's identity of all pride, will, and resistance. In a marriage in which a woman believes in submission and in which her husband abuses the power she grants him, a loss of self is surely the wife's fate. Women can become figures of Christian

martyrdom without being married through extreme immersion in good works or anything else that perpetuates a denial of the self. What problematizes the notions of both submission and martyrdom is that the emulation of Christ could very well be regarded as an empowering process for any Christian who chooses to so frame it. There is an old fundamentalist hymn that speaks of the “power, wonderworking power in the precious blood of the lamb,” and the motif of *powerful* submission, sacrifice, and martyrdom echoes throughout much of traditional Christianity. This theme has been effectively harvested by the creators of many texts absorbed by the Christian Right woman and encourages a certain sort of femininity that allows women to negotiate some complicated terrain in order to balance subjective contradictions.

The Identity of Christian Right Women: Personal Insight and Critical Investigation

I have personal reasons for interrogating the themes of Madonna, submission, and martyrdom as powerful forces that participate in constructing and maintaining the identity of Christian Right women. During my early childhood, I was heavily indoctrinated in right-wing Pentecostal teachings. Until I was six, my immediate and extended family was intimately involved in what was once a separatist church and still is a fundamentalist Pentecostal denomination, the Church of God of Prophecy (CGP). Its congregation is made up of working class, mostly uneducated, and often poor, families. My father was an occasional preacher, and my mother was a song leader and children’s teacher; both were young church leaders and looked upon with admiration as exemplars of CGP godliness. Even after my mother divorced and remarried, and we joined my

doctor stepfather's moderate Methodist church, I continued to be influenced by the CGP, even though I wasn't a regular attendee.

I was raised in a spiritual miasma of contradictory forces. My religious training is even more contradictory than most contrasting denominations—Catholic and Protestant, for example—because my training mixes doctrine, lifestyle, *and* class. I can't remember a time when I wasn't watching women negotiate the complicated subjective terrain staked out by the Christian Right. Because fundamentalism was such a large part of my most formative years, I can't simply erase its subjective effects by consciously choosing to believe and behave differently. I am driven to interact with fundamentalism, and my decision to study these women is, in reality, a compulsion. It stems from a need to reconcile my interlocked desires to both separate myself from and identify with these women. Regardless of, perhaps because of, my emotional ambivalence, my intentions are to conduct a sympathetic critique using mainly Marxist and feminist theoretical tools in combination with my own insight, to analyze the collective subjectivity of this complicated group.

Accountability and the View from Within

My parents were raised from pre-adolescence in the CGP and met one another at Tomlinson College, which was founded by the CGP's founder and provided an environment where parents could send their children to be educated without ending their separation from the rest of society. Both my father and mother received degrees in Christian education, and while they were there, were voted Mr. and Miss Tomlinson College, an honor that bespoke to their spiritual correctness according to the strict CGP

doctrine, as well as their ability to minister to others. After graduation, they undertook mission work in Canada and eventually settled down in regular jobs, so my father could take on preaching responsibilities at a CGP near Atlanta, Georgia. My mother began nursing school, and I was born. Within two years, their divorce was legal, and my mother and I began the long process of subjective reformation that would result in us leaving the CGP and rejecting its fundamentalist lifestyle.

One doesn't easily choose to leave such a church. My mother and I were thoroughly ensconced in the church's culture; all of our socialization was done there, and almost every decision in our lives had to be made through the church's frame of reference. Separating from that culture wasn't easy, even given the circumstances in which my mother found herself. My father left my mother for another man. Apparently, he had only married in an attempt to "cure" himself of homosexuality, but the church blamed my mother, nonetheless. My parents's divorce was a necessity, but as a result, my mother went from a prominent Madonna to a pariah Whore. According to the thought of the CGP, a woman once married could never be without her husband again because her physical being couldn't resist the lure of the flesh. No matter what my mother said or how she behaved, everyone thought a young divorcee was promiscuous and committing adultery against her husband, from whom no divorce papers could ever separate her. Furthermore, her decision to divorce, and especially, to remarry, condemned her, my stepfather, me, and their future children, to Hell for participating in such an adulterous and unholy enterprise.

Even though my mother had always believed this philosophy, too, because it was part of the church's teaching, she was able to reject it once she was in the position to

prove it false. She was able to reject it but not the church itself. Only when forced did she abdicate her membership, which left my grandmother to navigate complicated terrain because once again, the CGP was enforcing an inapplicable rule. My mother was supposed to be ostracized by her family because of her “decision” to leave the flock. Fortunately, my grandmother was able to empower herself and chose to openly support my mother while simultaneously choosing to stay in the church.

My immediate family and I were and occasionally, still are, subjected to religious practices of differing degrees of coercive force that designated us as others who were in need of spiritual intervention. Members of the congregation, especially family members, engaged in manipulative behaviors, such as physical breakdowns akin to epileptic seizures, the forcible “laying on of hands” in unannounced prayer without permission, and countless abusive conversations aimed at bringing us all back from what many consider the depths of sin. Our reactions have varied over the years, as has our willingness to subject ourselves to this treatment, but even now, when we least expect it, someone will approach us in public with a request for a quick, collective prayer. What was especially confusing to me as a child and later as a young adult, was the congregation’s fervent desire to “fix” my mother, who was forced out of her marriage and out of her church home against her will. It has never been clear what the CGP would have prescribed to my mother as an acceptable course of action to redeem herself, and it was many years before my mother was able to reconcile herself with grateful and guiltless acceptance to her escape from this environment. My mother’s and grandmother’s negotiations, like my own, lasted a long time, and perhaps they are still with us in the decisions we make and our views of ourselves and each other. Only in the

details of our lives can those questions be answered, but we have certainly been changed by a force that is also changing the country.

Many Americans, academics and political pundits alike, are at a loss to explain what's happening when evangelical Christianity, which has countless fundamentalist categories like the CGP's brand of Pentecostalism, comes into contact with American politics. It's not as simple as the dichotomy presented by the notion of culture war, but that rhetoric is powerfully effective; good versus evil is concise and sharp, especially to those religious conservatives who feel that God is on their side. What everyone, including the Democratic Party, is just beginning to figure out is that devout spirituality and a revolutionary desire to change the world are the forces moving beneath the surface. The stage hands of the Christian Right have been working behind the scenes for several decades, preparing the American set for this very moment. It could be that the props are all in place, and the actors are made up and costumed just offstage, waiting to take their places when the curtain rises.

This point of view seems paranoid, and that's precisely why the powerful constituency of religious fundamentalists represented by public figures like Pat Robertson have been so successful in creating this set. No one takes them seriously, and this underestimation of their influence may be the very thing that provides the energy for the powerful spotlights that are beginning to shine forth from the darkness, one by one. Perhaps televangelists like Jerry Falwell are decoys, loud and flamboyant performers meant to distract the astute from what is happening behind the curtain. Americans are just beginning to ask, "Just what is going on back there?" Some say fundamentalist Christians are organizing, but they're already organized. Some may say they're

recruiting, but over half the country already takes part in their movement, many without realizing just how far to the political right it is. It's quite possible that those Christian extremists in charge are all behind that curtain, sitting in the dark, poised and ready to jump out and scare the living daylights out of all of the rest of us.

What's happening is more profound than any one person's story about their exit from fundamentalism. These tiny churches that no one has heard of are microcosms that represent what's happening in this country at large—small groups of invisible people with the faith to move mountains are changing the topography of their world one stone at a time, often without critically examining their goals or motivations. These stalwart workers believe in what they do so strongly that they can see no alternative other than the spiritual collective action in which they participate. Most dangerously, their logic is a confluence of desire and ancient directive text that becomes, for them, unquestionable and sacred. This holy mix results in a worldview that becomes a moral given because its circular self-affirmation answers all of its own questions. In contrast to generations past, this worldview is one of political transformation, rather than separatism, and I witnessed that particular transformation firsthand. As a child, I watched private muddy river baptisms and heard voices singing gospel and speaking in tongues, and these encoded behaviors were followed by a luxurious lunch at which people argued for participation in worldly politics; after all, many said, God Himself is a conservative.

In Theory: Research Conflicts

The fundamentalist background of my most formative years, even though I have rejected its training, tenets, and lifestyle, affects my decision to study Christian Right

women and the decisions I make about how to conduct my studies of them. The decision to disavow my early spiritual training is in itself a reworking of my subjectivity that cannot help but influence everything I interpret. I can only make decisions from within the altered frames of the culture I was provided, as well as the culture I choose to provide for myself. I like to think that the latter is equally as formative.

I have chosen to be a feminist graduate student trained in literary analysis who has migrated to Cultural Studies, which is decidedly Marxist. This influences my project a great deal, too. From an Althusserian perspective, Christian ideology must reproduce its spiritual labor power in the form of believers in order to guarantee its own perpetuation. Because the average population no longer relies on the Church itself for answers in the all-encompassing way that was prevalent in bygone eras, it is becoming increasingly common for the Christian Church to rely on non-traditional methods of member recruitment in order to guarantee its own future. The Christian Right has an especially vibrant and multi-faceted methodology for counteracting what it sees as an American secularization. One piece of this plan is to actively recreate reality through popular culture. With the media's help, members of these cultural movements portray themselves as representative of the mainstream and are often accepted as such, even when they are far from the center. Partly because of such implicit campaigns, the Church is enjoying a revival of influence that reinforces its status as a relevant ideology.

One way an ideology can guarantee its own relevance and perpetuation is by adapting to the needs of its adherents as it simultaneously creates them as subjects. There has been an evolutionary shift in the ideology of Christianity to fulfill the needs of Christian consumers, and this shift has resulted in a diversity of texts believers can

purchase in order to mark themselves as members of this ideological group. These texts, such as *What Would Jesus Do?* (WWJD) products and self-help books on everything from finance to romance, are all created from the ingredients of spiritual myth and contemporary culture, and this myth/culture combination results in profoundly effective tools with which to attract new participants.

The women's movement within evangelical Christianity is attracting unexpectedly large numbers of women formerly thought untouchable—non-Southern suburbanites ensconced, as Glenn Shuck, specialist in religious studies, describes them “amid an endless sea of asphalt and strip malls, punctuated occasionally with ‘master planned’ lakes and golf courses” (Shuck 24). One of the mysteries of the evolving Christian Right woman concerns her utilization of the myths of Christian ideology to refashion herself as a subject-agent suitable for the postmodern environment in which she finds herself. One of the reasons these women are often not taken seriously is because they are misunderstood to be akin to support personnel, administrative assistants for the “real workers,” the men at their tables, the pastors at their pulpits, and the legislators fighting for their legislative goals. These women are powerful agents in certain spheres; Concerned Women for America, or CWA (supposedly the nation's largest public policy organization for women), is an excellent example of powerful women internationally facilitating the political changes that they want to see. However, what's bewildering to many is the decision most Christian Right women make regarding the abdication of their own agency in the realms in which they would be assumed to be most powerful—the church, and especially the home. Countless individual women are remarkably anti-feminist, and many Christian women's groups (CWA, particularly) have as part of their

platform the denunciation of all forms of the feminist movement. This, along with other machinations apparently meant to preserve the patriarchal power status quo in reference to class, race, and sexuality, cause these women to be stereotyped in a decidedly unfavorable light by more moderate Americans. The enigma of the Christian Right woman's power and submission is the major tripwire for many of my analytical difficulties and has become a foundation for my research.

Like Cathleen Armstead, author of "Writing Contradictions: Feminist Research and Feminist Writing," a study of white, working class women, I find myself in conflict. I certainly recognize that many of the prevalent stereotypes of Christian Right women bear out upon closer examination, but at the same time, I recognize that the situation of these women is more complex than it looks. As a writer, I certainly have an agenda, and it is feminist, so I can't avoid looking at the texts that influence Christian Right women through feminist eyes. I'm staunchly anti-conservative and find that most of the tenets of conservatism run contrary to my most deep-seated emotional and intellectual beliefs. At the same time, I feel a certain loyalty to these women, not because I agree with them, but because I understand some of the feelings that bring them to their absolutist conclusions. I understand that most of the time, these women are guided by an intense desire to do the right thing, not just for themselves, but for their community at large. And I've seen with my own eyes the amount of work—intellectual, emotional, and physical—that is exerted in the search for what they truly believe will be a loving world of justice. Most of all, I identify with the emotion that motivates most intensely spiritual people; there is something connecting all of us that makes it worthwhile to try to affect change in a seemingly brutal universe.

Because of my ambivalent identification with these women, I attempt a sympathetic portrayal in my analysis. It's not enough to simply reinstate with some new insight the common stereotypes that preclude any real grappling with the contradictions of these women. It would be easy to recreate them in order to fit some criteria of my analysis, and I fear I'm already suffering from the difficulties Armstead speaks of when she says she is "working through the aesthetic and political difficulties of achieving a balanced account, one poised between [her] knowledge of social structural conditions (and feminism) and these women's experiential knowledges" (632). One of my goals may also be in direct opposition to feminist ideals because I hope to recast these patriarchally anti-feminist women in light of their perpetuation of a strange, new form of feminism. These women aspire to a certain feminist vision, even as they eschew and denigrate American feminism. But is it fair of me to pin the label of feminist on Christian Right women when both groups consider the other to be their antithesis? Isn't that the worst kind of appropriation?

Armstead gets around this difficulty by calling her subjects "protofeminists" (632) because she interprets their contradictory expressions to be critiques of gender relations combined with a belief that feminism is anti-male and anti-family. I'm not comfortable with the condescension behind the term, "protofeminist." Furthermore, Christian Right women, although they do share some of the problematic characteristics of Armstead's subjects, are situated differently from many of them. All of Armstead's subjects are in the workforce, and some comment on gender inequality between working women and men. Many Christian Right women are not involved in careers outside of their homes and immediate communities, and I have certainly not seen any critiques of gender

relations in the popular Christian texts I'm studying. On the contrary, many Christian Right women's groups, like Concerned Women for America, belittle egalitarian efforts as unnecessary and downright un-American. However, these women practice politics and motherhood in many ways that are in direct correlation to certain feminist values. For example, politically successful Christian Right women's groups can be ideologically linked to both liberal feminists because of a staunch belief in the American legislative system, as well as radical cultural feminism, which is often accused of the same kinds of essentializing one finds in the foundations of Christian Right schools of thought.

Just because Christian Right women are powerful agents in the world, are a powerful political constituency, and share some characteristics with certain brands of feminism, I don't label them feminists, and this is another problematic facet of my project. Naming becomes a reductive and degrading practice when an outside "authority" claims the power to do so, especially when the naming would be a *re-naming* that would be irately refused. It is admittedly difficult to avoid imposing my frames of reference while simultaneously presenting my analysis of these women's patterns of behavior and actions in the world.

Kintz explains discrepancies in the Christian Right woman's anti-feminism. She claims that Christian Right texts resolve the contradictions of ideal femininity with the politically active Christian warrior woman by claiming that the desire to fight stems from the more germinal and natural desire to nurture and protect the children of her family. This original desire of motherhood protects the Christian woman from being masculine and unnatural like the feminist when she is aggressively asserting her agency in the public sphere (79). This rhetorical move of chiasmus, although it simply reasserts the

biological feminine ideal, provides such a complex doubling back and ideological layering that it helps me to do justice to the complexity of the subjects I'm writing about.

Ann Ferguson's "Can I Choose Who I Am? And How Would That Empower Me? Gender, Race, Identities and the Self" is a powerful tool that proves useful to me in examining complicated perceptions of Christian Right women's subjectivities. After having read many theories of subjectivity, I still haven't been able to reconcile myself to utilizing one set of them because so many are reductive; usually they contain what is a profound, yet oversimplified, view of subjectivity that simply isn't capable of adjusting to complex arguments about women's subjectivity and agency. Ferguson, a professor of philosophy and women's studies, however, responds to this problem by critiquing and adding to theories of subjectivity construction in a way that provides for change and agency, allowing agents the power of choice (although these choices are constrained by powerful social factors). Her discussion of creating oppositional communities for collective action also directly applies to the Christian Right women because in their view, they are creating just these kinds of communities to fight battles of secular oppression that for them, are a very real threat.

Christian Right Texts and the Construction of Feminine Subjectivity

My examination will entail looking at specific texts of popular culture that are favorites among Christians in general and right-wing Christians in particular. As I have discussed, feminine subjectivity is constructed through popular Christian texts that also usually empower men. The consumption of these texts acts as a means through which Christian Right women can support patriarchy and affect their own personal

transformations. Capitalizing on these women's desire to improve themselves in a religiously appropriate way, most products aimed at and embraced by Christian women encourage a femininity that can be linked to Mary, the perfect mother of Christ, or one of her saintly attributes, namely submission and martyrdom.

Each of the texts I've chosen further the Madonna paradigm in some way. Tim LaHaye's and Jerry Jenkin's *Left Behind* casts its major female characters through the Madonna/Whore dichotomy. The selections from the most popular of the Christian women's self-help books—*The Power of a Praying Wife* by Stormie Omartian; *The Act of Marriage: the Beauty of Sexual Love* by Tim and Beverly LaHaye; *Woman, Thou Art Loosed* by T.D.Jakes; and *Every Young Woman's Battle: Guiding Your Mind, Heart, and Body in a Sex-Saturated World* by Shannon Ethridge and Stephen Arterburn—further the feminine submission to the masculine. And finally, Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* glorifies a feminized martyrdom through Christ and His mother. Each text breaks money-making records within its genre and has been widely disseminated to Christian Right women and to the larger public. Conveniently, those texts that are most influential also comprise a quite diverse spectrum across the Christian market, and it is easy to justify the texts I've chosen as among the most important of the last decade.

Tim LaHaye's *Left Behind* series promulgates the Madonna/Whore dichotomy, particularly the first book of the series. In Chapter Two, I will argue that this action novel contributes to the postmodern subjectivity of the Christian Right woman by perpetuating the Jamesonian schizophrenia found in contemporary popular texts.

In *Left Behind*, there are only two feminine identities: Madonna and Whore. *Left Behind* adheres to the revitalization of gendered essentialism in its development of Chloe

and Hattie, the two major female characters. There is a small space in *Left Behind*, however, for the postmodern complexity of the “powerful submission” we see in many texts consumed by Christian Right women. LaHaye’s Christian self-help books for men are echoed in the context and action of this story, which urges men to take back their masculine right to power. In contrast, the cycle of male salvation, and by extension, the salvation of the masculine world, is set in motion by a feminine catalyst. Although women have a presence in the damnation and salvation of humanity, this presence represents a power that must be contained within the strict hierarchy of a certain biblical theology, or else Christian masculinity could be threatened.

The Power of a Praying Wife; The Act of Marriage; Woman, Thou Art Loosed; and *Every Young Woman’s Battle* further the Madonna paradigm through the fundamentalist ideas of women’s submission and servitude as foundational premises. It is these ideas that form the foundation for the destructive gender ideology that primarily constructs the postmodern subjectivity of the Christian Right woman. In Chapter Three, I will illuminate the submissive aspects of their subjectivity by analyzing the feminine identity espoused in these bestsellers from the lucrative genre of Christian women’s self-help books.

Rigid gender codes and traditional roles for women are the main themes of these books, but there is a twist to these themes that is both confusing and empowering; a Christian woman’s submission can be reframed as a *choice* to submit from a position of power through an emulation of the martyrdom of Jesus Christ. The coupling of strict gender codes and the idea of a powerful submission leaves readers’ mates in positions that are awkwardly weaker in their insistence on the alpha role. If the Christian woman

reader chooses to participate in this call for a powerful submission, she theoretically subverts the alpha role because many categories are disrupted in this strategic move—man, woman, masculine, feminine, power, submission, domination. Modern ideas of gender are dislocated, as well as the parameters of power and struggle in a marriage, but for many women, the practical reality of submission to their husbands probably remains unchanged. The representations of Christ, woman, and man featured in texts that utilize this strategy of powerful submission definitely retain the message of feminine subordination, while also attempting to recreate Christianity into a more postmodern ideology.

Mel Gibson's film, *The Passion of the Christ*, is an artful pastiche of cultural elements that persuades precisely because it is temporally schizophrenic cinema combining multiple genres. The film successfully contributes to the postmodern Christian Right woman's subjectivity as described in previous chapters. In Chapter Four, I will examine feminine martyrdom, perhaps the most important piece of the Madonna paradigm. Indeed, the ultimate feminine martyr, Mary, the mother of Jesus, is represented in what is arguably a more powerful submission than Christ himself. Her attitude is the epitome of powerful submission and meshes perfectly with the ideas of the Christian culture industry found in other popular texts that help fashion the temporally schizophrenic subjectivity of the Christian Right woman. She is reproduced in a less glorified fashion throughout the film in every other female character, and Gibson's depiction of women offers little choice other than the particular subjectivity offered them through Mary's maternal martyrdom.

Chapter Five will underscore my insistence that popular culture's maintenance of the Madonna paradigm and its ideals of submission and martyrdom affect all of American culture and should be taken seriously. I will conclude with real-world examples and analysis of these powerful aspects of Christian Right feminine identity in the online texts of Concerned Women for America (CWA), which claims it is the largest women's political action group in America. CWA is but one example of Christian Right women's collective propensity to continually disseminate a contradictory picture of themselves and their moral frameworks. CWA texts insist on the biological difference between women and men, welcoming the strict boundaries of essentialism, while utilizing stereotypical patriarchal forms of modernist argument and power as their chosen rhetoric. As if this weren't complex enough, because they are part of a larger movement that is strictly and neoliberally conservative, CWA collapses capitalist arguments into their religious rhetoric so thoroughly that capitalism and Christianity become synonymous. Through politically successful women's groups like CWA, this super-capitalist, fundamentalist Christian doctrine dominates the voices of less powerful women everywhere. Even though they are currently dominant in American politics, Christian Right women also claim the subject position of victim and act accordingly. It is this counterintuitive strategy that reveals the locus of their power—a confluence of supposed victimization in the public sphere with the victimization they suffer, yet minimize, in their private lives.

Left Behind:

The Madonna/Whore Paradigm and the Masculinity Crisis

The *Left Behind* series, a relatively recent textual addition to the toolbox of the Christian Right, is comprised of twelve politico-mystery, Tom-Clancy-like interpretations of Revelation and Christian prophecy according to American Evangelical leader and creator, Tim LaHaye. Specifically, these books tell the eschatological story of what Premillenarians assert will happen during the Apocalypse, which is that all “believers” will be transported to Heaven in preparation for the second coming of Christ. Those left on Earth will suffer a period of horrible tribulation that will transform every corner of the planet until the day that Christ returns to recreate the world as his paradise and rule it for one thousand years.

According to the August 29, 2002 issue of the *Christian Science Monitor*, Evangelical Christiansⁱⁱ are not the only consumers of these books, who actually comprise only half of the vast readership. *Publisher’s Weekly* tabulates series sales at more than sixty-two million copies. These novels and a myriad of spin-off products—comic books, graphic novels, prophecy charts and clubs, calendars, greeting cards, a young adults’s series, software, video games, music, dramatized audio recordings, and films—have been skillfully mainstreamed into American culture, and they have more than a spiritual agenda.

Although the explicit agenda of *Left Behind* products is salvation, their implicit agenda is revolutionary—to remake the world in the image of the Christian Right. In the introduction to *The Authorized Left Behind Handbook*, which is co-authored by LaHaye himself, a spiritual agenda is at the forefront: “But it isn’t just about the books. It isn’t even mostly about the books. The real impact of the Left Behind series is on souls. [. . .] The success of the books has driven the opportunity for an unprecedented harvest of souls” (LaHaye *LBH* 4). To LaHaye, the novels detail a black-and-white struggle between good and evil, and because his view is so fundamentalist, the plot and action of the series is prophetic and, according to him, rhetorically designed to motivate readers toward God before it is “too late.” However, if one looks beyond the battle between good and evil and considers the political momentum of the books, then their agenda is somewhat complicated.

To begin to decipher that agenda, one has only to know about some of the previous publications of creator and Evangelical force, Tim LaHayeⁱⁱⁱ. One of the main movers and shakers of the Christian Right, LaHaye, often in collaboration with his wife, has also published numerous self-help books on marriage and sexuality that re-assert the masculinity and power of the male as head of household, anti-homosexual tracts, and analyses of the good versus evil struggle of Christianity against “secular humanism,” all of which rely upon a literal interpretation of the Bible, according to *The Christian Science Monitor* (Lapman). Scarcely visible to non-evangelical America before *Left Behind*, LaHaye was named the country’s most influential evangelical of the past quarter century by the *Evangelical Studies Bulletin* in 2001, and this means he was chosen over

many household names like Billy Graham, Pat Robertson, and James Dobson. He has more than eighty publications, the majority of which are full-length books.

An astounding number of LaHaye's accomplishments have affected public policy. He founded the Coalition for Religious Freedom and the secretive Council for National Policy, an organization that brings the ultra-rich, evangelicals, and influential conservatives together to plan and pay for the country's conservative movement. He is responsible for convincing Jerry Falwell to start the Moral Majority, and he and his wife donated millions of dollars to Falwell's Liberty University. As a result, Falwell built the Tim and Beverly LaHaye Student Center and the Tim LaHaye School of Biblical Prophecy. LaHaye's fight against Darwin's theory of evolution led him to raise the money necessary to start The Institute for Creation Research. LaHaye has also changed America's electoral history by helping Ronald Reagan become governor of California in 1967 in a movement led by his organization, Californians for Biblical Morality. He has successfully established countless far-right candidates in different offices nationwide by motivating evangelical voters through his American Coalition for Traditional Values. LaHaye was also a member of the exclusive, religious conservative group that interrogated George W. Bush in 1999 when he announced his desire to be president and later gave Bush their official backing in the public domain. This Christian Right activist's vitae reveals him to be one of the inventors of the contemporary American Christian Right and one whose goal is to reverse the progress made by decades of social movements, especially feminism.

This goal to reverse social progress in the name of God is evident in Christian movements as diverse as the aforementioned backlash against feminism, attempts to

crush the multicultural programs of many American public school systems, and attacks on the United Nations as an international body intent on compromising American sovereignty. Not surprisingly, these overtly political issues and countless others are woven into the very fabric of the *Left Behind* series.

The Ideological Evolution of the End Times

Again, many readers of the *Left Behind* series would not call themselves “evangelical,” “born-again,” or even Christian. Most likely, they are also blissfully unaware of the political goals of Tim LaHaye; perhaps they are just looking for a “good read” or participating in a church-sponsored book group with a friend. LaHaye’s ability to attract such a wide audience, especially the portion deemed “crossover” (readers moving from secular to Christian markets and vice versa) results in large part from their accommodations to contemporary consumer desires and his skillful importing and recasting of postmodernism in some of its most popular forms. Under the author’s manipulations, archaic prophecy morphs into banal, formulaic entertainment that is so transparently identical to its secular origins that readers are able to forget the real message of the narrative. It is *Left Behind*’s disguise as entertainment that I would argue make the political portions of the texts so dangerous. According to Amy Johnson-Frykholm, author of the scholarly study, *Rapture Culture: Left Behind in Evangelical America*:

[. . .] the lightness with which readers accept the books [. . .]
paradoxically opens the door wider for the books’ ideological work.

Readers do not need to study the books with the precision required of the

Bible. They do not need to discern the meanings of individual words and images—a process that can lead to uncertainty and multiplicity by its very nature. Instead, they can read for fun. (133)

This “fun” activity translates into a subjectivity-forming activity, performing many categorizing functions for the reader—namely determining who is holy and who is not.

One of the techniques employed by LaHaye to make *Left Behind* more accessible and therefore, more “fun” is a very postmodern hybridizing of archaic text into banal, formulaic fiction. Previously incomprehensible prophecy is converted into a political-action-science-fiction-romance-horror narrative that is hard for many readers to put down. I call this hybridizing “postmodern” because not only is it a multiplying of the narratives in the novels, but the books are also somewhat decentered by this creative move. Readers can forget the spiritual agenda of the books as they enjoy jumping from genre to genre in a text that becomes a near-hypertext in its multiplicity. Thus, the novels can be categorized in numerous ways and because of this, reach a wider audience. They can be read by Christians and non-Christians, fans of traditional romance-type stories, and those who enjoy political intrigue; the *Left Behind* series offers something to all readers, regardless of their normal reading preferences. Hybridizing, along with several other accommodations to postmodernism yet to be discussed, entrenches the *Left Behind* series in an ideological realm that makes it hard to ignore its implications for popular culture’s intersections with Althusserian thought. Louis Althusser, the Marxist philosopher, was the first to map the concept of ideology.

As I have said before, many Christian ideas are historical constructs, and because this is so, the ideology must adapt to current history. This is the only way that

Christianity can guarantee the reproduction of its own means of production. Its labor power must be reproduced through maintaining its own membership and the conditions which make that membership possible. In other words, believers, Christianity's spiritual labor power, must be reproduced in order to guarantee the perpetuation of the ideology. Adapting to the needs of its adherents as it simultaneously creates them as subjects is one way an ideology can guarantee its own continuing relevance. There has been an evolutionary shift in the ideology of Christianity to fulfill the needs of Christian consumers, and this shift has resulted in a diversity of texts believers can purchase in order to mark themselves as members of this ideological group. The *Left Behind* series is such a text; it fulfills the needs of consumers while it subjects them without regard for whether or not they are marked members of the ideology who seek spiritual sustenance, entertainment, or the common combination of the two.

The *Left Behind* series is, without question, an ideological creation, and as such, depends on signs, such as the cross, to influence the subjectivity of a believer. Even though the series attempts to connect itself to the cross and the Christly love of the New Testament, it would be more representative of the actual story for signs of violence^{iv} and destruction to be associated with the narrative. Semiotics, the study of signs, is an important theoretical domain to impose on the *Left Behind* series, if for no other reason than to make explicit its contradictory aims of portraying the loving forgiveness of Christ through the destruction of non-believers by a wrathful Father-God.

According to Valentin Vološinov (9), the Marxist semiotician, ideology cannot exist without signs. He claims that the evolution of the word as sign is extraordinarily sensitive to the changing moods of the social atmosphere (20). Because ideology is

inseparable from words or language, it must also react somehow to social forces. It is my assertion that the ideology of Christianity will symbolically and materially adapt its signs to current trends in order to maintain its own relevance and reproduce the means of its own production. These evolving signs carry an inordinate amount of meaning for Christians. According to Vološinov, who occasionally uses Christian symbols to explicate his complicated theses, the existence of evolving signs even creates consciousness itself and connects all consciousnesses together in an “ideological chain” (11).

Certainly the notion of evolving ideology is inseparable from the notion of evolving ideological signs, and in the context of *Left Behind*, one must consider the evolutionary trends of the signs included in the narrative of the Apocalypse, the sign of Christ himself and the sign of the Christian Right woman, both of which are also undergoing changes that reflect the postmodern turn to multiplicity. The series also illuminates many political changes, as well. A large part of the series’s success is due to its particular moment in the social milieu; contemporary history is ready to snatch up any creative force that will motivate the participants of the influential and revolutionary force that is the Christian Right. It is no surprise that the popularity of the series coincides closely with the rise of the Bush administration and the country-wide realization that the Christian Right is no longer a behind-the-scenes force but a front-stage presence. *Left Behind* can definitely be said to connect the consciousnesses of readers in ways that will be discussed later in this chapter, but it also connects together pieces of the collective Christian consciousness in ways that support a certain politically charged agenda.

Many of these changes are illuminated in the *Left Behind* novels, which make accommodations to postmodernism in occasionally surprising ways, one of which is the portrayal of power in the end of days story. Just as the Christian Right is now conscious of its influence and able to enforce its will, the characters in the series are neither Christians who believe that the meek will inherit the earth, nor do they refuse to soil themselves with the tools of their enemy. In fact, the degree to which they enforce their dominance by using Satan's own weapons against him is noteworthy. Power is a fluid force in the novels, while simultaneously being rendered in the traditional form of graphic violence. Along with the aforementioned hybridizing of fictional genres, the series offers considerably more than a passing nod to the genres of the action novel and film, focusing particularly on popular portrayals of contemporary technology and weaponry to tell its ancient story. Power, then, is also to be found, in fact, in "might" and in "right." God's people do not win by some abstract and positive force that overtakes the negative force of the enemy, but very often by their superiority in making war.

Particularly hypnotic to many readers is the series's concentration on the glorious technology available to those who fight God's battles. Access to technology is a deciding factor in the distribution of power in the series; technological details are also a large part of the accommodations made to hybridize the ancient biblical texts into a more palatable form for readers^v. For example, according to Glenn Shuck, author of *Marks of the Beast*, the Tribulation Force utilizes e-mail, publishes websites, operates electronic bulletin boards, and webcasts sermons. Although those things in themselves are not futuristic or fantastic, what is truly unbelievable is that the followers of God conduct all of these activities in secret, successfully hiding most of them from the eyes and ears of the almost-

omniscient Antichrist. The Tribulation Force members also talk on untraceable cell phones, use unbelievably advanced laptops, and use bugging equipment that is foolproof and completely undetectable. Most of the protagonists know how to encrypt data, and the Tribulation Force has undercover technology operatives working within the Beast System who are routinely able to distract the global network's attention from the activities of those fighting Satan's forces (Shuck 109).

There is also great detail devoted to describing other technologies, like the modes of travel and weapons used by both the Tribulation Force and the Beast system. *The Authorized Left Behind Handbook*, which gives copious details and background on the series, has both a chapter on transportation and a weapons concordance. According to this very conscientiously compiled information, there are thirty different kinds of planes mentioned in the series. Some have names and are explicitly described, especially the multi-million dollar models that are reminiscent of private planes that might be seen on *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous*. The Tribulation Force never has problems gaining access to the best and most expensive equipment, and they are often guilty of conspicuous consumption.

Not to be confused with ascetic Christians, the Tribulation Force also eschews pacifism. The *Handbook's* weapons concordance is an impressive cataloguing of thirty-five different types of weapons used by characters in the series, detailed information regarding when they were used, where they were used, and who used them. The language of this section in the handbook is a little unsettling because it trivializes the use of violent force by connecting it to casual, "gangsta"-type language. Chloe, the principal female character, "picks" a Luger and an Uzi in Book Ten, and she "ditches" a different

Uzi in Book Eleven. Bombs are also described in explicit detail, often including lists of nicknames:

Two massive concussion bombs, 4.5 feet in diameter, 11 feet long, and 15,000 pounds each, are prepared for the attack on Petra. Most of their weight is made up of a gel consisting of polystyrene, ammonium nitrate, and powdered aluminum. These bombs are also called Big Blue 82s or daisy cutter bombs and are designed to detonate a few feet above the ground and create a fireball 6,000 feet in diameter, killing anything in a 2,000 acre area. (328)

Hybridizing the traditional apocalyptic narrative with violent action narratives and other fiction genres shows that LaHaye is accommodating his religious goals to what is perhaps the goal of his readers—to be entertained in a very specific way, regardless of the origin or message of the borrowed material. This morphing of Biblical text into a hybridized genre that includes almost every other contemporary popular genre is further evidence of the grounding of *Left Behind* in an ideological literary tradition. LaHaye is recreating a piece of Christianity—the Apocalypse—in order to maintain its relevance to an audience that has certain entertainment standards. In addition, he does so in a way that, at times, conveys his spiritual message subliminally rather than directly.

Left Behind: an Anti-Feminist Response to the Masculinity Crisis

LaHaye never confronts the many contradictions upon which his story is grounded, at least not within the series or in any of the supplementary material available about the series. His paradoxical mixture of entertainment and salvation, secular and

spiritual texts, and his attempted confluence of the wrathful and loving versions of God are echoed in other contradictions that are not so apparent. The ideological accommodation of genre hybridizing is the context in which gender accommodations are rendered, and it is these accommodations that offer the most insight into the subjectivity of the Christian Right women. Feminine portrayals, especially those in the first book of the series, are conservative, to be sure, and far from revolutionary. At the same time, however, the author does not shy away from characterizations of women that make allowances for postmodern changes in gender relations.

For the purposes of making my argument that the *Left Behind* series is making accommodations that reflect postmodern gender ideals while simultaneously reasserting the subordination of women, I am mainly concerned with the first volume, which bears the series's title, *Left Behind*^{vi}. Other books in the series will be mentioned but only to add to analysis of the first. In *Left Behind*, there are only two feminine paradigms, and they represent the pervasive feminine dichotomy of Madonna/Whore. Essentialism is "in" in all segments of society, and *Left Behind* adheres to the revitalization of this gender trend in its development of Chloe and Hattie, the primary female characters. There is, however, a subtext so subtle it is almost indiscernible, and it resonates with the postmodern complexity of the Christian Right woman's "powerful submission." *Left Behind* certainly can be read as an exhortation to men to take back their masculine right to power, the same exhortation one reads again and again in LaHaye's Christian self-help books. Most often, though, the cycle of events surrounding individual male salvation, and by extension, the salvation of the world as a masculine domain, is set in motion by a feminine catalyst. Women represent a powerful presence in the damnation and ensuing

salvation of both particular men and “mankind” at large. However, their power is contained within the strict hierarchy of a certain biblical theology, which dictates that it must eventually be surrendered to male authority or else the Christian status quo will be endangered by gender chaos.

From its beginning, the first novel of the series establishes itself as a conservative, sexist text. *Left Behind* opens on an airplane minutes after the Rapture. God has taken all believers to Heaven, and readers are introduced to three of the four principal characters in the aftermath of the disappearance of many of the plane’s passengers. Rayford, the married pilot of the plane, has been halfheartedly pursuing a relationship with Hattie, a beautiful, young, and willing flight attendant. The chaos of his flight and what he finds later on the ground changes his world view drastically, and he begins to seek spiritual understanding. Buck, a famous young journalist who will eventually try to explain the enigmatic occurrences to the public, is a passenger who, through Hattie, is later introduced to Rayford and his daughter, Chloe. After he accepts the Rapture of his wife, Irene, Rayford is a newly converted Christian and is trying to convince his skeptic daughter to accept his religious views of the events that are transforming the world. After joining her father in his faith, Chloe immediately proceeds to proselytize to Buck, presumably because they are falling in love.

Almost as a sideline to these personal complexities, a charismatic political leader from Romania, Nicolae Carpathia, seizes control of the world and begins to snuff out all opposition to his rule. Significantly, Carpathia uses the United Nations as his pawn in a way that refers to Christian Right arguments that the United Nations threatens the sovereignty of the United States. Buck begins to think it his responsibility to expose

Carpathia, while at the same time, Rayford and Chloe are recruited by a self-appointed church leader to become part of a select group of activist believers calling themselves the Tribulation Force, which is the title of the next book in this apocalyptic series.

To those who see Revelation as a warning of the painful end of the world, the *Left Behind* series is a modernization of this sacred admonition to repent. Although saving souls is the most obvious of LaHaye's goals for these books, the spiritual triumph of a saved soul for Christ becomes a political triumph for the Christian Right. Pervasively intertwined with his religious (and political) agenda, anti-feminism and the white, conservative masculinity crisis in America play a huge role in the first book of the *Left Behind* series. Different kinds of women are misrepresented, underrepresented, or completely missing from his portrait of contemporary America. In *Rapture Culture*, Frykholm asserts that gender is one of the main sites of negotiation between traditional apocalypticism and contemporary culture. For example, while Irene's character, Rayford's wife, follows the conservative rapture tradition by being raptured during the novel's beginning and being elevated to "mythological status as archetypal wife and mother" (31), her husband, Rayford, the Christians's leader in the series, is both feminized by his newfound religion (32) and allowed to maintain a stereotypical machismo: "He flaunts his wealth; he flies into ungodly rages; he struggles with sexual temptation" (32). The author of *Left Behind* is seeking to continue to revitalize the rapture narrative with postmodern ideas about gender in an attempt to recreate its relevancy as part of the Christian ideology. Even Frykholm admits that this gender negotiation does not interfere with the series's investment in "maintaining a patriarchal order of male leadership, heterosexuality, and female docility" (33). Perhaps postmodern

gender relations cannot help but be reflected in any contemporary text. Even so, this particular negotiation simply furthers the status quo—it allows a small space for resistance that is, in the end, governed by the masculine powers-that-be. Unfortunately, the existence of a resistant space provides a reference for masculine arguments against the need for power redistribution. Because masculine powers are, in reality, governing the feminine resistance against themselves, the result is that women characters, and by extension, women readers, are rendered a voiceless collective sculpture framed in the masculine worldview.

Audible women are not the only people missing from LaHaye's world in the first book of the series; minorities and all socioeconomic groups below standard middle class are absent, and homosexuals only come in later in the series as comically evil figures. Why does LaHaye choose to portray America in such an inaccurate way? He is, quite successfully, meeting the needs of his audience by reacting to a particular rhetorical situation that can be explained through the philosophical notions of *chronos* and *kairos*.

Chronos is the Greek concept of linear, measurable time from which the English language acquires the word "chronology." The chronological evolution of feminism in combination with the chronology of the American masculinity crisis has created a social sinkhole LaHaye hopes to fill with his personal vision of the world. This *chronos* creates a particular *kairos* to which LaHaye is adeptly responding. *Kairos* is an untranslatable Greek concept with as many viable definitions as there are rhetoricians to write about it. For simplicity's sake, I choose the discussion of *kairos* offered in Amélie Benedikt's "On Doing the Right Thing at the Right Time," which frames the idea in the following quote from her essay:

Concern for *kairos* begins with an effort to recognize opportunity. [. . .]

The decision concerning the right moment signifies understanding of *this* moment as distinct from others, concerning this moment as the culmination of a series of events. A concern for *kairos* signals an interest in being “on time” chronologically speaking, which leads to being “on time” ethically speaking. (227)

She goes on to say that “Although people say that things happen at the right or wrong time, what they mean, in fact, is that things happen at a right or wrong *kairos*” (228).

It is important to point out that LaHaye is responding to a particular *kairos* that includes much more than feminism and the masculinity crisis. Remember, this book is an interpretation of Revelation that was written just a few years before September 11th, which many Premillenarians believe was a pre-Apocalyptic event. Thus, not only does LaHaye have the advantage of the old rumblings of an implicit climate of fear due to the masculinity crisis; he is also working within a very explicit climate of End Times fear due to the increase in natural disasters so widely publicized by a tragedy-hungry media, global health crises like the AIDS epidemic and China’s SARS outbreak, and more importantly for his purposes, the changing face of America since the inception of the War on Terrorism.

America’s explicit fear cannot help but influence perceptions of the “masculinity crisis” in a way that allows for opportunists like Tim LaHaye to assert an agenda that promises security through absolutism. By following the alleged commands of God through the fulfillment of patriarchal obligations to women, certain men can regain a sense of knowing what to do in their religion and in their relationships at a time when

everything else is fuzzy. Everything has become so dangerous in the current climate of fear that men, as family leaders, need to be even more actively decisive than before. If the world's current climate of violence is a sign of the End Times, then everything becomes more serious, more real somehow; the media-induced anxiety stirs a primitive instinct to protect the nest, even as it serves as a call for a triumphant celebration of the Second Coming of the Lord.

Even without taking into account the changes wrought in the American landscape since September 11th, the foundation of white male security has been destabilized. Although they are still the dominant group, white males are being forced to make room for autonomous others in their personal and public lives. Because these “others”—women, minorities, immigrants—are transforming the personal and political landscape, some men are becoming more steadfast in their belief that there is only one reality with one set of rules; according to this view, the “old way” is better, and traditional values should be upheld—or reinstated, as the case may be—no matter what the cost. In *Left Behind*, LaHaye artificially buttresses these men in their panic by satisfying their craving for the old black-and-white world of the fifties, re-establishing outmoded social patterns, so that it is easier for them to recognize the “reality” in the book, not because it is realistic, but because it is the world as they desire it. Thus, many of the minor characters in the novel are stock stereotypes who are easy to classify, and hence, control.

For example, there is only one black person in the entire book, Lucinda Williams, and she is a character who closely resembles the “tough-love-Black-Mother” stereotype. At one point in the novel, she roundly chastises Buck, one of the leading male characters, proselytizes to him, then hugs him before he leaves. Lucinda says to Buck, “. . . if I catch

you in my town again . . . I'm gonna whip your tail" (LB 79). It is noteworthy that Lucinda, a career journalist, speaks in such a noticeable dialect that her speech is written "eye-dialectally." Her speech is not categorically African American Vernacular English, but she and the token southerner are the only characters whose words are written in such a way as to suggest a correspondence between the visual reading and the spoken utterance. The southern woman is a cabdriver who witnesses to two of the main characters and uses expressions like "over yonder" (LB 234), "ain't got," and "'em" (LB 235) instead of "over there," "don't have," and "them." The stereotyping of these women is not overt, but it is there, especially because they are the only representatives of these two groups and the only characters who speak in anything other than standardized English. Because these stereotypes of "Black Mother" and "Southern Woman" are easily recognizable, they offer a secure hermeneutical orientation from which LaHaye's readers can safely judge and react to these women.

LaHaye also addresses work world insecurities that have created perhaps the deepest cracks in men's perceived masculinity. LaHaye chooses to fill these cracks by allowing his male readers to immerse themselves in a world where women are not a real threat to the professional aspect of male identity. As mentioned earlier, LaHaye is not creating a world for working class men, perhaps because they do not have as much potential power to be harvested for the sake of the Religious Right. Regardless, female professionals are underrepresented in the book; Lucinda Williams, the aforementioned journalist, is one of only two women in a professional position, and readers only hear about her in retrospect because she has ascended to Heaven with the rest of the saved. The other female professional is a financial editor who is mentioned only twice in an

incidental scene of a journalist's meeting; she has no bearing on the story whatsoever (*LB* 153). Newspaper offices are major settings, and all of the other journalists are men; most of the other male characters are doctors, pilots, and religious leaders. Furthermore, service persons are women by a large majority—secretaries, customer service, waitstaff. Even the one taxi driver is a woman.

It is not surprising, then, that the primary female characters are few and somewhat flat, as well. There are only two, and they represent the pervasive Madonna/Whore dichotomy of the female body. This is not an unforeseen response to the current American *kairos* because the masculinity crisis calls for a simplification of gender roles, and it is much easier for a man in crisis to know how to relate to women if there are only two types—the marrying type and the fornicating type. According to Michael Messner, one of America's most prominent gender sociologists, this kind of essentializing is an important strategy for many movements of the Christian Right. Take, for example, the reawakening of the antifeminist idea asserted by seemingly mainstream religious groups like the Promise Keepers that men and women are meant to fill separate roles in society because of biological differences (Messner 27). These allegedly biblical ideas about gender, identity, and position, in combination with a feigned ignorance of the sociological research advancing the idea that gender is a social construct, are not only evident in popular religion but in secular popular culture, as well. Essentialism is “in,” and *Left Behind* adheres to the revitalization of this gender trend in its development of Chloe and Hattie, the primary female characters.

Madonna/Whore: a Pervasive Gender Performance

Conservative Christianity's links to fundamentalism require that the Bible be read as the literal word of God. According to this logic, God is infallible, so His word does not need to be adapted to socio-historical conditions. Often, one can find this same logic extended to include many conservative ideas that are not necessarily addressed directly by biblical text. Ironically, many of these ideas are historical constructs themselves, such as the prevalent gender performance of Christian Right women, which certainly shows an evolution to accommodate postmodernism. In *Left Behind*, the most prevalent feminine gender performance is constructed around the Madonna/Whore dichotomy, which because of its pervasiveness in American thought, is a reductive influence on all gender performances, feminine and masculine alike. Judith Butler's assertions that gender performances are coerced and repeated historical constructs certainly applies in the case of these novels. The conservative performances of feminine, Madonna-like submission are coerced from women because the consequences of non-compliance are being branded with the title and performance that is the only other option, the Whore, and even possible damnation for refusing the instructions of God. The instructions themselves have a history of repeat performances by women who pass down their interpretations of submission to other women, and these women either accept them at face value or adapt them to their own needs, as we see in the trend toward powerful submission that has become a standard theme in current Christian Right texts, including *Left Behind*.

Chloe, the daughter of the main protagonist, is a young, innocent college student who performs the Madonna side of the binary, while Hattie, a flight attendant, performs

the Whore, specifically, Revelation's prostitutes, the Scarlet Whore of Babylon and Jezebel. Represented by Chloe and Hattie, these two female archetypes are engaged by the two primary male characters, Rayford and Buck, both of whom represent the prevalent stereotype of the rational male rescuer to different degrees.

Chloe and Irene: the Madonnas of Left Behind

Chloe is the main character with whom female readers of the Christian Right would identify or attempt to position as a role model. Chloe is saved from her intellectual skepticism by her father and by the end of the novel, has begun a chaste romance with Buck, the secondary male protagonist, an older crackerjack journalist. An examination of Chloe's relationships with two men—Rayford and Buck—reveals a patriarchal subordination of the Madonna feminine by the masculine, especially if the examination begins at Rayford's relationship with Chloe as an extension of her mother, Irene, who also performs a Madonna role. Irene is undesirable to her husband, Rayford, at the beginning of the novel expressly because of what he deems a fanatical "devotion to a divine suitor" (*LB* 2) that he hoped would "fade like Irene's Amway days, her Tupperware phase, and her aerobics spell" (*LB* 5). In flashbacks after her disappearance in the Rapture, Rayford considers his misplaced pride and condescension to his wife, admitting he thought himself her rational and intellectual superior (*LB* 5). He realizes that while he was dabbling in other women (*LB* 2-3) and looking for reasons to avoid church, Irene was always the dutiful Christian wife praying for his redemption (*LB* 125). Once Irene is proven right and taken to Heaven, Rayford elevates her to sainthood status, but he does not let go of his condescending caretaker role. He just transfers it to other

women, especially his daughter, Chloe, who is also portrayed as a misguided innocent like her mother. This portrayal is a foreshadowing of what is to come regarding Chloe's characterization as a performer of the feminine Madonna role. Chloe, who at first performs a feminine gender that is entirely different from her mother's, rapidly revises her interpretation of womanhood until it is almost identical to that of her mother; she evolves from an independent and critically-thinking Stanford student into a submissive wife and stay-at-home mom.

In the novel's beginning, Chloe is a student at Stanford University whom Rayford admits has overindulged in alcohol a time or two (*LB* 160), but this is her only sin, and she becomes his Irene/Madonna extension emotionally and intellectually. Whereas Rayford considered Irene irrational and overly confident in her faith, he believes after his own conversion that Chloe is too prideful in her skepticism of the same faith: "What had he done in his raising of Chloe that could make her so cautious, so careful, that she might look down her nose at what was so obvious to him" (*LB* 207). What was once so irrational to him has become the only "logical explanation" (*LB* 169), and now Chloe is the delusional woman, just as her mother was before her, albeit the delusions have changed. Although Rayford, with his new sense of Christian responsibility, now identifies with his late wife in his hope to convert a loved one, he continues in his refusal to recognize the autonomy of either woman; neither Irene nor Chloe can possess a reality that measures up to his own more correct version. Before his conversion, he wanted to "protect [Chloe] from herself" (*LB* 161), and after, his relationship differs only in that now his duty is spiritual: "He felt that if he said or did anything more, he would be responsible for her deciding against Christ once and for all" (*LB* 299). Instead he is

responsible for rescuing Chloe from the oblivion of the unsaved, enabling her to gently encourage Buck in a traditionally feminine way very unlike her father's unilateral insistence that Chloe decide to be a Christian.

Buck, who will be discussed in his "natural" role as a rational rescuer in connection with Hattie, flounders when he meets Chloe, and their initial interactions fit the popular narrative of love-at-first-sight films. Readers only get Buck's point of view because he is Rayford's narrative counterpart, and through his eyes, Chloe's attributes are her appearance and intelligence. Her looks get more airtime in the limited omniscient narration; her beauty is lauded four times during their first meeting, while her other positive characteristics are barely mentioned. From the outset, Buck views her in a paternal light, implicitly excused in the text by their age difference of ten years. He is "impressed at how smart and articulate and mature she *seemed* [emphasis added]" (*LB* 366) and condescends in their conversation by only answering the questions she directly asks, even though she elaborates in answering those he asks her.

Buck's fatherly posture is made even more clear as the scene progresses and his paternal thoughts are borne out in his behavior and words. For example, he wipes food from Chloe's face as though she were a child and later calls her a "college kid" (*LB* 372-3). Even his jokes are of the avuncular type, and he pretends to be an old man when he asks her age (*LB* 374). When Chloe comes to dinner, he even thinks that she is "radiant, looking five years older in a classy evening dress" (*LB* 381), which is a parent's thought about a daughter rather than a man's romantic interest in a woman.

The author's interpretation of biblical gender roles plays a part in the explication of Buck's relationship with Chloe. LaHaye establishes a traditional foundation for this

love story, making sure that the story's rhetoric shows that regardless of Chloe's Stanford education, her gender determines the level of her autonomy in all of her relationships with men. Men are the unquestionable leaders in every forum of the world as created by Tim LaHaye, and Buck is no exception. If he and Chloe are to be the lovers in *Left Behind's* love affair, then Chloe will have to perform as a subordinate Madonna, just as her mother was. This subordination is not without its complexities because even though Irene and Chloe, the two Madonnas, are subordinate, they are the holders of the only information that, according to the novel's world view, can save the men who dominate them. Irene is only posthumously successful with Rayford, who in turn, convinces their daughter, Chloe; she then becomes responsible for saving Buck in a feminine way before they can truly become a couple.

According to Frykholm, this pattern of spiritually powerful women is not a deviation from traditional rapture fiction. Frykholm's analysis expands the idea of Irene as the ideal Madonna and Chloe as her extension by connecting these two women to the archetypal female found in most rapture fiction:

This ideal woman is embodied in the raptured female who is crucial to structuring the narrative. She is also simultaneously disembodied as a figure who appears only to quickly disappear. In this way, she becomes intensely symbolic—far more powerful as a symbol of faith than she was as a living believer. (31)

Frykholm goes on to say that this tradition codes the dichotomy of male/female with another layer of world/church. An extension of the notion that women are emotional while men are rational, this idea suggests that women, who are naturally more pious than

men, are responsible for bringing the men in their lives into the church. The men will resist, undoubtedly because the leap of faith required runs contrary to their worldly concerns (32).

Frykholm also notes that this is where the *Left Behind* series deviates and enters the realm of postmodern gender mixing. Rayford, although he is the series patriarch, identifies himself with the home in his wife's absence and takes on the motherly role with his daughter; this connection to Irene's hearth helps him on his journey toward Christianity. Chloe, too, who is not represented as the ideal feminine in her introduction, becomes more and more archetypal after she is converted, eventually becoming Buck's submissive wife later in the series (32-3). What Frykholm's analysis doesn't explicitly state is that it is salvation that feminizes both of these characters, and this, too, complicates the power differential between men and women. If salvation is a sought-after condition in the novels that also feminizes characters, then femininity itself is assigned the highest power while simultaneously being degraded in the relationships between characters who take on a more feminine identity. Irene and Chloe are powerful figures whose autonomous and highly spiritual subjectivities are ultimately sacrificed on the altar of a worldly patriarchy. Why women cannot be leaders, even though they are leading, is one of the mysteries of the novel, and indeed, one of the mysteries of this absolutist, gendered thinking.

Hattie: The Scarlet Whore

Irene and Chloe are the feminine salvationists in the series's first novel, but the traditional masculine savior is represented by both Buck and Rayford. It is not necessary

for a woman to be a love interest in order for Buck to take care of her; even if the relationship is a casual one, Buck still feel a responsibility to the “weaker sex.” Hattie, the clingy flight attendant who represents the Whore side of the binary that includes Chloe as Madonna, is introduced during the mysterious flight that opens the novel. She is propped up by Buck after he establishes himself as her rational superior by successfully manipulating her. When she tries to prevent him from connecting his laptop to the in flight phone, he condescends to her, calling her, “beautiful Hattie” (*LB* 32) and plays on her emotions by confronting her with her own fear concerning the disappearance of so many of her passengers; he even promises to try to contact her family members (*LB* 33). His condescending behavior seems like kindness to Hattie, and they bind her to him somehow. Just as she will do later with her boss, Rayford, Hattie attempts to maintain a personal connection with Buck after the crisis: “Would you mind calling me again sometime? You seem like a nice person, and I appreciate what you did for me. It would be nice to hear from you again” (*LB* 94). When she does not hear from Buck, she calls him for support, eliciting condescending thoughts from him: “Maybe Hattie showed more depth and sense when she wasn’t under stress. He hoped so” (*LB* 149).

Hattie only continues to disappoint him, though, when she refuses to take his advice about seeing Nicolae Carpathia, the world leader who takes charge of the United Nations and is the novel’s anti-Christ character. Buck later introduces Hattie to Carpathia at her behest, but when Carpathia requests a date with her, Buck becomes paternally protective to the woman he earlier considered a nuisance, advising her to turn Carpathia down. He even lectures her:

[. . .] you don't strike me as that kind of girl. [. . .] you don't seem like the type who would allow herself to be taken advantage of by a stranger [. . .] well, *are* you that kind of person? By not passing along the invitation, was I protecting you from something you would enjoy? (*LB* 437-8)

Buck's questions are rhetorical and meant to shame Hattie. Buck has already judged Hattie, but his judgment is a confusing one. If Hattie could *allow* someone to "take advantage of her," then how could she be a victim in need of protection? By not allowing Hattie to make her own decisions, Buck is attempting to protect her from herself rather than from another person, and it is this instinct that reveals his self-imposed fathering role. As a man, he knows what is best for this woman, although she is practically a stranger to him.

Buck's reaction to the potential relationship between Carpathia and Hattie firmly entrenches her character in the miasma of the prostitutes in Revelation. It is not clear in *Left Behind*, the first book of this series, whether or not Hattie is meant to represent the Scarlet Whore of Babylon or Jezebel, but she is linked to lust and prostitution. Buck even uses the word "pimp" in reference to himself when he is asked to set her up with Carpathia (*LB* 417).

Hattie's relationship with Rayford also links her to the Madonna/Whore dichotomy because she seduces him to impure thoughts of an adulterous affair with her. Their relationship is never physically consummated, but Rayford does feel paternally for her and acts as her caretaker in a very traditional sense. One has to wonder if this is not adultery of the emotional type. After all, he fathers Hattie the same way he does his own wife and daughter. Or, is it his responsibility as a man to father and protect all women in

the harem of femininity? Hattie as whore is a representation of a particular brand of femininity, and this becomes apparent during and after the crisis on the airplane on which she is an attendant and Rayford a pilot. She is described using words meant to create her as an irrational, helpless, and potentially dangerous woman needing constant direction and encouragement. She whines, squeals, whimpers, and screams (*LB* 16-8), and her body language betrays her hysteria, as well. She grabs Rayford's arms with her "talons," shudders, buries her head in his chest, weeps and loses control of her body, falls to her knees, and stares vacantly at him as he gives her instructions (*LB* 16-9). Even after the plane lands, she still "quiver[s]" (*LB* 54) and clings to Rayford, insisting he call her when he gets home. Hattie in no way rises to the challenge of handling herself in this crisis, and Rayford acts as her protector and guide, comforting her and eventually holding a helicopter so she can ride in his lap away from the airport (*LB* 51).

His responsibility to Hattie does not end when he knows she is safely home, either. She continues to cling, and he continues to accept the role of her caretaker when she repeatedly calls him at home; eventually, she becomes his intellectual and spiritual charge just as his daughter does. When Hattie disagrees with him, he, like Buck, tends to condescend harshly, explaining that "he had never found Hattie guilty of brilliance" and wonders whether he should "waste his energy arguing with someone who clearly did not have a clue" (*LB* 267). Later, after his own conversion, he decides it is his responsibility to convert her, too, perhaps to rectify the fact that his previous feelings for her were based on her being an object, a mere "physical diversion" (*LB* 328). He is still considering her in terms of his own selfish desires, though. The difference is that now his desires are removed from the physical: "His real motive, even for talking to Hattie, was to

communicate to Chloe” (*LB* 288). Rayford’s relationship with Hattie, before and after his conversion, is aligned somewhat with his relationship to his wife, Irene, and daughter, Chloe, even though Hattie is meant to fill the Whore side of the binary, while Irene and Chloe are meant to represent Madonnas. To Rayford, the three women are irrational “others” for whom true autonomy would be dangerous; Irene, Chloe, and Hattie all need his assistance at some point to establish valid realities for themselves and escape from what he deems illusory existences.

Christian Right Subjectivity Construction and the *Left Behind* Series

In her interviews with *Left Behind* readers, Frykholm is surprised that the gender issues that are such a large part of the series to her are largely ignored by readers, who view the characters through the lens of personality rather than gender, using adjectives like “strong” to describe characters of both genders. Furthermore, readers, regardless of their own gender, identify with both male and female characters in the series, depending on characteristics like “courage.” Over and over again, Frykholm struggles to design interview questions that will reveal the underlying significance of gender in the minds of her readers, and she is always disappointed by the responses. Many of her subjects are bewildered and deny that gender is an issue at all (90-4). This is not surprising, given the cultural milieu of conservative Christianity, which resolutely refutes the need for the Equal Rights Amendment or Affirmative Action, pointing instead to specific instances of the American Dream and to the existence of rare public figures like Condoleeza Rice. However, Frykholm notes one exception—Hattie, the Whore—who is often considered too repulsive as a feminine character to escape a gendered condemnation and remarks of

embodied disgust: “she is making me ill” (95). Most interestingly, Hattie elicits this reaction from female readers, who are, according to Frykholm, experiencing a “reverse identification [. . .], a desire to articulate their alignment with orthodoxy and their rejection of her alternative” (95). Why would they want to be the Whore in a world that glorifies Madonnas like Chloe?

By categorizing Chloe and Hattie this way from the beginning of the series, LaHaye creates a comforting construction of reality for all of his white male readers who feel displaced. One can see that he writes primarily for this audience because they are the models for the protagonists through whom the story is told, and they are the holders of power—financial, intellectual, even religious—in the first novel. Understandably, he wants to make it easy for these readers to feel good in his world, so they must feel good about his characters. Not only are the novel’s male characters in charge of their universe, but they even dictate the way the female characters are seen by the readers. Both Chloe and Hattie lack narrative voice, and the third person limited omniscient narrator only delves into the minds of Rayford and Buck. Thus, readers have no choice but to assume that Chloe and Hattie *are* the simple archetypes they appear to be to these two men, who are, incidentally, afforded a great deal of emotional and mental complexity. For example, Rayford is represented as a philanderous lecher in the story’s beginning, but he is actually a responsible and self-actualized leader and caretaker. Hattie, guilty of the same crimes as Rayford, though unmarried, childless, young, impressionable, et cetera, is not shown to have emotional complexity. She is just a whore, period.

The perpetuation of absolutist gender roles is a major supporting pier of the Christian Right’s platform and part of the absolutist political agenda affecting America

today under the guise of “family values.” The male obligation to be leader and the female duty of subordination is morally correct for no other reason than its intrinsic spiritual “rightness,” which for many, creates a system in which to argue is to be wrong, and even worse, sinful. For those Christians who believe in a LaHaye-type of gender hierarchy, absolutist roles for men and women become givens equipped with their own biblical reactions to attack—“for the Bible tells me so.” Many men and women reduce themselves to fit in this gender hierarchy because they believe it is right.

LaHaye believes it is right. Absolutist gender roles are inseparable from what he defines as “Christian.” Author of more than thirty non-fiction Christian books, many of which are best-sellers pushing the viewpoint of traditional gender, he is such a publishing phenomenon that one can only believe him sincere in his efforts to help others. However, the effects he must have on subjectivity construction, for both women and men, cannot be primarily positive given the tenets of the novels in combination with the postmodern climate in which they are occurring. On one hand, most men cannot possibly live up to the essentialist, yet contradictory, expectations found in conservative Christian texts like *Left Behind*, and it is more likely that the unreachable bar actually inflicts personal harm on these men who feel forever less-than, like Mike and Susan Faludi’s other Promise Keeper subjects from Chapter One. This kind of masculinity is the gender flipside of the Madonna coin, for just as no woman can be everything that is good, no man can accomplish an identity so balanced that he lives through both sides of every male dichotomy. Just as unrealistic, and even more stifling than the expectations imposed on men in the *Left Behind* paradigm, is the Madonna mold forced on women, and it is the formation of their subjectivity within this frame that perpetuates the most invasive

personal harm. Together, these personal harms committed in the name of salvation against individual female readers perpetrate harms against the wider collective population of women. This injustice, in turn, helps create an environment that condones other collective harms committed under the banners of ideas like “freedom,” “democracy,” and most ironically of all, “Christian love.”

Because *Left Behind* has a spiritual and political message, it creates a world that is far from objective; the worldview it offers is tailor-made, purpose-driven, and unabashedly biased. Frykholm explains that the genre of apocalyptic fiction does important religious work for all end-times prophecy that must be disseminated in useful forms in order to survive in popular Christian culture. By providing a narrative that arranges the unrelated signs of the end of the world into a story, *Left Behind* gives seemingly transparent meaning to indecipherable biblical text, and because most readers already have some degree of belief in the fiery apocalypse prophesied in the Bible, their view of the world is changed. Here are two reports Frykholm provides:

“One reader describes turning on the television after a long session of reading and expecting to see news about the Antichrist” (134).

Yet another reader, Cindy, proves that the book *creates* news of an Antichrist: “Whenever I see things on TV, I’m like, ‘Setting it up.’[. . .] ‘Setting it up for the end times’” (118).

Frykholm explains that Cindy and other readers, after reading the books, are able to “read the signs” of everyday international occurrences presented by the media and fit them into the prophetic codes and narratives (119). Not surprisingly, this decoding/recoding activity helps to assuage fears about the postmodern condition: globalization becomes

evidence of the “One World Government” (120), the violence in Israel and Palestine becomes necessary bloodshed in order to rebuild the holy temple, and privacy issues prove the readying of the world for the Antichrist’s “marking” of his followers.

Absorbing these texts gives readers a “framework through which to read the world, and perhaps more importantly, *to understand their own place in the cosmic scheme*” (111, emphasis added).

It is this “place” in the master plan that reveals LaHaye and his counterparts to be advocates of the archaically outdated and socially unjust ideas that make *Left Behind* troubling reading for many, including those who enjoy studying it. This series promotes a hierarchy similar to the classical Great Chain of Being minus the monarchical structures at the top of earthly humanity. According to this structure, God practices a kind of Trickle Down Economics of Holy Authority, seeping through white, privileged, Christian men to their charges and Christian men of other classes and colors to their women and children. The relationships between the different levels of the hierarchy pose problems for everyone included, regardless of the level they occupy, but women, especially, find themselves in a confusing place. When this archaic Great Chain is meshed with their postmodern realities, women are left in contradictory subjective terrain that must be negotiated.

This is not to say that women readers of the *Left Behind* series have no agency in the subjective work done by the books; quite the contrary. Their negotiations, at least while they are entrenched in the narrative, may very well result in a more creative mix of consciousness than the gender negotiations of male readers because the series’s masculine representations are less contradictory. Women readers are, after all, given

incoherent scraps—postmodern gender, biblical gender, etc.—from which to construct their subjectivities. Recognizing the difficulty of these negotiations may make it easier to sympathetically theorize the Christian Right woman. Although it is certainly more difficult to find merit in the agency of those with whom we disagree, it is still a worthy enterprise: “If we affirm the agency of evangelical believers, we gain the advantage of creating a space for increased understanding and dialogue [. . . and] we come to better understand ourselves, and we have hope that, as in every encounter, each one who encounters [the other] is changed” (Frykholm 187). One way we can analyze the agency of women readers of these novels is by looking at the ways they actively create and establish themselves as part of a community.

Women Readers of *Left Behind*: Negotiating Conflicts

An important theme of Frykholm’s *Rapture Culture* is that reading the *Left Behind* series is not an act done in isolation, but as part of a community. Often, reading the novels accomplishes identity formation through identification with a certain group of people: “Readers read to connect themselves to other readers, to distinguish themselves from other readers, and to read themselves into a community. Through reading, they both form social bonds and challenge them” (64). Although Frykholm interviews women and men, there are three women in particular whose reading performs a function of subjectivity construction through their communities and relationships: Sarah, Laura, and Rachel. All three are examples of readers who use the books as self-defining material, especially when they cause a conflict that demands some sort of action, usually intense reflection, before a resolution can be reached.

Sarah, who travels to her hometown most weekends to go to church, has never found a church home that is as fulfilling as the one in which she grew up, and this is partly because of the influential relationship she has with the church's pastor, Bill. Bill is an outspoken detractor of the *Left Behind* novels because of doctrinal differences, and Sarah is a lover of the books who participates in a huge reading community. Negotiating her way through her spiritual advisor's disagreement with her choice to participate in the series's culture has been a challenge, but it has caused her to adopt a more loving and inclusive view of those outside the circle of whom her hometown church would consider saved (48-50).

Laura, a woman who converted from Evangelicalism to Catholicism, is in a similar position because her husband, Mark, whom she respects and knows to be a devout Catholic believer, does not believe in the rapture at all, and so cannot be a Christian according to the ideas advanced in the *Left Behind* series. Laura's loyalties are divided between Evangelicalism and Catholicism and complicated further by her belief in the rapture and her belief that her husband is a Christian. These conflicts come to the forefront when she and Mark openly disagree and must negotiate power and submission in a conversation about the books, which Mark despises. Contributing to her status as a bridge between religious worlds and people, the books heighten her identity as a woman divided. She even chooses to submit to Mark in conversation, although she sincerely believes he is wrong, and feels herself in a more powerful position as a true believer (50-53).

Rachel, too, is in conflict with an unbeliever for whom she feels a deep concern. Rachel is a new convert, and her mother, Margaret, openly calls herself a "heathen" (54).

Rachel's identity as a new Christian is partly formed through the books, and although she admits she would read another apocalyptic narrative to compare it with the *Left Behind* series, at the time of the interview, it is LaHaye's version of the End Times that prompts her to explain how realistic the books are to her: "I mean how else would it happen?" (54). The series's narrative has so convinced her that she cannot even imagine the details being ordered differently, and everything she says in her interview is designed to persuade her mother of their relevancy. When she speaks of her anger at characters in the novel who refuse to convert and she positions herself in opposition to them, she is, in fact, speaking of her mother and attempting to find an appropriate way to express her feelings and newfound authority without being domineering. What is most striking about Rachel's reaction to both her faith and the *Left Behind* books is her certainty that her worldview is the one her mother should accept because it is the only right one. This certainty about spiritual correctness unites not only three of the women discussed here, but Christian Right women as a whole.

The Blessed Assurance and Impossibility of Fixed Identity

A famous hymn from the nineteenth-century bespeaks the importance of certainty in matters of salvation:

Blessèd assurance, Jesus is mine!
O what a foretaste of glory divine!
Heir of salvation, purchase of God,
Born of His Spirit, washed in His blood.

Perfect submission, perfect delight,
Visions of rapture now burst on my sight;
Angels descending bring from above
Echoes of mercy, whispers of love.

Not only is it important to know without doubt what behaviors are required for the eternal reward described in the hymn, but it is important to be sure of one's immutable identity as a true believer. One must also be assured spiritual distance from others who are not. Although Christianity is rapidly adapting to contemporary life, the need for absolute assurances of self still guarantees that many will be left out of the "visions of rapture" described here.

The ideological evolution of Christianity requires accommodations for postmodernism, as well as reactionary confrontations with it, although admittedly the results are often one and the same. Regardless, one such confrontation is the evangelical insistence upon fixed identities, and this reactionary stance, although illusory, provides a certain sense of security in a postmodern world where security is all too elusive. According to the Evangelical point of view, everyone fits somewhere, especially if they are traditionally gendered and evangelically Christian, as defined by the given evangelical discourse under examination at the moment. A certainty of identity—a very specific combination of conservatism, Christianity, and femininity—is one of the primary goals of Christian Right women, at least according to the representation of them found in *Left Behind* and the other popular texts to be discussed in subsequent chapters. It is this desire for certainty that cannot be realized in a postmodern environment, which by definition, fractures the subject.

Christian Right women are attempting to unify increasingly disparate ideologies from different historical moments—ancient biblical, historical Christian, twenty-first century Christian and consumer, among others—into a seamless fabric that they can use to clothe themselves in an unquestionable logic. This attempted unification cannot help but confuse them in the manner that the ultimate Marxist critic, Fredric Jameson, describes when he connects the breakdown of the signification chain to true schizophrenia. Jameson’s description of the schizophrenic subject best illuminates the plight of Christian Right women because his account of the subject includes a historically layered approach that can take into account the temporal nature of their subjectivity construction in a postmodern environment.

Jameson explains that “personal identity is itself the effect of a certain temporal unification of past and future with the present” and “such active temporal unification is itself a function of language, or better still of the sentence, as it moves along its hermeneutic circle through time.” Therefore, “if we are unable to unify the past, present, and future of the sentence, then we are similarly unable to unify the past, present, and future of our own biographical experience or psychic life” (568). Christian Right women are faced with the conundrum of what aspects of historical and contemporary Christianity and postmodernism are truly useful in their subjective quest for a fixed identity and which are worthless. Even more problematic than the attempted historical unification is the Christian Right’s insistence that this patchworked confluence of ideologies is “natural” and coherent rather than constructed and temporally schizophrenic. Hence, the subjectivity construction of Christian Right women involves even more negotiations

between conflicting ideological discourses and their histories than other women living the contradictions of a postmodern feminine reality.

Dangerous Marks: the Limits of Christian Identity in the *Left Behind* Series

All of Frykholm's women subjects—Sarah, Rachel, and Laura—are being constructed by and are constructing themselves through the fundamentalist ideology of the books and their interactions with others in their *Left Behind* reading communities. They are simultaneously weakened through the fear and propaganda tactics in the series and empowered by the privileged position afforded them through the ideological narrative of exclusivity and salvation: "Rapture is rhetoric. It is used to persuade people of their need for faith and to persuade others of the superiority and rightness of that faith" (Frykholm 11). Furthermore, becoming a reader is an act that usually marks one as a member of an even more narrowly defined community than just evangelicalism, and often, this reductive positioning has severe subjective consequences that promote an "us versus them" mentality that is anything but constructive. This "us versus them" motif is more widely discussed in Shuck's work, who shares with Frykholm the opinion that traditional rapture narratives include a microcosm/macrocosm structure that positions the protagonists as a small group of believers fighting what is an impossible battle against the evil forces that envelope them (Frykholm 14).

Shuck analyzes the macrocosm/microcosm notion as a touchstone throughout his study of the networked culture found in the *Left Behind* series. His analysis includes a discussion of the traditional apocalyptic theme from which he derives his book's title—the literal markings of both Christians and Beast followers in the time of the Tribulation

(see Shuck's Chapter Five). Just as the essentialist turn in the series's portrayal of masculinity and femininity attempts to simplify gender relations, and the author promotes an oversimplifying of the international stage by mythologizing world events into their apocalyptic narrative, so, too, do these marks distill and simplify, however unrealistically. The marks, both of which are on the forehead, simplify the judgments that must be made by *Left Behind* Christians whose lives might be in danger were they to miscalculate someone else's identity. Either someone is trustworthy because she has the mark of God's hand, or she is untrustworthy because she has the Beast's mark (an unmarked person is deemed as untrustworthy as a person marked by the Beast because their undecided status renders them a security risk).

Evangelical readers, who very often define themselves by who they are not, as in the case of Frykholm's Hattie-hating subjects, are very concerned with identity boundaries and questions regarding the authenticity of other believers: "the quest for marks, then, represents a quixotic search for an assurance of one's identity as a believer, along with guarantees that others are who they profess to be" (144). Part of the postmodern condition, this searching for the "real" self and the "real" other is doomed to fail. This is especially true in the case of fundamentalist Evangelicals because the boundaries for the category of authentic Evangelical are so impermeable that they preclude the inclusion of anyone with a more complex subjectivity. Unfortunately, those who find themselves "outside" the boundaries of salvation are, according to this belief system, doomed for eternity. This very common assumption is reflected in the anxiety of readers, such as Laura's concern for her unraptureable husband, Mark, and Rachel's wish that her mother convert before it is "too late." What these readers consider to be their

real knowledge of the future is “knowledge” that can do catastrophic or constructive work on their subjectivity formation, depending on one’s point of view.

The consequences of being outside the boundaries drawn by evangelicalism are so tragically permanent that if one believes in this system, free will—Christianity’s powerful agency—is removed from the equation entirely; choosing Christ becomes a necessity rather than a choice when it “encounters the immovable force of a salvation drama written two thousand years ago” (186). Much of Shuck’s discussion of the macrocosm/microcosm apocalyptic theme returns to the idea that classification systems like the ones evangelicals use lead to an “us versus them” mentality that, while erasing ambiguity and doubt, also erase the middle ground in a world in which the different sides are networked (81) and no longer as distinct as fundamentalist activists like LaHaye would like his readers to think. Nevertheless, LaHaye, following conservative Christianity, promotes a fixed identity that actually parallels the Beast’s standards for his followers. Take, for example, this description by Shuck of the Beast Movement’s dependence on uncertainty:

Antichrist offers to replace the uncertainty characteristic of contemporary existence with assurances of security, in exchange for his citizens’ trust. Such trust, however, turns individuals against each other and produces even greater uncertainty. Antichrist builds a panoptic culture, feeding off of the anxiety and uncertainty of his subjects. [. . .] He needs mistrust to build his system, and individuals who eschew risk and eagerly embrace his promises find themselves trapped ever more tightly within his grasp. But

at least they receive the comfort of a fixed identity in an uncertain world.

(125)

The inability of the Beast to provide the certainty he promises should bring to mind the uncertainty of the masculinity crisis and the ensuing search for fixed gender identities, as well the conjunction of this phenomenon with the opportunistic rendering of gender relations in *Left Behind*. Furthermore, the search for fixed identities and their perpetuation as the only morally correct identities can be observed in the terrorism anxiety that breeds distrust among different groups of Americans and international groups of Christians and Muslims. In addition to these issues, which are currently important in evangelical circles, one must also consider the revolving inescapability of the self-perpetuating Patriot Act, which traps America and its citizens in a war without end against an indefinable and invisible enemy that is defined simply as dark, un-American, and not coincidentally, non-Christian.

Essentialism is a vitally necessary component of these dangerous systems that reductively distill identity. The ways that essentialism is promoted in the novel and in fundamentalist forms of evangelicalism links the evangelical movement to the End Times evil—the Beast’s rigidly fixed identities—it inverts to define itself. As Shuck says, “If prophecy believers insist upon certainty and fixed identities in a world often characterized by ambiguity, they may recreate the Beast they seek to avoid—not a Beast external to them, but one that emerges from within their own fears of the present and attempts to re-create a mythical past” (26).

Preparing for Sacrifice with Self-Help Books

The overwhelming success of *Left Behind* is due in large part to the ability of the text to be all things to all readers. Because it makes effective accommodations to the postmodern world, regardless of its origins in modern ideas, the series guarantees its own expected Christian audience and a crossover audience that consumes the books for other reasons, such as sheer entertainment value. The texts's adaptations to postmodernity make it clear that it is actively supporting a certain kind of hyper-conservative Christianity in its struggle to maintain relevancy, while simultaneously effecting small changes in that community's discourse. One way the text achieves this goal is through the representation of women in the novels. Although *Left Behind's* perpetuation of the Madonna/Whore paradigm renders its feminine representations far from revolutionary, the essentialism advocated by characterizations like Chloe and Hattie is tempered by a feminine agency and power that problematizes the strict gender performance required by the narrative's ideology.

A similar complication of conservative Christianity's strict gender performance can be seen in other Christian Right texts, as well, and often it is found in these texts's perpetuation of the Madonna/Whore paradigm. Although this bastion of gender tradition is an unlikely place in which to locate any sort of progressive subversion, the Madonna/Whore paradigm carries within itself a small space for resistance against its very own structures of power. This counterintuitive twist, which I call "powerful

submission,” can most easily be observed at work in the postmodern rhetoric of self-help books written for Christian women, which primarily perpetuate the submission component of the Madonna/Whore paradigm. In this chapter, I will examine five bestseller Christian Right self-help books written for women, all of which further both the Madonna/Whore paradigm and the notion of powerful submission: *The Power of a Praying Wife* by Stormie Omartian; *Every Young Woman’s Battle* by Shannon Ethridge and Stephen Arterburn; *The Act of Marriage* by Tim and Beverly LaHaye; *The Spirit-Controlled Woman* by Beverly LaHaye; and *Woman, Thou Art Loosed* by T.D. Jakes. These texts undoubtedly shape feminine Christian subjectivity, and especially so because women consume these particular books not out of an outward supposition that they are entertainment, but rather in a conscious effort to educate themselves or improve their lives in some way. Reader intention is a powerful indicator of a text’s subjective effects, and this group of texts provides powerful material women actively use to reshape themselves and their lives. Much of this reshaping is acted out in their gender performance, which constitutes the subject matter of a sizeable portion of the spiritual instruction found in Christian Right self-help books.

Part of the repeat gender performance of Christian Right women is historicized within certain absolutist interpretations of religious texts, and the rest is the result of their own particular history and socioeconomic conditioning. Biblical references to the subordinate woman abound, and many conservatively religious women look to the submission and martyrdom of Jesus Christ as a model for their behavior toward their husband and children. For some of the more conservative denominations, feminine servitude and passivity are the primary goals of any woman because it helps her to form

an identification with Christ. The scenario of a woman's earthly submission, then, serves a dual function. Christian Right women who model their own submission to their families, especially their husbands, after the submission of Christ to His Heavenly Father gain the benefits of family tranquility. In addition to a harmonious home, her submission to her family results in a closer relationship with Jesus due to her identification with him as a submissive martyr. Linda Kintz points out in *Between Jesus and the Market* that this is a problematic appropriation of a persona that Christian men need to be a masculine figure instead of a feminine role model:

For this version of submission also threatens to undercut the equation between men and the anthropomorphic image of the Creator. Here it is women whose image is closer to his. [. . .] Though women learn in this misogynistic structure to act in men's interests, it nevertheless is obvious that they also derive a great deal of power from this guaranteed identity [. . .] in many ways, these women have learned how to usurp the most important guarantee of meaning in this religious structure: the imitation of Christ. (53)

This particular aspect of Christian Right women's subjectivity contributes to the most postmodern of all of the contradictory twists of the Christian Right woman. Many Christian Right women claim the doctrine of submission leads both to freedom and to transformation. They believe, as the author of *God's Daughters*, R. Marie Griffith, puts it: "God rewards His obedient daughters by healing their sorrows and easing their pain" (179). Although the Christian Right woman is supposedly adhering to rigid gender codes established by God's instructions to humanity, these codes are superficial because she

also chooses a *powerful submission* by linking herself with the submissive martyrdom of Jesus Christ. This coupling leaves her mate in a position that is awkwardly weaker and, from this perspective, almost petulant in his insistence on having the dominant position. Because she chooses to be submissive in imitation of her savior and spiritual king, she is actually rejecting the terms of the power struggle altogether and “rising above” the potential conflicts involved in vying for power. In a sense, this decision reverses her relationship to her husband and provides her subjectivity with a way to function as her husband’s superior. In this scenario, “Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low [. . .]” (Isaiah 40:4).

Many categories are disrupted in this strategic psychological move of the Christian Right woman to reframe her submission—man, woman, masculine, feminine, power, submission, domination. If one bases their assumptions about gender and power on essentialized categories, then this strategy begins to deconstruct this already shaky system of understanding. Furthermore, there is definitely an implied wordplay in the oxymoronic idea of “powerful submission” that is an ingeniously ironic subversion of modern ideas to satisfy the contemporary Christian woman. If she wants to remain within the comfortable confines of conservative Christianity but still claim her agency, she can do so because she is not being forced to submit. The concept of a powerful submission swirls modern ideas of gender roles around in an attempt to dislocate the parameters of power and struggle in a marriage. Texts that utilize this strategy of powerful submission have a postmodern subtext that recreates the Christian reality through adaptive representations of Christ, woman, and man.

Bestselling Christian Right Self-Help Texts: A Focus on Feminine Submission

Marriage is the subject of countless titles in the self-help category of Christian publishing, and many of them espouse the necessity of feminine submission in marriage, furthering the unrealistic ideals of the Madonna paradigm. There are moderate Christian texts that posit a more egalitarian view of the marital relationship, but they are much rarer than the texts that try to assert the absolutist gender ideal of feminine submission within twenty-first century reality. All of the texts included in this chapter are or have recently been bestsellers, often on the secular and Christian lists, and all are examples of books suitable for reading in small fellowship groups, like Sunday School classes or weeknight prayer groups. For the sake of clarity in later discussion, I will provide brief overviews of each of the self-help books that will be used in the analysis throughout this chapter.

One very popular series, *The Power of a Praying [Parent, Wife, Husband, Woman, Teen.]*, by Stormie Omartian has been on the Christian bestseller lists since its inception in 1995. *The Power of a Praying Wife* broke an industry record with its twenty-seven week run at number one (Harvest House) and can easily be called one of the most influential Christian women's self-help books on the market. From the very beginning, *The Power of a Praying Wife* locates woman in reference to man. The absolute separation of the masculine and feminine gender and their disparate roles are upheld, and the linear chain of family command and standard hierarchy is never challenged; there are no attempts at a progressive re-reading of these tenets. The book's two theses are (1) A wife who prays for her husband in the right way reaps a harvest of benefits beyond her understanding; (2) No matter her personal circumstances, a woman's

place is one of submission to God through her husband. Broken up into chapters that detail the different areas of a man's life—"His Wife," "His Finances," "His Temptations," "His Integrity," "His Choices"—the book is meant to illuminate the man and guide the woman to better serve him through prayer with a specific agenda.

By continually representing woman as the derivative of man, or as Omartian would probably say, by recognizing the rightful station of man as head of the household, *The Power of a Praying Wife* attempts to provide a template for a coherent feminine subjectivity. Although it goes unrecognized, this text, like all of the others to be discussed here, actually sends contradictory messages about womanhood and creates an often impossible set of ideals that can only contribute to the temporal schizophrenia of the Christian Right woman's subjectivity. Although testimonials abound on this book's efficacy in the lives of Christian women, *The Power of a Praying Wife* is an excellent representative sample of the perpetuation of some of the most fundamentalist (and contradictory) ideas about femininity. These ideas are part of the destructive ideology that constructs the postmodern subjectivity of the Christian Right woman using modern frameworks.

One of the books in a bestselling series similar to Omartian's, *Every Young Woman's Battle: Guarding Your Mind, Heart, and Spirit in a Sex-Saturated World* by Shannon Ethridge and Stephen Arterburn^{vii}, is an example of a text that includes many of Omartian's ideas regarding the innumerable facets of a Christian woman's responsibility to submit to men, even before she is in a marriage relationship. The reader of this book is assumed to be an adolescent girl or her parents, the latter of whom are encouraged to pre-read the text or read along with their daughter in order to answer questions about some of

the frank sexual discussion in the text. Meant to help readers realize the goal of abstinence until marriage, this text also contains information for young women who have become sexually active and wish to recommit to abstinence, as well as advice on how to be an appropriate participant in the Christian dating scene. Often taboo subjects, such as pornography addiction and masturbation, are discussed from a very conservative Christian point of view.

Although the “foundational”^{viii} Christian self-help text, *The Act of Marriage: The Beauty of Sexual Love* (1976), by Tim and Beverly LaHaye is more of a classic Christian text than *Every Young Woman’s Battle*, it is more progressive because it encourages women to be more proactive about their sexual satisfaction. This sex manual provides detailed chapters on female and male physiology and practical and detailed instruction on solving particular sexual problems within the confines of marriage, from advice on impotency to how virgin women can avoid pain on their wedding nights. The sheer volume of information and matter-of-fact tone of the text are somewhat empowering to readers of both genders. The text’s charge that men are responsible for the success of both sexual and non-sexual communication with their partners is refreshing. Furthermore, the authors implicitly claim that a woman’s essential role as a caretaker, both sexual and otherwise, has the power to make or break her husband. They even link sexual caretaking to increased spiritual faith in men, telling a story of a “lukewarm Christian” (31) husband who became a more spiritual Christian after his wife received counseling and became more responsive in bed. However, regardless of how revolutionary all the frank talk about the orgasms of both women and men was and is, at least for a Christian Right text, the authors still choose to contain women within the role

of receiver, or “responder” (145) and men within the role of “aggressor, provider, and leader” (34). Women are even twice referred to as “the object of his love” (41, 44). The perpetuation of the Madonna paradigm is more muted in this particular text because, after all, it is difficult to reconcile healthy sexuality with the purity of the feminine ideal, but somehow the LaHaye team manages to do just that.

Although Beverly LaHaye is named as the sole author of *The Spirit Controlled Woman*, the book focuses on her husband’s adaptation of the theory of the four temperaments—sanguine, choleric, melancholic, and phlegmatic—borrowed from popular psychology. Regardless, this self-help book is a classic Christian Right text originally published in 1976 but still very popular with evangelical women. *The Spirit Controlled Woman* teaches women how their temperament/s and their mate’s temperament/s combine in their marriage and how they can use this knowledge to best achieve the peace and fulfillment of a spirit-controlled life. A postmodern accommodation to the affective turn in American culture during the 1960s, the LaHaye conception of temperaments is a fusion of current therapeutic pop-psychology culture with ideological Christianity and Biblical scripture. Presented as spiritual common sense with the know-how of scientific fact, this mix has attracted many consumers, men and women alike. It should not come as a surprise that for Beverly LaHaye, a woman’s submission is the most important indicator of a spirit-filled life; submission in different (and often puzzling) forms comprises much of the book’s instructive material outside of the discussion of the four temperaments^{ix}.

A Christian Right text very different in form from all of the above, the bestselling *Woman, Thou Art Loosed: Healing the Wounds of the Past*, still perpetuates the idea of

Madonna-like submission, even as it espouses femininity as a powerful force. T.D. Jakes's self-help text, which is a collection of very loosely organized, often conversational or pulpit-pounding lectures, has some repeating motifs regarding the effects of abuses committed against women and many comments on general self-esteem. Focusing on the abstract configuration of feminine victimhood, this book encourages women to claim their right to power as God has designed it to be theirs—through the metaphors of the body. Lacking any practical advice, Jakes's text is more of an emotional release for him and his readers rather than a manual on self-empowerment, but apparently this sort of guided release is necessary enough to make Jakes a bestselling author.

Essentialism: The Foundational Argument in Christian Right Self-Help Books

These Christian Right texts I have selected as illustrative of the Christian women's self-help genre depend heavily on essentialist arguments. Although this is to be expected to some degree, the imbedded rhetoric of absolute gender difference and biological determinism guarantees that any reader not consciously guarding against it gets sucked into the fallacious logic. Books that are not classified as fiction and that have as their audience readers who are seeking self-improvement may not invite readers to make decisions, conscious or unconscious, regarding the suspension of disbelief. Furthermore, in a popular environment suffused with essentialism, it is very unlikely that many readers question these kinds of stereotypical notions, even as "political correctness" is a superficial requirement for all. From within the logic of the conservative Christian's version of biological determinism, men's and women's roles are biblically and physically

naturalized, leaving little room for personal difference or choice, indeed often making these factors seem counterproductive or even sinful. In this case, the utilization of reason becomes blasphemous. The effects of this judgmental environment on subjectivity construction can result in an internalization of the punitive role, and if not, there are countless examples of societal punishment for deviation from the prescribed norms, especially within the confines of this conservative ideology. Christian Right self-help texts perpetuate biological determinism through numerous rhetorical formats, from the explicitly deterministic metaphor to the logically concrete list of absolute gender differences. Some authors even choose to assume that readers are already so intellectually committed to this doctrine that these rhetorical steps are skipped completely, and they rely instead on essentialized arguments with unspoken and often indecipherable premises.

T.D. Jakes's *Woman, Thou art Loosed* focuses on the popular opinion that God designed women to be receivers. Jakes even offers an electrical outlet metaphor to make his point:

In order to take advantage of the [electric] power, something must be plugged into the receptacle. The receptacle is the female and the plug is the male. Women were made like receptacles. They were made to be receivers. Men were made to be givers, physically, sexually, and emotionally, and by providing for others in every area, women were made to receive. (69)

Although Jakes's syntax is problematic here, the context shows that he is assigning the role of "giver" to man and "receiver" to woman, which contradicts his next idea—

women were created to be feminine assistants, which is a “giving” role. He insists that woman was made from and for man to be a “help meet”: “[. . .] She helps him meet and accomplish his task” (69) and continues on to compare a man to a power saw that has great potential but can cut nothing without being plugged into a power outlet (70). He claims that women as a potential power source are vulnerable because to be a provider of power means that they must be “open” (70) in comparison to with their male counterparts, who are “closed” (70). According to Jakes, God provided the covenant of marriage to protect women from being victims of men who want to take power without giving back: “You must be careful what you allow to plug into you and draw strength from you. The wrong plug may seek your help and drain your power” (70). At this point, the whole metaphor falls apart because in this scenario, the men are dependent upon what they receive from women in order to “power up” their internal resources, so women, are, in fact, the givers, and men the receivers.

Regardless of the efficacy or inefficacy of his metaphors, it is interesting that as Jakes seeks to empower women, he reinvents an old metaphor and imposes biological essentialism on both men and women, who are reduced in his metaphor to extensions of their sexual organs. He furthers this idea with a new metaphor in his “Womb-Man” chapter by insisting that women bear not only the world’s children, but all the world’s good: “If there’s going to be any virtue, any praise, any victory, any deliverance, it’s got to come through” (75) women with enormous pain and suffering he likens to childbirth (74). Jakes’s dependence on the metaphor of the female body continues throughout the book and becomes oppressive in its prevalence, although it is constantly linked to power: “Put the truth in your spirit and feed, nurture and allow it to grow. Quit telling yourself,

‘You’re too fat, too old, too late, or too ignorant.’ Quit feeding yourself that garbage. That will not nourish the baby. Too often we starve the embryo of faith that is growing within us” (81). Jakes is certainly not alone in his belief that women’s collective and powerful purpose is to mother the world.

Apparently the assumption that women are to be mothers of the world is a common theme for evangelicals because R. Marie Griffith, an Associate Professor of Religion at Princeton University, hears this rhetoric in connection with Women Aglow, one of the evangelical women’s groups she has studied. Women Aglow, the multi-national charismatic prayer organization that is the focus of Griffith’s research, asserts the following opinion regarding women’s power: “women hold the unsurpassable advantage of being chosen by God to beget new forms of existence, to give birth to the Kingdom of God by means of a spiritual labor that is at once the most humble yet also the most glorious labor imaginable” (199). Depending on one’s perspective, the intertwined power and imprisonment that is part of constructing feminine subjectivity through body and motherhood metaphors is either an emotional minefield or a rich opportunity for multi-layered self-actualization. It is yet another example of the complications of postmodern femininity, even within the texts of the Christian Right, which attempt to create a seamless coherence from the tangled web of women’s subjectivity construction.

Some authors attempt to portray the “commonsense simplicity” of gender by using a textbook approach in their dissemination of the doctrine of biological determinism. One of the rhetorical tools used by Ethridge and Arterburn in the beginning of *Every Young Woman’s Battle*—the bifurcated “Guys/Girls” chart—locates its discourse firmly within the essentialist tradition of Christian Right literature and

explicitly delineates the biological determinism readers have to accept in order to be able to understand (or suspend their need to understand) other theses of the book. This chart from page twenty-one summarizes some of the finer points of the biological determinism that has imprisoned women for centuries and is reproduced in *Every Young Woman's Battle* to indoctrinate yet another generation of young women:

Guys

- driven by their physical desires
- crave physical intimacy
- stimulated by what they see
- give love to get sex
- body can disconnect from mind, heart, and spirit

Girls

- driven by their emotional desires
- crave emotional intimacy
- stimulated by what they hear and feel
- give sex to get love
- body, heart, and mind intricately connected

Once this argument is established in such a simple and commonsense format, other fallacious reasoning can also be glossed over, such as the assumption that women should caretake even those men who reify them as sex objects.

Another assumption that further reifies the young women readers of this Christian Right text and subordinates them is the belief that all young girls have as their most cherished goal the prize of marriage. Education, career, and platonic relationships hold no sway in *Every Young Woman's Battle*, but there is a chapter called, "Becoming Mrs. Right."^x The authors claim to have asked six young Christian men what their "top ten" are in a potential wife, and their answers are followed by instructions from Ethridge and Arterburn about how to become the woman these young men seek. Included are statements such as, "She is nurturing and would make a good mother someday"; "She is supportive of what I want to do with my life and encourages me"; "She has her own dreams and goals that I can help her fulfill"; "She is adventurous and can enjoy at least some of my hobbies" (205-7). There is no explanation about the power differential expressed in the statements of the young men, and the problems of compulsory

motherhood, feminine “encouragement” versus masculine “help,” and the lack of reciprocation regarding personal interests are never addressed by the authors. It is not surprising that these young men have idealized notions about their future mates that include implicit requirements for feminine submission. It is disappointing, however, that the authors, who have written a guide for young women, neglect to actually guide them. Instead, they condone the domination of women by failing to explicitly recognize power as an issue and even implicitly advise their readers to give up power in the romantic relationship.

As progenitors of the contemporary Christian Right, the LaHaye team utilizes the technique of essentializing in much the same way as the other authors mentioned. In *The Act of Marriage*, there are no charts, but femininity and masculinity are completely dichotomized within the text. According to the authors, most little girls want to be housewives and mothers, while little boys want to be firemen, doctors, or jet pilots (50-1). Perhaps this career differentiation along power lines can be linked to the authors’s beliefs about sex drive, which the LaHayes claim is “sporadic” in women, yet “continual” (34) in men. Fortunately, the authors claim that female sex drive can be improved by romance; even women who seem practically-minded are hiding an intrinsic need for their husband to be “the image of prince charming on his white horse coming to wake up the beautiful princess with her first kiss of love” (55).

A Dialogue: Judith Butler “Talks” with Tim and Beverly LaHaye

There is no way out of the essentialist trap; the LaHaye team claims that even women who claim to feel differently are hiding a desire for masculine rescue behind a

façade of pragmatism. Judith Butler's theory of gender performance resonates more than ever in the discussion of Christian Right women's subjectivity construction when it confronts logic such as the LaHayes's. Their opinion of the ubiquity of female desire for masculine rescue deserves examination from the perspective of gender performance. According to their ideas, any differentiation from the naturalized feminine stereotype is identified as the gender performance, rather than the essentialized role itself. What is true for some or most, they assert, is true for everyone, regardless of who they are, and anyone who says they are "different" is pretending, or performing. Furthermore, it is up to the LaHayes (as representatives of the Christian Right) to decide what standards of gender are to be appropriately imposed on the world at large. Leaving little or no room for individual variation, the blanket biological determinism found in these examples, and the coherent representation of the performance of Christian Right women is so seamless that it seems popped from a plastic mold. The LaHayes's built-in disclaimer to explain away any gender difference as a lack of self-actualization is a revealing thought that highlights the constrictive nature of what must be a fragile position of coherence, even if it is the most dominant position.

How strong can the position of collective coherence be? If even the LaHaye team, unquestionable leaders in their arena, assert an argument as flimsy as the "women-who-say-they-don't-want-the-white-horse-are-pretending" opinion to discount apparent gender difference in favor of an invisible and collective "real" gender, then the whole house of gender coherence must be shaky indeed. Much of the Christian Right's focus on gender seems surreptitiously designed to shame or intimidate men and women into following the prescribed norms the Christian Right has established; fortunately, coercion

alone cannot create truth. In this particular case, the transparency of the forced collective performance actually supports Butler in her insistence that gender is not an outward sign of an inward truth:

If gender is instituted through acts which are internally discontinuous, then the *appearance of substance* is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief. If the ground of gender identity is the stylized repetition of acts through time, and not a seemingly seamless identity, then the possibilities of gender transformation are to be found in the arbitrary relation between such acts, in the possibility of a different sort of repeating, in the breaking or subversive repetition of that style. (415)

To accept this argument, one must first accept that one “does” one’s gender only periodically, rather than all of the time. This would mean that separate acts or performances make up an individual’s gender instead of that gender emanating from some hidden center. Gender revolution, then, is possible because not only is gender a construct, but there are intervals and relationships between the gendering moments in which an individual could choose to perform something differently. For example, a man who flexes his muscles while he helps a woman carry groceries is performing one gender that he can later adjust when he dons an apron to cook dinner for a friend. He can, through his own agency, perform whatever gender he wishes.

If faced with Butler’s promise, the LaHaye team might protest that she, too, resorts to their rhetorical magic. They might protest that whereas they claim an

omniscient knowledge of the internal subjectivities of all women by positing that women who *seem different* are in fact, just ignorant of their real desires, Butler makes the opposite, yet equal claim that she knows that the women who *seem the same* are the ignorant ones. However, Butler provides evidence in support of both pieces of her argument—an explanation of performers who are historically coherent and those who are not—that originates from within the argument itself, rather than from her own intrinsic knowledge of the internal subjectivity of others. Her argument is self-perpetuating, while the argument of the LaHaye team comes out of and concludes with their own experience and knowledge of all women. In other words, Butler’s argument depends only on itself to explain its own discontinuities. According to her theory, exceptions to the rule of gender performance only further reveal the existence of gender as a performance because these exceptions are the momentary revelation of the breaks in the performance’s continuity and have the potential to be sites of gender difference, or even transformation.

In a world where part of the acceptable gender performance of women is to make some of the choices regarding their personal power, the Christian Right woman is often discounted as a backward enigma, and it certainly appears that her subjectivity construction depends on elisions of logic, such as the aforementioned example from *The Act of Marriage*. In the case of the textual perpetuation of the Madonna paradigm, the requirement for feminine submission is one such elision, especially when the paradigm is clarified by breaking it down into the pieces of its representation in Christian Right texts. Essentialism is the main argument through which submission is asserted, and although this argument is flawed, it is effective because it uses a simple format to explain away many patterns and contradictions in gender relations.

Responsibility Without Authority

Part of the umbrella argument of biological determinism is the resulting injustices of unequal responsibility between men and women and an often stultifying set of requirements that doom most women to an imposed inadequacy unrecognized by the very system that creates it. Not surprisingly, this inequality is never adequately justified, and is yet another example of an elision of logic, and although this is often a topic of much discussion, most of the responsibility in a marriage is foisted upon the woman. Ironically, in Christian Right texts, this assignment of responsibility does not result in an increase in feminine authority, and side-by-side with voluminous lists of all of the things that fall under the purview of feminine responsibility are assertions of femininity's submission to masculinity.

The most voluminous lists of responsibilities can be found in Omartian's *The Power of a Praying Wife*, and some of these lists include prayer responsibilities. Women should pray for their husbands no matter what but release their husbands from the obligation of praying for their wives in return. Selfless prayer is apparently the goal for women, but not men. The author recognizes that wives need prayer, too, but advises them to seek prayer fellowship through relationships with other women, even claiming this is what is best for the marriage itself (21). *How* a wife prays is important, too, and she is responsible for making the necessary changes in herself in order to see results: "This whole requirement is especially hard when you feel your husband has sinned against you with unkindness, lack of respect, indifference, irresponsibility, infidelity, abandonment, cruelty, or abuse. But God considers the sins of unforgiveness, anger, hatred, self-pity, lovelessness, and revenge to be just as bad as any others" (27). Because

this list was perhaps declared irresponsible by her editor or publisher due to the potential implications for victims of domestic violence, Omartian includes a disclaimer of sorts as a mere parenthetical insertion a few pages later: “(In fact, if you are in any kind of physical or emotional danger, remove yourself immediately from the situation to a place of safety and get help. You can pray from there while your husband receives the counseling he needs)” (29).

There are also the wifely responsibilities that come with running the household for one’s husband, and these are apparently infinite and inescapable:

I don’t care how liberated you are, when you are married there will always be two areas that will ultimately be your responsibility: home and children. Even if you are the only one working and your husband stays home to keep the house and tend the kids, you will still be expected to see that the heart of your home is a peaceful sanctuary [. . .]. On top of this, you will also be expected to be sexually appealing, a good cook, a great mother, and physically, emotionally, and spiritually fit. It’s overwhelming to most women, but the good news is that you don’t have to do it all on your own. You can seek God’s help. (Omartian 37)

Omartian’s list exemplifies the aphorism about the endlessness of women’s work. A woman is to be everything at once; she embodies wife, mother, lover, sex object, housecleaner, breadwinner. All of the incompatibilities between these roles are disguised by their union under the umbrella of contemporary Christianity, which some claim unifies them, but in fact, only provides the veneer that covers their splintered subjectivities. As if these requirements do not impose enough pressure, the author even

resorts to a certain fear factor to impose on women the weightiness of their responsibilities, insinuating that husbands will only remain faithful to certain kinds of wives. Male self-control is only required if wives continually make themselves entertaining, attractive (52, 61), and always sexually available: “whether you feel like it or not isn’t the point”; she insinuates that there will always be other women available, willing, and able to do all of these things (62). Assigning blame in cases of marital infidelity is further complicated in the author’s scenario because not only should women expect unfaithfulness if they are tired or overweight, but they should realize that men cannot help it. Men are especially vulnerable to temptation because for them, sex is “pure need” (62) as opposed to the often unnecessary expression of physical affection it is for women.

The Spirit-Controlled Woman, like *The Power of a Praying Wife*, also includes instructions concerning the fulfillment of marital submission in the form of daily responsibilities to be accomplished. There is motherhood itself, the avoidance of which Beverly LaHaye dedicates a whole section, hypothesizing that what keeps women (and men) from achieving their “normal desire” (164) to “replenish the earth” (166) has nothing to do with the altruistic concerns many cite as their reasons for remaining childless. She claims that there is “often a current of selfishness flowing beneath the most acceptable of excuses” (166). This self-righteous indignation directed toward women who do not share her belief in the “biological imperative” to have children is mean-spirited and almost misogynistic in its reduction of acceptable womanhood to her ideal femininity, which is drawn from the Madonna paradigm.

Even given the importance Beverly LaHaye assigns to motherhood, she still asserts that a wife's primary responsibility is making her husband happy, claiming that this will bring happiness to both of them (171). She does not recognize any situation in which a husband's happiness might run counter to his wife's happiness; once again, derivative status is reinforced through the marriage relationship. Even if it means reforming one's personality, a woman should do it to please her husband (196), although she should also accept him just the way he is and not attempt to change him (210). After all, according to this logic, it was she who was created for him, and anything she does to detract from his pleasure in her detracts from her life's purpose.

Part of that pleasure, too, is in being the object of a husband's sexual desires, and although it is not delineated in the same amount of detail as Omartian uses, Beverly LaHaye claims that keeping the sexual interest of one's husband is a responsibility that overlaps the private sphere of the bedroom with the public sphere of socialization. A woman's behavior in both places determines whether or not her husband will seek physical gratification elsewhere, and the author of *A Spirit-Controlled Woman* states that this propensity for adultery is especially true of certain personality types, who need to conquer other women to satisfy their ego or who have a weak will that makes them easy targets for loose women (193). These masculine portrayals of certain personality types are spoken of in a tone that removes all responsibility from the men and place it squarely on the shoulders of their wives; these husbands may be weak-willed, but their wives's reaction to this flaw is what determines the course of their marriage.

Cultivating a Womanly Christian Appearance

Another interesting link between Beverly LaHaye's text and countless others, including O'Connell's, is its concentration on a woman's cultivation of her physical attributes, whatever they may be. Women are also advised of the advantages of utilizing the countless commodities available to improve one's appearance. This is linked to marital satisfaction and Godliness:

I feel very strongly that when a woman fully accepts herself as a creature that God has made, she will do her best to prune, trim, manicure, and even paint the object of God's love and care. It is a pity to see a Christian woman who has developed her inner beauty, but who has done nothing to the frame she must house it in [. . .]. With all the beauty care products available today, there is no need for a woman to let herself get [worn out looking][. . .] I'm sure [God] enjoys seeing a woman delight in taking care of His handiwork. God does want the hidden woman of the heart to be beautiful, but a little work on the outer woman helps the whole person. I believe it is God-honoring. (159-60)

At another point, LaHaye likens a woman to "the most beautiful flower in a man's garden" (216), reminding readers that "even roses need to be cultivated, pruned, and cared for" (216). There are no apologies for the objectification these statements impose on women, nor is there any recognition anywhere in the book that women may feel differently about the importance of their physical appearance or have time or financial constraints that keep them from being able to treat themselves like flowers.

In *The Act of Marriage*, the LaHaye team explicitly connects the feminine submission of even unmarried women to their maintenance of a certain kind of feminine appearance. Performatively and coherently gendering oneself is linked with feminine submission to both worldly masculinity and the Heavenly Father; women who become Christians become more coherently gendered—in appearance and personality—as a natural result. The LaHayes tell the story of Jeri: “when she first started attending services, she wore blue jeans and a white T-shirt. Outwardly she was somewhat coarse and independent. As she grew in her faith in the Lord, she began to dress up and fix her hair. Surprisingly she proved to be a very attractive young woman” (56). Jeri is a success story because her newfound faith and public gender performance attracts a man who both “treats [her] like a lady” (56) and marries her.

One explanation for this concentration on appearance is found in *God’s Daughters*. Griffith explains:

As outer and inner selves become identical, inner beauty is expected to be reflected on the outside, evidenced by increased energy and enthusiasm as well as more material signs [. . .] manifestations of external attractiveness—bright clothing, slimness, makeup, neatly combed hair, manicured nails [. . .] are emblems of transformation. (104)

Although Griffith’s explanation has a more self-affirming ring to it than anything offered by Beverly LaHaye or Stormie Omartian, it is still suspect that these women outwardly exhibit their inward transformations by imitating the same behavior Christian women are advised to incorporate into themselves in order to prevent their husbands from committing adultery.

The Depth of the Image in Christian Capitalism: Making it “Fit”

Perhaps the reconciliation of a sexualized appearance with feminine Christian submission can be explained through Christian ideology’s accommodation to American consumerism that results in the articulation of Christianity with the more dominant ideological engine of capitalism. Consumerism is so much the focus of American life that it logically follows that any activity or belief that incorporates the practice of consumption will be more successful than that which cannot. Christian consumerism provides an opportunity to unite the sacred and the profane in a heady mix that has created a formidable Christian market no longer overlooked in American business. On another corresponding level, there is the profane objectification of the body and the sexualized consumerism that is also integrated into the mix as soon as Christian women are pressured to take up the responsibility for self-objectification for the good of their faith and their marriages. Although it is surprising, these particular incorporations of contemporary life into the ancient ideology of Christianity are effective and necessary accommodations for the continued relevancy of the faith. Although aspects of contemporary life, such as the aforementioned consumer practices that mix the sacred and profane, are not in themselves postmodern, the contemporary practice of deconstructing dichotomies in order to redefine them and occasionally unite them—sacred/profane—is postmodern. The Christian Right woman, once she accepts contemporaneity in ways that contradict her faith (and these acceptances cannot be avoided) is postmodernizing herself and by extension, Christianity as a whole. The examples of self-help texts discussed in this chapter reveal important changes wrought upon contemporary Christianity through the perpetuation of certain ideas found in

Christian popculture. There is a temporally “Schizophrenic Christian Right woman” subject being recognized and confirmed in these books, which implicitly state that subjective incoherence is acceptable. This process of change is best explained by Althusser’s conception of ideology.

From an Althusserian perspective, because Christianity is an ideology, it is a creator of subjects. Christian Right women are largely influenced, as independent agents and subjects, by the ideological processes of subject creation imposed on Christians. These processes constantly address the subject and produce her from within itself, so she is “always-already” (132) subjected and without agency. Furthermore, the ideology of Christianity is subjected to the ideology of the ruling class, which in this case is the capitalism that simultaneously subjects the Christian Right woman. The consumption of certain products—not necessarily always products marketed as Christian commodities—is part of the way Christian Right women ‘act according to their ideas’ (126-7), or beliefs, and this consumer behavior is also part of their ritualized material practice of Christianity. For example, makeup is not a commodity marketed exclusively to Christians, but its consumption is cited in Christian Right texts as a way for parents of lesbian children to simultaneously Christianize and feminize their daughters in an attempt to cure them of their “gender confusion.” This type of ideological consumption locates and relocates Christian Right women as subjects within the ideology of both the church apparatus and the capitalist apparatus, and it is these actions as Christian consumers that often most visibly mark them as subjects of the Christian ideology.

Althusser would probably identify this spiritualized consumerism as the behavior that reveals the “duplicate mirror-structure of ideology” (135). These behaviors allow

Christian Right women to recognize themselves as subjected subjects, God as the subjecting subject, and other believers as subjects, as well. All of this mutual recognition reinforces the correctness of their beliefs and the conviction that they should, in fact, act according to these ideas. Many Christian ideas are historical constructs, and because this is so, the ideology must adapt to whatever history in which it finds itself. Only in this occurrence can it guarantee the reproduction of its own means of production, which for Christianity means that it must reproduce its labor power by maintaining its own membership and the conditions that make membership possible.

Reflecting (or directing, depending on the point of view) the adaptations of Christianity to its current circumstances, the Christian Right woman becomes an evolving sign of her belief system. As such, she is emblematic of the historical sensitivity Christianity has to adapt—even in a postmodern environment that, at first glance, might seem to render it irrelevant. The gender performance of cultivating a sexualized appearance easily falls under the category of marking, contributing to a sense of community that is further engendered by other consumptive Christian behaviors, too. The maintenance of a specific feminine Christian appearance does more than just naturalize the notions of a woman's responsibility to look a certain way; it becomes a requirement for the acceptance of a woman into the Christian Right community, as well as a measure of her spiritual depth. This counterintuitive contradiction — surface equals depth — discloses another way that the Christian ideology's incorporations of contemporaneity postmodernize the Christian Right woman. She is performing a gendered behavior that reveals the contradictory confluence of surface and depth, while simultaneously encouraging the postmodern turn to the pervasiveness of the image.

Ironically, fundamentalist beliefs focus in part on the unchanging rigidity of God's word and certain interpretations of it, making few allowances for competing views; certainly, to fundamentalists, the very idea that they are adapting to the secular environment they consider a conspiratorial victimizer would be an accusation of ingenuity and failure on their part. However, adaptation is indeed occurring on many levels of Christian consciousness, especially when one considers the self-help texts analyzed here. One important adaptation that accurately portrays both the flexibility of Christianity and its believers is the postmodern reformation of the doctrine of feminine submission.

The Christian Right Woman's Reframing of Submission

After reading Omartian's endless lists of household responsibilities, Beverly LaHaye's edicts regarding compulsory motherhood, and Ethridge's and Arterburn's prose lectures on adolescent girls dressing to "lift others up," it becomes apparent that successful submission and imitation of the Madonna paradigm are not for the faint-hearted and may be impossible for even the most dedicated and selfless of women. In an environment where many wives and mothers must work outside of the home, and still accomplish all of the other tasks required of their sex, Christianity has been forced to adapt to the conditions of the working woman and feminism itself. Christian Right self-help texts are far from feminist texts, but they have been influenced by an American cultural milieu that includes feminist thought. This does not mean that women are relieved of their proletariat responsibilities to support the status quo of their masculine counterparts, but rather, that they adopt a new responsibility—to make the necessary

subjective negotiations that will allow them to fulfill multiple Christian roles without feeling out of synch with contemporary society and culture. The result is a combination of ideologies—Christianity, feminism, consumerism—that do not necessarily complement one another without an extensive reworking of the definition of feminine submission into a powerful position. The only way this complicated system of self-subjecting is conceivable is through the Christ-like martyrdom of women and their ability to reframe their own domination in terms of superhuman strength and self-control: a wife’s submission deconstructs itself to affect her dominance over her husband. This deconstructed submission, however, does not lead to a total dominance, or even a dominance equal to that enforced by the masculine portion of this fundamentalist dichotomy. It is a dominance that still maintains the status quo, perhaps even contributing to patriarchy by maintaining its appearance as natural and allowing it to flourish unhindered within this particular societal sphere. Unfortunately, much of the power distilled from the Christian Right woman’s reframing of submission is internal and is often harvested for patriarchy itself.

For example, the “different but equal” essentialist argument pursues a vision of women as feminine sources of power that are considered counterpoints to the powers supposedly intrinsic in men. According to this point of view, women must learn to use their womanhood to their advantage, and refusing to do so is like a refusal to recognize and be thankful for gifts from God. Likening womanhood to the Parable of the Talents^{xi}, this doctrine often contributes to stereotyped classifications of women as dishonest and opportunistic. Much of the more contemporary advice to women is advocating an ultra-feminized demeanor—saccharin and overly supportive—in order to gain “the power to

influence—or, in less flattering terms, manipulate—one’s husband to one’s own ends” (Griffith 185). While this provides women with easily accessible ways to assert their submissive power, this kind of power is superficial and temporary, and in reality, further binds them within the strictures of a dichotomized, inferior, and performative gender identity.

Advice of this kind, however, harbors a distorted view of the idea of a Christly submission, which is constructed as powerful in the truly selfless giving that originates under favorable circumstances between both wife and husband. Even in this event, though, the success of the union is apparently dependent first and foremost on the willing submission of the wife as the martyred Christ figure and the subordinate. Readers find a similar structuring of the marriage relationship in more classic Christian self-help texts, like *The Spirit-Controlled Woman* and *The Act of Marriage*, although the message of the power of a Christly submission is more muted in favor of the glorification of the meek. Generally, the more contemporary notion of a powerful Christly submission was preceded by a simple assertion that submission does not mean subordinate. Unfortunately, in more classic texts, this oxymoronic assertion is never explained in any way other than as an oversimplified insistence and perpetual re-statement.

Beverly LaHaye’s discussion of submission is at its most complex when she adapts it to current gender roles by insisting that it does not equate with subordination, although this assertion is never satisfactorily explained. For example, in *The Spirit-Controlled Woman*, Beverly LaHaye classifies women as equal to men, while simultaneously explaining that women are derivative of men and were created for their satisfaction: “Woman is part of a man, not a lesser or greater part, but an equal. She is

God's provision to give man total fulfillment" (155). Her later clarifications do little but obfuscate the contradiction:

The woman who is truly Spirit-filled will want to be totally submissive to her husband. Contrary to what radical feminists advocate, submission does not mean that the wife who submits is a second-rate citizen. The wife is to submit to the "headship" of the husband, not the "lordship." Lordship is to coerce someone to follow your will, while headship is to be responsible for creating an environment of protection. (167)

Eventually, the edict to submit leads to its framing as a powerful position, although as a predecessor to *The Power of a Praying Wife*, *The Spirit-Controlled Woman* does not front this concept; rather, it is an addition that facilitates the explanation of submission as other than subordination. It is a woman's obedience to the commands of God that dictates her submission, not her husband's love or behavior (210). In a story of dirty socks, reminiscent of the manner in which her husband furthers the great Chain of Being in his *Left Behind* series, Beverly LaHaye encourages women to serve the Holy Father through the service of His earthly representative, man as embodied in her husband. In summary, the author tells of resentment toward her husband because he left his dirty socks on the floor every day, and she found herself equating the man with the dirty socks, rather than feeling love for him. After happening upon a scripture that equated wifely submission with womanly service to God Himself and heavenly rewards, LaHaye had a change of heart:

I wasn't just picking up dirty socks for my husband; I was serving the Lord Jesus by doing this, so I had to do it heartily *as unto Him* [emphasis

added]. The Lord was using dirty socks to teach me a lesson. [. . .]

Interestingly enough, after I confessed, I truly enjoyed serving the Lord and my husband. It was almost a time of devotion each day as I lovingly picked up those blessed dirty socks. (162-3)

Pretending that one's husband is Jesus in order to be able to serve him without resentment is an accomplished subjective feat that emphasizes a powerful mind control. Her personal narrative would be comical were it not profoundly disturbing. LaHaye's personal anecdote proves that her reality is in fact of her own making, and her earthly submission can be reconstructed to suit her in a more powerful, supernatural, and triumphant service to God that brings positive results in her daily life. This becomes especially true at the story's conclusion when her husband just "decided one day to be more careful and to pick up after himself" (163); as a *coup de grace*, LaHaye offers not only heavenly rewards for earthly servitude, but she insinuates that a wife's submission can silently solve all of the niggling little issues that can make intimate living so annoying. She also reinterprets menial tasks as sacred worship, and this particular subjective switch is also noted by Griffith, who notes that many members of Women Aglow, the subjects of her extensive research, considered wifely submission a strategic move meant to make husbands happier, and as a result, more tractable; one way this is accomplished is through the cheerful completion of "'sacred housework,' wherein surrendering to one's ordained tasks is seen as an act of worship that also leads to greater happiness in the home" (181).

Like so many other Christian Right texts written for women, *The Spirit-Controlled Woman* returns to what is best for the man, always perpetuating the Biblical

doctrine of Adam's rib—woman was created from and for man—even in cases in which a husband is not a Christian. In the section titled, "Love Your Husband to Christ," LaHaye reiterates the notion that women are often the powerful conduits through which God comes to their husbands, and she claims that it is through submissive love that men will be led to Christianity: "Some husbands become very demanding and somewhat unreasonable as the Holy Spirit convicts them. So it can be a time of suffering and trial for the family, especially the wife [. . .]. It is God's design that a wife submit to her husband, even if he is not a believer" (238). This section does not explicitly list its requirements as choices that a woman must make in this situation, but the subtext is of a powerful submission because the sections—"Understand Him;" "Please Him;" "Respect Him;" and "Examine Yourself"—are written from the point of view of gaining a Godly husband by creating an environment that fulfills all of his needs and guides him to satisfy his wife without her instruction: "And most of all, don't constantly remind your husband about God—instead, remind God about your husband" (239).

One of the final sections of *The Spirit-Controlled Woman*, "Examine Yourself," details the emotional need that men have for a submissive wife, claiming that men are more frustrated by wives who refuse to respect them through submission than by other *failures* of their masculinity, such as professional ones (240). According to LaHaye's logic, God commanded women to submit because their husbands have a dire need for their "respect and admiration" (240), which is elsewhere in the text called obedience. An interesting twist, this idea makes an implicit emotional plea to women for help in the maintenance of a husband's masculinity through a wifely submission that will mask the fact that he was hitherto a failure at eliciting unconditional submission. This feminine

responsibility arises from a masculine inability to cope with contemporary conditions that require gender negotiations around ideas like breadwinner and submission. Rather than allowing her husband to feel inadequate, which might motivate him to reflect critically on aspects of his own subjectivity, the Christian Right woman is encouraged to create a somewhat dishonest environment in which she chooses (pretends?) to be dominated. At this point, the contemporary doctrine of powerful submission becomes dangerous because whether or not the submission has been reframed, pretending to be submissive/obedient and practicing true submission/obedience are certainly positions of subordination that invite psychic damage.

Powerful Caretaking: the Infantilization of Men

One of the ways that the Christian Right successfully reframes the notion of feminine submission and further accommodates postmodernism is by infantilizing men. Creating a reality in which men are *in need* of their wives—wives who *choose* to submit to them—conveys emotional power to the women, who are responsible for taking care of these men as they submit to their authority. Not only are women responsible for the traditional caretaking of their husbands, but contemporary Christian Right texts imply that certain wifely behaviors protect their husbands from emasculation within the marriage, the emasculating trends of American society, and loose women on the prowl for impressionable men whose wives are not performing their gender appropriately. Furthermore, it is also often implied that men lack maturity and self-control, are generally undependable, and must be managed carefully. Paradoxically, women are urged to

depend on these same men for protection and spiritual guidance because men are bound by a holy mandate to be the family head.

Readers of *The Act of Marriage* are confronted with the paradox of “baby-men;” in this text, men are infantilized without being penalized in any way for their immaturity. Even though they “are just boys grown tall” (38), it is a woman’s responsibility to submit to *and* perpetuate that boyishness, rather than hold them to more adult standards. *The Power of a Praying Wife*, too, extensively infantilizes men, yet they escape being dominated. For example, an unintended major theme of the book is that women cannot depend on their husbands to be anything but childish tyrants: “My husband will not do something he doesn’t want to do. And if he ends up doing something he doesn’t want to do, his immediate family members will pay for it” (33). According to the author, wives should submit anyway, praying for their husbands instead of resisting male domination. Despite their inability to behave as adults, men are still the “head” (as opposed to the “heart”) of their households. Perhaps this supposed entitlement to headship stems from Omartian’s, and indeed, countless others’s, impression that husbands are warriors out in the world: “Our husbands are on the battlefield every day. There are dangers everywhere. Only God knows what traps the enemy has laid to bring accidents, diseases, evil, violence, and destruction into our lives. Few places are safe anymore, including your own home” (107). This kind of paranoia is rampant in numerous Christian Right arguments, but in this instance it is even more ridiculous because of its pairing with the men-are-babies logic. How can women simultaneously infantilize their husbands while imagining them as the only force preventing the family’s horrific demise?

Using infantilization as a method for counteracting masculine domination continues into the bedroom. A common theme in Christian Right self-help books is the essentialized notion that God intends for women to be the receivers of masculine largesse, especially in intercourse. In *Every Young Woman's Battle*, the section on masturbation culminates in the negative effects masturbating can have on a married woman's sex life: "Most husbands find pleasure and satisfaction in bringing their wives to orgasm. If you regularly find sexual release through masturbation, you may be robbing your future husband of this pleasure by feeling the need to 'help him'" (48). The potential of this approach for limiting a future wife's sexual pleasure is not even given the recognition of a mention in this instance because, apparently, a woman's limited satisfaction should not take precedence over her husband's perception of his own sexual ability and the connection of his sexual self-esteem with his satisfaction. So not only are the readers of this book encouraged in the chapter called "Pursuing Power" to see young men as the only appropriate initiators of a relationship (81-88), but they are also coached to see their future husbands as initiators of their sexual satisfaction. Feminine sexual agency is viewed negatively because the submissive wife should concentrate solely on her husband's satisfaction and merely hope that he is a sexually generous reciprocator who is capable of and desires achieving her satisfaction, as well. Abdicating her sexual agency is posited as the only effective Christian method available to a woman for ensuring a satisfying and long-term conjugal relationship within a marriage. According to a medical practitioner cited by the LaHaye team, women must accept that sexual satisfaction is inextricably linked with feminine submission. The authors quote a Dr. Marie Robinson^{xii} at length, who connects the ability to achieve orgasm to a woman's

mature ability to surrender (191-2). According to this logic, the path of sexual satisfaction for a wife begins with self-sacrifice: “Her own desires become unimportant, and “because she thinks more of his needs than of her own tiredness [. . .], Her reward will be his ready response to her mood, and together they can share the rapturous experience of married love” (47). The deciding factor is a wife’s willingness to give up her power in order to create the possibility that it will be returned to her in a different form by her husband. As an unnamed woman said to the LaHaye team, “A woman is the only creature who can conquer by surrendering” (192).

Even more troubling than sexual infantilization is the infantilization of men regarding their reactions to women’s amended appearances. Although in *The Spirit-Controlled Woman*, Beverly LaHaye stresses the importance of going to great lengths to make oneself sexually desirable, once that feat is accomplished, a woman is to blame for causing Christian men to commit the sin of lust. Apparently, there is some sort of invisible line that divides attractive from provocative, but she gives no guidance about exactly how one can tastefully sexualize themselves for the public eye without becoming the perpetrators of temptation. The following quote explains that should a woman cross the “lust line” in her mode of dress, she is just as responsible for a man’s lustful thoughts about her as he is:

I have seen lovely girls clothe and conduct themselves in such a manner that they turn fellows on and cause them to have problems with lust and evil thoughts [. . .] a Christian man has to overcome the temptation to lust after a woman, but I believe God holds the woman accountable for the manner in which she dresses and conducts herself. (141)

The onus of responsibility is, once again, laid firmly on the shoulders of the woman, who is to blame should her husband seek physical love elsewhere because his wife becomes unattractive to him; on the other hand, should she make the mistake of oversexualizing herself and attracting the attention of other men, then she is to blame for their sins, as well.

The subjectivities of young, unmarried Christian women are being constructed using the same methods because texts written specifically for them also preach the Madonna paradigm through the lens of submission's responsibilities, especially appearance. The authors of *Every Young Woman's Battle*, Shannon Ethridge and Stephen Arterburn, focus on appearances, too, although their focus is less on keeping a man faithful than preventing young women from committing the sin of tempting others to lust. They also most frequently combine flirting behaviors with sexualized dress as harmful to young men and even call flirting "cruel" (99). Certain ambiguous statements, like many made by Beverly LaHaye, are not explained; take, for example, the following question drawn from a list called the "law vs. love filter," a filter that helps young women differentiate between what is merely "legal" and what is "right": "There is no law against flattering clothes, but is your motive in wearing them to build others up or to build up your own ego by turning a guy's head?" (28). What is left unsaid is how one builds others up through their dress and why it is necessary to do so.

An ambivalence toward dressing to feel good is also expressed here and never adequately explained. The authors state that young women may have to give up certain of their freedoms—"in dress, thoughts, speech, and behavior" (29) to make sure that they are acting in others's best interests. At what point, though, can they act in their own best

interests? Why is it that young women are given the responsibility of caretaking others, even those with whom they have no relationship? The authors even admit to readers, or rather encourage them, at the section's conclusion, by saying that some men will find them sexy even when they are modestly dressed (30). Not only does this statement buttress the assumption that all women are comfortable with sexual objectification, but it also further muddies the issue of temptation. What if young women attempt to dress modestly and still attract a man's attention, and then this man commits the sin of lust? Is the woman still responsible for inciting him to sin? This question and others like it may plague teenage girls reading such books because of the constant struggle between pleasing self and others that is such an enormous part of adolescence (especially female adolescence). In fact, since sexuality is the only arena that the book regards as under feminine power and control, it seems mysterious that the book's obtuse, illogical arguments about men and women do not plague the selling power of what is meant to be an easy-to-understand guide for an impressionable consumer set.

One very positive contribution made by *Every Young Woman's Battle* is due to its almost constant concentration on the psychology of both young women and young men. Even though the text makes many mistakes in the way that it portrays and discusses the inner lives of young women and men, it very effectively focuses on the importance of that inner life. Ethridge and Arterburn openly discuss the counterproductive thought patterns that torture many young adults, especially those that have to do with self-esteem and sexuality issues: "If your vanity leads you into sexual situations with young men who think you look hot or if your poor body image causes you to latch onto any guy willing to affirm your sex appeal in spite of how you feel about yourself, you are compromising"

(52). For these authors, self-esteem is intricately and inextricably tied with positive Christian spirituality, and transforming a young woman's feelings about herself and her body is a large part of her journey toward a faithful life. This focus on the self as part of becoming a Christian is a relatively new development in spiritual discourse and is yet another way that Christianity is adapting to postmodern conditions.

Incorporating the Therapeutic: A Further Accommodation to Postmodernism

Every Young Woman's Battle is not the only text analyzed here that draws from current therapeutic trends. There is a seemingly constant and unconscious borrowing from pop-psychology that establishes yet another adjustment Christian Right self-help texts are making to accommodate readers's needs for postmodern ideas—religiosity must merge with therapeutic culture in order to survive as a relevant ideology. By hybridizing itself with the therapeutic, Christianity invites postmodern multiplicity and endangers the absolutes of fundamentalist thinking. Not only does the hybridization itself of Christianity to therapeutic culture refer to postmodernism, but postmodernism is implicated already within the therapeutic. For example, therapeutic practice is often occupied with the interpretation of different versions of truth. The modern idea of “Truth” is invalidated by contemporary therapeutic language. Every feeling felt by everyone is “valid” in much of pop-psychology's discourse, and this, too, lends itself to a multiplicity of realities that is nothing if not postmodern. Although this would be called amoral relativism by many in the Christian Right, this philosophical stance has not prevented even the most fundamentalist of texts from benefiting from Christianity's evolution into a therapeutic ideology.

The bestseller texts under discussion in this chapter have psychological threads that are explicit or easily discernable. *The Act of Marriage* discusses many sexual aversions and encourages Christian counseling in the occurrence of any marital problems. *Every Young Woman's Battle* has a chapter on the subliminal effects of sex in the media. *The Spirit-Controlled Woman* has, as has been discussed, a concentration on temperaments. *The Power of a Praying Wife* discusses the effects of childhood issues on the relationship men have with their children. *Woman, Thou Art Loosed* has as one of its main objectives helping of female readers recover from past abuses. Needless to say, the pervasiveness of the therapy culture in America makes it hard to find a self-help text, Christian or not, that does not draw heavily from some sort of psychological discourse. In fact, it is difficult to imagine the genre of self-help texts without realizing that it can only exist in such an affective environment.

Griffith historicizes the rise of the therapeutic in American Evangelicalism by noting the tension in organized religion between demonizing psychology and integrating “proven” effective techniques for helping unhappy people: “Popular evangelical writers increasingly began to discuss problems in terms of ‘anxiety’ and ‘inferiority complexes’ and advised readers on heightening ‘self-esteem’ and fulfilling ‘emotional needs,’ however, and the boundaries between religious and secular prescriptions steadily blurred” (36). Recovery groups, spurred by the germinal Alcoholics Anonymous Twelve Step Program, not only led the way for the therapeutic culture that transformed America’s worldview, and along with it, the worldview of American religion. They also heralded the rise of the “small group movement” (37), at least according to Griffith. Christian Right self-help texts for women discussed here enjoy the exposure and revenue that

comes with a small group readership, which might occur in a small group such as a Christian book club or a Sunday school class. Griffith notes that the great contradiction of recovery discourse within the small group movement is the contradictory “powerful submission” so prevalent in differing degrees in both classic and more contemporary Christian Right self-help books for women. Griffith states: “Recovery discourse is grounded in notions of surrendering control over one’s life, learning to be vulnerable with others and with God in order to cultivate relationships of deeper intimacy. The paradox is that the therapeutic process supposedly also involves learning to take charge of one’s life, accepting responsibility, and cultivating discipline” (38). With the tenets of basic psychological thought and therapeutic culture seeping into religion, this contradiction cannot avoid influencing the subjectivity of Christian Right women, even though it negates many of their modernist beliefs. Perhaps the Christian Right woman’s reworking of submission occurs in large part because of the pervasiveness of this wider therapeutic submission/power contradiction in American culture.

This is not to say that the women of Women Aglow or the larger set of Christian Right women are overpowering the patriarchal structures of evangelicalism. By locating their transformation on the ideological grounds of Biblical submission, these women are recoding a doctrine that can never be completely separated from its destructive roots. There is still too much domination and misogyny in it: “The potential for abdicating personal will and desire in this worldview is not only individually stifling but also [. . .] politically immobilizing. Female surrender in this context all too often includes abdicating independent reflection and forfeiting self-protection, capacities which these women cannot afford to sacrifice” (Griffith 213). Although Griffith cites her female

subjects's behavior as "politically immobilizing," it is quite the opposite if their personal power is harnessed for forces that they believe protect them, as in the case of activist organizations such as Concerned Women for America, who will be discussed in Chapter Five. Griffith, however, refers to political mobilization for the sake of the women themselves, and woman-centered politics is impossible in any situation in which the subjects are submitting, even if they choose to do so.

Women Aglow has featured within its public doctrinal statements a shift away from its fundamentalist hardline of feminine submission to male authority to a more liberal stance of "mutual submission and intimacy between men and women" (45). Between the 1970s and the 1990s, their organizational leadership underwent a change of heart so extreme that Griffith asserts that

An expansive vision of liberation for Christian women, one closer to that of some feminist thinkers than even evangelicals or feminists might like to believe, has been gathering steam among Aglow leaders; and while its eventual impact remains to be seen, its appearance may well presage a new era in evangelical thinking about gender. (45-6)

This shift in evangelical thinking is also evident in the self-help texts written for Christian Right women. On the surface, this shift appears to point to a Christian withdrawal from fundamentalism based on a subjective reworking of the conservative notion of feminine submission. Griffith is heartened by what she sees as a potential for power reclamation: "the determination these women manifest in reworking their lives holds potential for more changes in the future" (213). Unfortunately, although these women have reframed submission for the sake of their internal selves, their external realities are virtually

unchanged by this negotiation. The ideological reworking of the concept of submission is a Christian accommodation to postmodernism that may only succeed in a more firmly entrenched American fundamentalism.

The Power of Submission in *The Passion of the Christ*

As the model for the Christian Right woman's powerful submission, Jesus Christ embodies a set of complex, internalized contradictions that have proven to be powerful rhetoric for those who feel oppressed. In a world filled with those who believe that power can only be manifested through force, the message of Christ still proves revolutionary because it advocates the usurping of power through a willful submission. Jesus's power is located as much in his obedience and humility as it is in his kingly divinity. In Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*, Jesus is represented as a feminized warrior, and his spiritual partner, his mother, Mary, is portrayed as both the perfect woman-mother and a warrior in her own right. Much of *The Passion's* exigence seeps forth from underneath; the subtexts provide a depth unavailable in the characterizations of the biblical figures or the narrative itself. Both Jesus and Mary implicitly contribute to the indoctrination of women into the subjective trap of the Madonna/Whore paradigm, and the rest of the film's Christian activist agenda, like that of LaHaye's *Left Behind* series, often feels insidiously promoted due to the film's hybridization with secular genres. Because this hybridization relocates the viewer's focus from the film's highly publicized message, it is arguable that both its proven commercial success and acclaimed spiritual triumphs can be attributed, at least in part, to the collage of borrowed material.

The Passion of the Christ was arguably the most influential popular culture phenomenon of 2004. Breaking cinematic records on its opening day to become

America's most popular film R-rated film in less than two months (Matthews 42), it was sensationalized in the media, and the fact that two people died while watching the film in its first five months^{xiii} only fueled the histrionics of many commentators. The film's marketing was fantastically successful, including, for example, a well-designed and interesting website that drew people in on a very personal level. But in addition to being marketed to the general public, the film was also marketed to the Christian community specifically, and that marketing was sheer genius. Offering the film directly to churches as an opportunity to witness, the marketing campaign for *The Passion* allowed churches to pay a marketing liaison for short commercials that advertised the film but were customized for the individual church. The commercials could include, for example, details regarding that congregation's showtimes and/or a short statement from the pastor in support of the film. As discussion groups, singles' activities, and church-produced pamphlets about the movie sprung up around the country, another partnership with Outreach, Inc., North America's biggest provider of Christian witnessing products, began to bear fruit. Their bulk sales (only to churches that agreed with their credo) of sundry *Passion* products, from "jumbo doorhangers" to "personal impact cards" foreshadowed the film's domination in *Passion*-related publishing areas and later, officially endorsed items, such as clothing, art, Bible covers^{xiv}, and the usual kitschy jewelry, including even a pendant shaped to look like a nail.

Considering *The Passion*'s marketing strategies is an important part of analyzing the film because it illuminates the capitalist context from which the evangelical film cannot escape. Gibson himself acknowledged in countless interviews that the purpose of the film was to evangelize, but commercial success becomes part of this spiritual

objective because it is an indicator of the distribution of the film's message. Considering capitalist versus spiritual objectives, in turn, begins the process of teasing out the other contradictions inherent in Gibson's creation. For example, capitalism confronts the film's evangelical purpose in its classification as a religious meditation that is counterintuitively meant to entertain viewers while it simultaneously condemns and absolves them from sin. Furthermore, Gibson claims that the film is historically accurate, yet he freely incorporates occult images and ideas straight from several horror film genres. Even the two most obvious goals of the film—creating a religious community among the viewers and accommodating the contemporary desire for entertainment—are at odds. One of the mysteries of the film's success is that violence is the *modus operandi* through which it accomplishes both spiritual and secular objectives.

The film is an ideological pastiche of cultural elements that successfully persuades because it creates a communal identification in viewers. Audiences are visually coerced through a limited point of view and violent images into a spectatorship that makes them a collective of individual voyeurs. Although this individual yet collective spectatorship is part of any theater experience, *The Passion* focuses on spectatorship, capitalizing on this quality of movie-watching in order to further its spiritual objective of creating a religious community. The movie's power as religious iconography and propaganda is evident in the bloody spectacle made of the biblical text about the last days of the life of Jesus of Nazareth; simultaneously expected yet shocking, the portrayal of Christ's last days in *The Passion* elicits contradictory responses.

Not only does the success of the film reassert Christianity as the popculture standard, but the standards of popculture Christianity are reinscribed as contemporary

doxology. Gibson accomplishes this with a powerful marriage of violent images and liturgical elements. There are no surprises because everyone watching knows how the film will end, yet audience members gasp and cry, as though they are learning of the tortures suffered by Jesus for the first time. What is new and surprising is the supposed realism of the tortures of Jesus, and the audience's position in relation to these tortures. *The Passion* is a spectacle in the sense meant by Guy Debord, Marxist media writer and revolutionary filmmaker, when he names the spectacle as not merely a "collection of images, but a social relation among people, mediated by images" (139). The passive perspective, the only perspective the film allows its audience in this harrowing experience, unites viewers into a community of helpless bystanders who are meant to identify with Jesus's followers rather than Jesus himself. From the first scene in the Garden of Gethsemane, the community being created in the theater is meant to be a propagation of the passive, witnessing community within the story itself. Sarah Hagelin, a film studies scholar and author of "*The Passion of the Christ* and the Lust for Certitude" discusses the formation of community by analyzing the film's version of morality: "An ethical premium is placed on staying and watching, on being able to stomach aggressive violence, the spectacle of which causes most of the disciples to abandon Jesus before twenty minutes is out" (51). Moviegoers become extensions of the faithful disciples and the two Marys: "The film establishes multiple layers of spectatorship, insisting that it is a very different thing for the disciples and Mary to watch Jesus suffer than it is for the Jewish crowd or Satan to watch" (151). Although there are these different layers of spectatorship offered, Gibson's film implicitly asserts that "good people do not turn away. They *watch*" (Hagelin 152) with the two Marys and the few faithful disciples who

can bear it. Only the certain kind of watching offered by Jesus's followers is acceptable, indeed ultimately the only Christian action available in the given circumstances. Only Christ is capable of the selfless sacrifice viewers are witnessing, so they are asked to be grateful for his sacrifice by giving themselves over to a sacred voyeurism: "The spectacle presents itself as something enormously positive, indisputable, and inaccessible [. . .]. The attitude which it demands in principle is passive acceptance which in fact it already obtained by its manner of appearing without reply, by its monopoly of appearance" (Debord 141).

Just as there are layers of spectatorship in the film, there are levels of spectatorship in the film's audience, and many are intertwined. There are the different brands of Christians represented in every *Passion* audience, as well as curiosity-seekers and hardcore blood and gore fans, and the reactions of individuals in each of the countless communities aligns and realigns them with one another. It is likely that the film is meant to affirm those audience members who are already ensconced in the Christian ideology and persuade others who are not to join it. Regardless of the spiritual choices made (or not made) by viewers, the simple act of "staying and watching," like the film's disciples are told to do while Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, is a religious act that lends credence to the point of view espoused by the film. Hagelin's assessment of this point of view further links *Passion* with politics and Debord's notion of spectacle, in which he asserts that "the spectacle is the present *model* of socially dominant life. It is the omnipresent affirmation of the choice *already made* in production and its corollary consumption. The spectacle's form and content are identically the total justification of the existing system's conditions and goals" (140). Hagelin explains the

film's vantage point through what she believes to be Gibson's political motive—establishing the Christian Right fundamentalist view as the mainstream view:

Gibson addresses an American Christian audience that is socially, economically, and culturally dominant but whose central religious text frames them as a minority. The film is an attempt to obscure this reality, to form Christianity's primal scene in pain, not in power. [. . .] To create a sense of persecution for wealthy, white Christians, Gibson uses intense screen violence to establish the "reality" of Jesus's gruesomely violent torture and to imagine this scene as Christianity's central moment. This allows him to re-frame American culture's increasing rejection of Gibson's cultural conservatism as a rejection of Christianity [. . .] and compel their consent to the political message the film sells. The film turns a cultural history of domination into one of victimization and uses this revision to establish religious fundamentalism as the "real." (153-4)

How can a religious community be created from strangers in a theatre? The communal experience of witnessing the torture of Jesus in such graphic detail coerces a revival in the heart of every Christian viewer, but it also pushes identification on other viewers, too. It is so real that it also appears to be true; once a viewer internalizes one "truth"—what they have "seen,"—the acceptance of other truths is often not far behind. To Hagelin, this is "the real problem with the pornographic level of violence in the film; its assault on the senses compels the audience to accept the spectacle as reality" (155), which could lead viewers to accept the film's worldview. The film's overlapping accommodations to postmodernism and the contemporary movie viewer's expectations

result in a pastiche film that manipulates audiences, Christian and non-Christian alike. By giving viewers what they expect of a Christ story (what Gibson calls “historical accuracy”) in combination with the new simulacra of special effects, the film creates new cogs for the machinery of the culture industry. The culture industry is defined by Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, social philosophers and leaders of the illustrious Frankfurt School, as the metaphorical factory that mass-produces the components of a standardized popular culture that tranquilizes the masses.

The Passion’s Accommodations to the Culture Industry

Although Horkheimer and Adorno coined the theoretical culture industry in 1948, it is increasingly relevant in the study of contemporary Christianity. Simply a slice of the broader culture industry, the Christian culture industry wants to sell both its material and spiritual products, which in this case, are a film and a doctrine. Gibson’s conservatism is tempered with a desire to maintain the relevancy of Christ’s story for a contemporary audience; thus, as director, he makes accommodations very similar to Tim LaHaye and the previously discussed Christian self-help authors. The movie can be interpreted as an infomercial marketing Christianity through the imitative plot of the crucifixion. Not only does the film imitate the Gospels through retelling a story that is an amalgamation of all of the apostles’s stories, but it also imitates popular portrayals of Christ, mixing these familiar images with techniques borrowed from the genre of the graphically violent action film. The combination is irresistible to the contemporary audience, who loves a bloody spectacle, and both the popular images of Christ and the commercially necessary

gore are so entrenched in the minds of most viewers that few think to question Jesus's appearance or the special effects used to alter it.

Take, for example, the film's first portrayal of Jesus in the garden where he asks God for guidance. His identity is obvious to most viewers from his physical attributes alone; they are a sign representing him: medium-brown, wavy, shoulder-length hair, a short beard, a thin face with a thin nose and prominent cheekbones, and large, kind, brown, doe-like eyes. David Morgan, a specialist in the history of religious images and author of "Protestant Visual Practice and Mass Culture," claims that this particular version of Jesus, which is the only version according to popular American Christian practice, originates from a contemporary's description of him supposedly found in a medieval manuscript. Once pictorial representations of Jesus were as commercially successful in the Protestant market as they had been in the Catholic market, lithographs modeled after this unverified description could be found in late nineteenth-century homes across the western world. Even more important from an ideological viewpoint is the fact that the physiognomy of Jesus is conflated with holy meaning: "His features are encoded with his character as a benevolent, solemn, tranquil saviour" (Morgan 57); therefore, changing his appearance now that the dominant portrayal of him is so widely disseminated and devoutly believed would cause ideological chaos. To portray him differently would feel like a betrayal of the very characteristics that make his person sacred.

The casting choice of Jim Caviezel connotes a decision to witness about Jesus using his most popular image. Gibson wants to create an affect of identification with mainstream Christian viewers, not alienate them by positing the ambiguity of verifiable

knowledge concerning Jesus's features. Through his choices regarding Jesus's traditional appearance, Gibson connects his viewers to one another by ideological chains forged from the visual signs of Christ's image as the martyred savior. It is important that his audience immediately recognize the Jesus on the screen as their Jesus, our Jesus, everyone's Jesus; in reality, each is most likely a carbon copy of the Jesus manufactured by the culture industry, which according to Horkheimer and Adorno, accepts no deviation from the norm: "Every detail is so firmly stamped with sameness that nothing can appear which is not marked at birth, or does not meet with approval at first sight" (76). The identification between the audience and Jesus that results from his culture industry appearance paves the way for the more profound identification meant to result from the images of his flayed body. Just as the casting choice of Caviezel has little to do with historical accuracy, the visual text of Jesus's torture and death is crafted to rhetorically foster identification with the audience rather than adhere to some sort of truth. Because the claims to historical accuracy are a large part of the film's marketing and because historical accuracy is, in fact, an impossibility, the identification that results from the appearance of Jesus before and after the violence is nothing short of a skillful manipulation of the viewer. After so much "realism," it may be difficult for viewers to consciously reject the film's fundamentalist worldview, or even know that it affects their consciousness.

Jesus as martyr is the crux of the ideology surrounding his worship; his sacrifice on the cross is the sign of all of the doctrinal codes of Christianity. The representation of his suffering in *The Passion of the Christ* tramples the boundaries between graphic violence and obscenity, and the special effects implemented are rhetorical techniques of

an extraordinary nature. Only the most desensitized viewers can avoid recoiling in horror from the images on the screen, which are signals that determine audience reactions (often knee-jerk reflexes). Just like amusements in the culture industry, the film's content is not the cause of the effects wrought in the viewers; rather, it is just as Horkheimer and Adorno said—the violent acts are signals for determining feelings, not independent thought (82). Viewers must fill in the gaps between scenes and think through some of the details from other renderings of the story in order to make this film complete. Jesus's trial, for example, is a longer scene, but one lacking in contextual details. It begins *in media res*, and without prior knowledge of Jesus's relationship with the spiritual elders who condemn him, it is unclear exactly who this group of powerful men are and why they are so angry and deceitful. Without this particular piece of knowledge, it is difficult for a viewer, who may or may not know that Jesus was sent to his death by his own people, to absorb the irony and poignancy of his betrayal. This is yet another symptom of the culture industry's workings in this scenario: "The so-called dominant idea is like a file which ensures order but not coherence" (Horkheimer 75). These missing pieces reveal that it is not the story that is the focus, but rather the longest and most detailed scene of all—the scourging scene in which Jesus is revealed to be superhuman. The structural plot of the film is flimsy and serves as a mere backdrop for the special effects that convey this violence, and it is the violence that clarifies the ideological shift implicitly predicted by Horkheimer and Adorno:

The interest of innumerable consumers is directed to the technique, and not to the contents—which are stubbornly repeated, outworn, and by now half-discredited. The social power which the spectators worship shows

itself more effectively in the omnipresence of the stereotype imposed by technical skill than in the stale ideologies for which the ephemeral contents stand in. (81)

Christ's suffering exists for viewers on a new level of sensory awareness, which changes the way that they think and feel about his personage; his mortality is pressed on the viewer each time the razored whips of the Romans reveal the bones of his ribs.

The Passion's representation of the Christ story reveals the calculated morphing of Christianity into a contemporary ideology that will continue to "sell" to contemporary participants and attract new converts. Religions must perpetually prove their relevancy in order to reproduce their own means of production—their believers—and Christianity joining forces with commercialism is not a new phenomenon; what is new is the Hollywood-action-flick methods by which *The Passion of the Christ* is made part of the consciousness of its Christian audience. As part of the culture industry, this kind of religious movement is almost omniscient in its gauging of public opinion and public desire: "The stronger the positions of the culture industry become, the more summarily it can deal with consumers' needs, producing them, controlling them, disciplining them" (Horkheimer 86). It can certainly be said that the film fulfills a need consumers may have to reconcile their consumptive desires with their religious beliefs, for the film as product and spiritual text allows them to consume and worship simultaneously in ways that are strictly of the now.

Another accommodation to postmodernism in the formation of Jesus results in a very successful evolutionary twist manifested in Gibson's film. This spiritual text relies on the surprising combination of the "traditional" interpretation of popular Christianity's

Jesus and the genre of the horror film. Utilizing elements from many sub-genres of horror, the film's protagonist is portrayed against a pastiche of characters, settings, motifs, and special effects featured in all types of scary films: psychological thrillers, supernatural possession films, and the sadistic blood and gore shows. Jesus the activist martyr is the crux of the ideology surrounding his worship. His sacrifice on the cross is the sign of all doctrinal codes of Christianity. In order to guarantee its own perpetuation, this sign cannot become stagnant. *The Passion* is a product and a spiritual text that fulfills a consumer need to reconcile consumptive desires with religious beliefs. It also creates a community in which viewers can consume and worship in a way that is certainly contemporary.

Audiences are reassured by the familiarity of the traditional images of Jesus and the film's plot, which is an amalgamation of all of the Gospels. Then they are shocked by the violent images that propel most of the film. In fact, much of the movie's power emanates from its marriage of the liturgical element with the violent image, and this is what most differentiates it from earlier portrayals of the Christ story. Gibson uses elements from psychological thrillers and devil possession flicks for this film, but the most dominant horror genre represented is the sadistic blood and gore show made popular by films like *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. Special effects have come a long way since the seventies and in *The Passion*, the lashes and nails and thorns are more "real" than any earlier screen violence.

Because of technological advances, Christ's suffering exists for viewers on a new level of sensory awareness that causes a transformative identification. People with disparate beliefs are bound together by a collective recoiling from the torture inflicted on

an innocent man and a profound wish that it end. It is possible that identification with the protagonist or the newfound membership in the theater community softens the hearts of potential converts. Because contemporary American culture is so reverent of martyrdom and yet simultaneously so self-indulgent, the film's representation of the world's most famous self sacrifice in such a graphic style was bound to wield money-making power. It would indeed be a triumph for Christianity if *The Passion's* spiritual success could be correlated to the public's response at the box office.

The Passion and the Madonna Paradigm: Martyrdom, the Ultimate Submission

The mixing of the secular and the spiritual does not make *The Passion of the Christ* revolutionary, and its representation of the feminine is not new, either. Not surprisingly, *The Passion's* portrayal of feminine subjectivity is disappointingly hegemonic, and its contribution to the subjectivity construction of the Christian Right woman perpetuates the Madonna paradigm in its conservative (yet incoherent) characterization of Christ's mother. In order to fully understand the film's perpetuation of the Madonna paradigm, it is necessary to locate its portrayal of the feminine within the context of the film's uppermost priorities—creating a religious community among the individuals in the audience while at the same time accommodating the contemporary desire for extreme forms of entertainment.

The focus of community and violence as entertainment in *The Passion* serves as a foundation for what is the most effective strategy for the indoctrination of the Madonna paradigm. The film serves as yet another essentialized element that contributes to the formation of subjectivity. Because American Christianity is inescapably articulated with

capitalism and the culture industry, the film pervasively and reductively positions women in hyper-conservative portrayals that perpetuate the Madonna paradigm and trap women viewers in schizophrenic circles of ancient gender ideals and contemporary gender requirements.

**Jesus:
A Feminized Martyr-Warrior and a Model for Christian Right Women**

As discussed in Chapters One and Two, the realization of the feminine Christian ideal can only be achieved through the Madonna paradigm. The Madonna paradigm culminates in the ultimate submission—sacrificial martyrdom—and this is the aspect of the paradigm that is most illuminated by *The Passion of the Christ*. Although Jesus is explicitly represented as a masculine warrior figure, his character and the context surrounding his strength in martyrdom is somewhat feminized. For example, Jesus is attractive, and his body is the focus of the film in a way that can be likened to the sexualization and objectification of the female body in cinema. Muscular and well-defined but slim, his body is far from any characterization of burly. Jesus's appearance is not stereotypically masculine, and his mortality is forecast on the fragility of his flesh. Furthermore, his is a persona of nurturance rather than physical prowess; because his strength is in his submission and sacrifice, he is more connected to the feminine ideal of compassionate giving than the stereotypically masculine ideals of aggressive domination. Christ's stereotypically feminine qualities are certainly downplayed, but they cannot be avoided entirely because the doctrine of Christianity espouses these ideals. Perhaps this unavoidable leaning toward the traditional feminine in Christianity explains why Christ has been appropriated by Christian Right women as a model for their postmodern

accommodations to the idea of a powerful submission. Regardless whether or not Gibson's intention was to further mobilize the effects of powerful submission in the subjectivity construction of Christian Right women, the notion has been successfully furthered by his interpretation of the crucifixion narrative.

Perhaps because it is the gruesome reality of physical martyrdom by crucifixion that is paramount in *The Passion*, all of the film's characters are developed superficially without granting any omniscience to the viewing audience. Full of powerful emotions, the film coerces feelings out of the audience without revealing what is happening within the characters's minds. The primary focus of the film, Jesus's physical body, or the destruction of his exterior, overshadows any glimpse into his interior self that viewers might think they are getting: "The film does not ask us to put ourselves in the position of the suffering protagonist and is in fact curiously uninterested in *his* interior self or in the question of our ability to ever know him" (Hagelin 161).

Refusing viewers access into the interior of Jesus does not promote the idea that he is merely superficial, but that his interior is in fact, inaccessible. This inaccessibility underscores the traditional masculinity of Jesus; indeed, one cannot help but compare Jesus to some sort of action hero, especially in the scourging scene when he stands up for punishment far more times than is humanly possible when the bones of his very ribs are protruding from the covering of his skin. This ideological plug for manliness can be seen as yet another accommodation to the contemporary cinema audience, who regardless of their level of spiritual commitment, "are trained to read violence not in a religious context but in an action-hero, injury-and-revenge context" (Hagelin 159) and will respond to a man's man with admiration and even an impulse to emulate him.

The film begins and ends with portrayals of Jesus as a warrior-action-hero. In the film's beginning, he stomps to death the snake that has just been born of Satan in the Garden of Gethsemane. According to Hagelin, "Gibson wants it clear—this is Jesus as a hero and a warrior, his emotional turmoil overcome with action" (152). Similarly, Jesus's divine strength is referenced in the punishment of Gesmas, the thief who was crucified with Jesus and refused to accept him as the Son of God; his eyes were pecked out by crows. Hagelin points that the film's last scene is a reference to the resurrection of the warrior-king:

The camera shows the stone rolling away from the tomb [. . . Jesus] is shot in profile, his face unreadable, as the martial music rises. This is Jesus girding for battle; the camera focuses on the hole in his hand—"proof." We have seen what happened to Gesmas [the bad thief whose eyes were pecked out by crows on Golgotha] after denying Jesus. Can the crusades be far behind? (162).

However, as with all of the aforementioned Christian Right works, there is a postmodern subtext of gender complications that defies the Christian culture industry's claim to gender absolutes. This subtext is so prevalent that its defiant stance against gender absolutes can arguably be said to have already been absorbed into the culture industry itself as the emergent cultural dominant. The more obvious perpetuation of gender absolutes through Jesus's warrior-like masculinity is contradicted by an alternative self that is somewhat feminized. To begin with, Jesus participates as a subordinate in a relationship of powerful submission with his heavenly father and is thus linked to the Christian Right women who are attempting to reframe their submission to

earthly husbands as a powerful submission to the same divine being. This connection is only strengthened by the narrative of the movie, which is about Jesus and the women who love him.

Women are primarily recognized by the Jesus of the film. The disciples are secondary and always disappoint, while Jesus's earthly father, Joseph, is an absent figure to whom there is not even one allusion. Although Jesus definitely has a relationship with his heavenly father, it is a relationship that is based on obedience. He prays and asks for answers and forgiveness for others, but it is his mother who is his main source of encouragement and fortitude during the part of his life portrayed in the film, which represents the mother/son relationship as one that eclipses even the relationship between the heavenly father and Jesus, the son of God, the son of man. Jesus's relationship with his mother is based on an extrasensory communication that transcends the boundaries of earthly existence. They communicate throughout the movie without having to use words, and when they do actually speak to one another, it is a pivotal communication in the overall theme of the narrative. For example, two scenes simultaneously occurring in present-time and in flashback during Jesus's walk to Golgotha encapsulate both Mary's characterization as the Divine Mother and Jesus's characterization as the Divine Savior. When Jesus falls while carrying the cross, Mary runs to him, reassuring him with the words, "I am here." As she runs to him through the crowd, a simultaneous flashback occurs in which she reassures the child, Jesus, with the same words after she picks him up from a fall. His response, "See, Mother, I make all things new," is multi-layered and has intense meaning for the moment encapsulated while he lies on the ground, as well as for the wider theme of redemption through his sacrifice. In short, the meaning viewers make

from the moments of the movie depend more on this mother/son interaction than on any other pairing, and this is one way that Jesus is linked with the feminine.

Jesus's link to femininity does not stop with his relationship with his mother, Mary. He has stereotypically feminine traits, as well^{xv}. In several scenes, Jesus displays empathy and compassion in ways that were revolutionary in a culture that privileged more masculinized, bellicose "eye-for-an-eye" mentalities. In the Garden of Gethsemane, he advocates passivity when he chastises Peter for his violent acts against the soldiers who have come to arrest him and compassionately heals the soldier's ear that Peter lopped off in anger. Later, there is a flashback scene in which he is shown saving Mary Magdalene's life, gently raising her from the dirt both figuratively and literally, recognizing her value as a person rather than judging her by social standards. Indeed, Jesus's behavior throughout the whole process of his trial, sentencing, and crucifixion is pointedly passive, and he makes several references to his power as he advocates passivity rather than the traditional swashbuckling, warlord-like behavior the watching crowds would expect from someone who calls himself a king. Most importantly, Jesus begs his heavenly father to forgive those who are torturing and later murder him, expressing compassion for even his enemies in their brutal ignorance. However, the film concentrates on the surface of Jesus, rather than his teachings, as Freeland points out: "It's hard to judge [. . .] whether any particular view of Christian ethics is advocated by *The Passion of the Christ*, since the scope of the film is deliberately narrow. We see little of Jesus's active ministry" (157). Viewers must rely on previously gained knowledge to fill in the narrative holes left by the film, such as the information that Jesus saves a prostitute when he rescues Mary Magdalene. This reliance on viewers's childhood

Sunday School lessons may weaken Jesus's links to the feminine somewhat, but no more than the film's reliance on visual images rather than on scripture to establish Jesus as a warrior weaken that attempt at characterization.

Another interesting point made by Cynthia Freeland, chair of the Department of Philosophy at the University of Houston, links Jesus to the feminine through his voluntary blood sacrifice. She points out that copious bloodshed like that found in the film "evoke associations between women and the flowing blood of menstruation and childbirth" (160), further noting that the film's portrayal of Mary the mother and Mary Magdalene shows them very comfortable with being stained with Jesus's blood, although they are devastated that it is being shed. According to Freeland's historical assessment of biblical times, women would have been responsible for the care of the sick and dying and the preparation of the dead for burial, and because of this "show an ability and a willingness to address life as it is lived [. . .] [and] cope practically and lovingly with the messy details of embodied human existence." Freeland goes on to explain the symbolic associations between Jesus's blood and mother's milk in the Christian sacrament of communion, which is said to nourish the soul with his blood in different artistic traditions. For example, Mexican *retablo* paintings show angels gathering Jesus's blood for believers to drink, and medieval art associates Jesus with pelicans, which were said to provide their own blood to nourish their young. Over the centuries, Christ's wounds have even been compared to small wombs in which mystics say they are absorbed and sheltered (160). Although these traditions are not part of the film's explicit text, they are certainly invited to participate in the film's subtext by the extremity of Gibson's artistic choices of blood and gore. They participate in the historical creation of Christ as an

intertextual fabric woven by different conceptions of his body and how it functions as a meaning-making ideological tool.

Mary, the Ultimate Mother (patterned after a man)

In *The Passion*, Jesus has two portrayals—the explicit warrior and the implicit nurturer—that are oppositionally gendered male and female. These two portrayals play off of one another in a way that encourages a contradictory reading perfect for the Christian Right culture industry’s accommodation to postmodernism—the powerful submission. Mary, the mother of Jesus, is also represented as being an amalgamation of the feminine and masculine genders, and she is paired with Jesus throughout the film. Although the literal martyr in this Christian Right activist text is Jesus of Nazareth, Mary is represented as co-experiencing his death and the death of herself as a subject. She, too, is portrayed as wholeheartedly submitting to the will of God, even though it means the slow and tortured death of her child. Feminine martyrdom is the most important piece of the Madonna paradigm, and in this film, the ultimate feminine martyr, Mary, the mother of Jesus, is represented in what is arguably a more powerful submission than Christ himself. She is represented as his mirror image because she is explicitly portrayed as a nurturer first and a warrior second, while Jesus is the reverse. Her attitude is the epitome of powerful submission and meshes perfectly with the ideas of the Christian culture industry found in other popular texts that help fashion the temporally schizophrenic subjectivity of the Christian Right woman. She is reproduced in a less glorified fashion throughout the film in almost every other female character, and the film’s depiction of

women offers little choice other than the particular subjectivity offered to them through Mary's maternal martyrdom.

The mythical feminine ideal of the Madonna paradigm is embodied in the mother of Christ, and the film's representation of her can be no more "historically accurate" than the paradigm itself because each is a portrayal of the other. Whether or not Gibson chooses to recognize its influence, the culture industry's notion of maternal perfection influences his interpretation of Mary as much as any biblical or historical text. Not at all the simple and natural role it is portrayed to be, the Madonna paradigm is, in fact, a complicated and elusive feminine identity that can only be achieved in artistic endeavors. Whereas living women certainly embody contradictions, the particular combination of oxymoronic qualities that make up the mother of Christ—child-mother, goddess-mortal, powerful-suppliant—are without the taint of humanity or sin. Because Mary, like her son, is above reproach, she occupies a mythical space mortal women can only struggle toward rather than hope to reach.

Mary's perfection, inside and out, is what makes her figure a model of unattainable stature. Most obviously, the cultural requirement that good be beautiful is realized in the casting choice of Maia Morgenstern, whose strongly featured face, tortured eyes, and perfect teeth create a physiognomy that reveals her assumed character as Mary the Mother, just as the culture industry's Christ has features that are "encoded" with meaning. However, her beauty is of a certain type that separates her physical features from those of the Mary Magdalene character, who is played by Monica Bellucci. Mary the Mother's face is mature and full of strength and not so finely featured and childlike as Mary Magdalene's. Although Mary the Mother's face is incredibly

expressive, it is as controlled as her emotions, and often even more expressive as a result. A single tear on Mary's cheek has more of an effect than hysteria would; emotional understatement portrays part of her warrior side. It is one way she fights for her son. In short, Mary the Mother's features are not of the type that Hollywood standards would associate with sexualized physical perfection but rather a more mature and wise type of beauty more appropriate for the ultimate virgin mother, who should not be associated with sex at all.

Mary's Co-Martyrdom

In Gibson's film, however, although Mary certainly is not sexualized, she is often more like a wife to Jesus than a mother. She fills the role of supportive helpmate throughout the narrative in a manner similar to Claudia's relationship to Pilate. When considering the contradictory ideals of the Madonna paradigm, this mother/partner relationship is not surprising, but it does make for confusing material in regards to subjectivity formation. Because the mother and son are partners in their martyrdom, but Mary is the subordinate partner, consumers of the film are faced with the subjective negotiation found in all of the Christian Right texts discussed here—a powerful submission disguised as a traditional submission. Some critics argue, and with good reason, that Mary is “one-dimensional, just as shown in tradition and many paintings. She is simply and naturally a mother: stereotypically selfless, patient, beautiful, and loving” (Freeland 156). Although this interpretation is not false, it does not take into account the postmodern twist of the powerful submission or the undercurrent of partnership in the relationship Mary has with her son. Even when this undercurrent is

recognized, as it is in Freeland's work—"in some interactions the mother and son appear almost like lovers" (156)—the critical interpretation does not attempt to complicate the flat Madonna portrayal the film offers viewers.

A deviation from an oversimplified Madonna theme that supports the argument of Mary as a partner to Jesus can be found in Bruce R. Reichenbach's "Dances of Death: Self-Sacrifice and Atonement." Reichenbach, a contemporary Christian philosopher, finds the interaction between mother and son in the film is like a *pas de deux* in which Mary, acting as Jesus's partner, experiences his suffering as her own, mirrors his agony, and becomes a "co-redemptrix" (198-200). Like Christ, who chooses to submit to the will of God and offer his very life for the redemption of humanity, Mary chooses to allow it to happen. Her brand of spectatorship embodies her passivity and submission because she chooses to watch without interfering in her son's torture and eventual death; rather, she does what she can to support Jesus in his choice to submit to the will of God and the process of crucifixion. She exhibits a superhuman warrior's strength and fortitude in accomplishing this task. Often in complete disregard for her own safety, she puts herself in harm's way and bravely defies the Roman soldiers in order to offer herself to Christ. Without speaking directly to the issue of power, Reichenbach, too, claims power for Mary, saying: "the self-sacrifice of Jesus has been transmuted into the sacrifice of Mary in giving up the one she loves. Although Mary cannot understand the events [. . .], she engages in self-sacrifice, even to the point of being willing to die with him. Gibson views Mary as part of the salvation process when she sacrifices to torture and death the son she voluntarily bore" (200). It is in this way that her powerful submission is so

closely linked to Christ's and arguably, as a survivor of her son's crucifixion, her powerful submission may be the more impressive example of obedience.

Mary's Reproductions in Other Female Characters

Reproduced to some degree in most of the other female characters, Mary, the mother of Christ, serves as a model for all other women in the film, and by extension, all other women. The generalized Madonna of the paradigm is most often dichotomously paired with the Whore, who lacks the luminescence of motherhood or the innocence of the virgin. No exception to this pattern, *The Passion's* Mary is actually paired with two Whores: Mary Magdalene, the reformed Whore, and Satan, who is somewhat androgynous but arguably more female than male and actually played by a woman. Although Mary Magdalene is certainly a more direct reproduction of Mary, mother of Christ, she cannot help but fall short of the Madonna paradigm's stringent requirements for the ideal woman. Satan, on the other hand, is in a more reverse modeling relationship with the character of Mary, but this connects her, nonetheless, to the feminine source. Claudia, Pilate's wife, and Veronica, the woman who brings Jesus water during his tortuous journey to Golgotha, are also linked with Mary the Mother in their portrayals as similarly gendered, nurturing caretakers meant to be exemplars of femininity. Just like the other Christian Right texts discussed, *The Passion* offers viewers only two feminine types. Because the Christian Right's discourse is so often fundamentalist, it is not surprising that there exists a powerful subtext in this discourse and in society's wider gender discourse, that represents femininity as an either/or proposition. Either a woman

chooses to aspire to be the Madonna and sacrifice herself, or she chooses to be the Whore who sacrifices her soul.

Mary Magdalene, the Reformed Whore

The Passion does provide a middle ground between the Madonna and the Whore. This less-than-sacred middle ground of femininity is *The Passion*'s representation of Mary Magdalene. Gibson accommodates his Mary Magdalene character to viewer expectations just like he recreated the popular Jesus exactly according to the image most often featured in contemporary representations. Like Jesus's physical appearance, the Mary Magdalene character is represented in a popular version of a historical and biblical figure that is an amalgamation of several women, at least according to Freeland. Freeland claims that the popular version of Mary Magdalene the reformed Whore has no biblical basis but is a confluence of a biblical figure from whom Jesus exorcised demons, a few other biblical Marys, and a "fallen woman" without a name (157-8). Furthermore, Freeland asserts that the choice of Monica Belluci for the role of Mary Magdalene rests on an artistic perpetuation of the Madonna/Whore paradigm because Belluci is a well-known sex symbol eroticized in other films, such as *The Matrix* sequels and *Malèna* (153-4). Referring to the mythical and artistic tradition that revolves around a sexualized although reformed Mary Magdalene with flowing tresses, Freeland also points out that Belluci's hair is shown loose and flowing without any sort of covering much of the time, in contrast to Morgenstern's, whose hair is usually hidden from view (158).

The Passion's representation of Mary Magdalene is interesting precisely because of its portrayal of her as a woman who resides in the space of the less-than-sacred middle

ground between the paradigms of the Madonna and the Whore. Although she is a faithful follower of Jesus and a highly respected figure within the ideology of Christianity, Mary Magdalene is reproduced here in the new form of a Madonna who is simultaneously linked to her older Whore identity. Regardless of Christianity's assurance of forgiveness and absolution, in the film, Mary Magdalene is not allowed to escape her past. There is even a flashback scene of Jesus saving her from death by stoning to remind viewers that she was a pariah of the worst sort. Along with other allusions to her sexuality, these artistic choices make viewers remember, not forget, Mary Magdalene's original position so as to further sacralize the true Madonna's absolute purity.

For women viewers, the character of Mary Magdalene implies that even though Whores can be forgiven, they are always Whores even after their redemption, perhaps especially so because it is only their attempt to be someone else that illuminates their previous identity so starkly. Mary Magdalene is a warning of the permanence of feminine identity choices, rather than an example of the unconditional love of God and the subjective mutability offered by salvation. The film finds a space for resistance within the Christian doctrine of divine forgiveness and chooses to capitalize on a position in which absolutes of gender identity are more powerful than that which was revolutionary about Jesus's teachings; the film does not focus on the central idea of a reformed Christian's clean slate, and it also ignores Jesus's propensity to encourage women to claim a higher position in Christian society.

Mary Magdalene's most biblically powerful moment is even absent from the film. Although, according to the Bible, she is the first of Jesus's followers to find him resurrected in his tomb, the film shows the resurrection without including her at all. She

is denied her role of disseminator of the “good news” and is instead merely the other Mary’s shadow and a supporter of Christ. In *The Passion*, Mary Magdalene’s martyrdom as a woman follower of Christ is merely a shadow of the martyrdom of Mary the Mother. Mary Magdalene is perhaps most martyred by her unholy middle ground position as a reformed whore because this role offers only a splintered subjectivity that invites judgment rather than the power of self-definition. Yet another example of the complexity of a Christian Right text’s perpetuation of the Madonna paradigm, the film’s portrayal of Mary Magdalene is rich with contradictions that only contribute to the fractured subjectivity offered to Christian Right women through the popular Christian texts they consume.

Satan, the Androgynous Whore

Played by Rosalinda Celentano, Satan is apparently androgynous but easily linked to femininity and Mary the mother of Christ. Mary is the character in the film who is most empathetic to the suffering of Christ because she is his mother and chooses to suffer with him throughout the entirety of his tortures. Mary does not choose to separate herself from his pain, and this decision is what makes her Christ’s co-martyr. Satan also makes the same choice but for markedly different reasons. Although Satan is not removed from Christ’s pain and chooses to watch with rapt attention, s/he is an anti-martyr. Rather than empathy, Satan watches the suffering of Christ with a detached objectivity that is, because of its disturbing difference, automatically separate from the narrative’s action. Cinematically, Satan’s voyeurism is separated from the spectatorship of the other characters by a slow-motion camera and dirge-like music. S/he establishes her anti-

martyrdom by openly stating her/his detached interest in the beginning scene in the Garden of Gethsemane, when s/he asks whether or not one mortal man is capable of shouldering the sins of the world, establishing herself/himself as a different type of passive spectator from Christ's supporters—an almost philosophical observer.

Furthermore, in contrast to Mary, Satan is imagistically linked with all of the supernatural evil that can be mustered from every artistic and cinematic source available. Mary, like every positively portrayed figure in the film, is beautiful, whereas Satan is appropriately ghoulish—pale, bald, and with claws for hands. Although Satan's costuming is not that different from Mary's, the Reaper's hood and the Nun-like head covering easily portray the difference between the two characters. Satan, too, is linked to femininity through motherhood, although it is a hellish maternity. S/he figuratively gives birth to maggots and snakes, which crawl from her facial orifices and from under her robes. At one point, s/he is even shown cradling a half-rotten demon-baby who watches Christ's torture with her.

The film's fundamental bent makes it impossible for Satan as female to be any kind of woman other than a whore, although all women must be connected to the ultimate woman, Mary, the mother of Christ. In terms of subjectivity construction, Satan is a more extreme extension of the warning encapsulated in the figure of Mary Magdalene. According to the mores of the film, Mary Magdalene cannot escape her Whore past, and although she is forgiven, she is still linked to lusty evil. Satan represents such evil in its most extreme form. Her/his visual repulsiveness and status as a detached observer only serve to link her/him with the Madonna in direct opposition to purity, goodness, and the self-sacrifice of maternal martyrdom.

Secondary Mary Reproductions: Claudia and Veronica

Claudia, Pilate's wife, and Veronica, the woman who brings Jesus water on his way to Golgotha, are also connected to the ultimate femininity, although both of their characters are without historical or biblical basis (Freeland 152). Claudia's portrayal is especially mystifying, as is her husband's, because they are the representatives of a brutal occupying force that fiercely oppresses the Jews, yet noble characteristics are chosen for each of them. Claudia is directly linked to Mary, the mother of Christ, from her first appearance, because both have some sort of clairvoyant dream on the night of Jesus's capture. She is further linked to the intuitive Mary because she prophesies that her husband's actions toward Jesus will bring Pilate political trouble, and she also claims to be able to differentiate truth from falsehood whenever she hears it. Like Mary to Jesus, Claudia is the perfect helpmate to Pilate. She is encouraging, loving, and supportive, even when she disagrees with or does not understand his choices. Cinematically, this link between the ultimate Madonna and her Roman counterpart is established most often through meaningful eye contact; Mary's soulful looks are exchanged with her son, and a less intense version of this kind of emotional exchange occurs between Claudia and her husband. Most interestingly, after Jesus's scourging, Claudia mysteriously believes in his divinity and understands Mary's desire to clean her son's sacred blood from the flagstones. In what would have had to be a major breach of conduct, Claudia silently and sympathetically brings snowy cloths to Mary so that she may mop up the copious blood shed by Jesus during his flaying by the Roman guards.

Veronica, too, displays the empathy that is paramount in the idealized woman and part of the essentialized trademark of the "good" women in *The Passion*. Although she,

like Claudia, is an example of the looseness with which the film presents “historical accuracy,” she further buttresses the Madonna/Whore paradigm by continuing the perpetuation of the construction and reconstruction of Mary throughout the collective femininity found in the film. It is important to note, as well, that in the few minutes she is on screen, Veronica is also portrayed as a compassionate mother comforting a daughter who watches her risk herself to provide Jesus some comfort. In this way, the multi-generational perspective of feminine subjectivity construction is established, and the inherited gender paradigms are reasserted within the context of the film.

Community and Entertainment: Beyond the Madonna Paradigm

The perpetuation of the Madonna paradigm and its components of submission and martyrdom are most effectively furthered in *The Passion of the Christ* because the film’s goals of creating a religious community and entertaining a contemporary film audience are united under the cinematic technique of pornographic violence. Without this level of pornographic violence, the extremity of Christ’s martyrdom and his mother’s martyrdom would not be so successfully forced on the viewer. Gibson’s artistic choices have particular effects on all audience members, but the community of viewers most susceptible to influence from this confluence of seemingly disparate categories is women, and most especially Christian Right women. Christian Right women are negotiating a virulently extreme form of Jameson’s schizophrenic subjectivity construction, both societally-imposed and self-imposed, that all American women are negotiating. The manner in which Christ and Mary exhibit the notions of martyrdom and powerful submission, in combination with the film’s perpetuation of Gibson’s fundamentalist ideas

about good and evil, contribute to the indoctrinative ideology that potentially imprisons these women.

The absolute separation of good and evil clearly mark the film as fundamentalist. Previously mentioned is Gibson's tendency toward what Hagelin calls "visual excess" (151) to accomplish the objective of obviously marking good and evil for the viewer. Maggots crawling from Satan's nose, ugly Jewish hags, pointy-toothed demonic Jewish children, crooked and rotten teeth, rotten camels, and hungry, eye-pecking crows are just a few examples of ways that the film reveals who belongs to the evil community. And no one is exempt from being classified; as mentioned earlier, another way both spectators within the film and within the film's audience are classified as good or evil depends on whether or not they follow Jesus's command in the beginning of the film to "stay and watch."

These examples of essentialism cannot help but have negative effects on the subjectivity construction of the Christian Right woman viewer. Not only is she expected to continually strive toward the spiritual and emotional perfection of the Madonna paradigm—she also receives a similar message from yet another Christian source that her goodness is in direct proportion to her attractiveness. In *The Passion* this is even more vehemently stated than it is in either *Left Behind* or any of the discussed self-help texts because the images that separate good from evil are so graphically abhorrent or awe-inspiring that once again the middle ground is obliterated, leaving no room for the average. Dictating the morality of viewers by judging their ability to stay and watch is yet another way that *The Passion* more easily traps Christian Right women than other spectator groups because these women have a special relationship with Jesus, at least if

they participate in the contemporary Christian culture industry. He is ultimately their model for the perpetuation of the Madonna paradigm and the subjective negotiation that makes it possible for them to reconcile the temporal schizophrenia of postmodernism and biblical obedience—the idea of powerful submission. This identification with Jesus negates some of the film’s efforts to force an identification with the two Marys and the disciples as passive spectators and makes it even more unlikely that Jesus’s feminine emulators would be able to look away; they are spiritual and emotional extensions of Jesus. The film’s fundamentalist separation of good and evil has definite negative potential for the subjectivity construction of Christian Right women, but like any essentialism, its dichotomizing of good and evil is easy to problematize, too. Although the film separates good and evil using seemingly impermeable boundaries, there are holes in the film’s fundamentalist doctrine that are clearest in light of some of Gibson’s interpretive choices.

Surprisingly, Gibson lumps his Christian viewers who stay and watch and suffer with Jesus with the evil torturers; he encourages everyone to align themselves with the evil forces that carried out the crucifixion. Pamela Grace, who teaches film at the City University of New York, explains:

The film’s demand that we blame ourselves for Christ’s death has been endlessly reinforced by the surrounding publicity. It is one of the most unusual aspects of *The Passion* and, odd as it seems, is probably one of the reasons for the picture’s unexpected popularity. Viewer responses to the film focus largely on the experience of seeing “what Jesus suffered for me.”

According to this view, every sinner is retroactively causing the situation that creates a need for Jesus to sacrifice himself on the cross to save humanity as a whole. Therefore, regardless of the time period in which one sins, that individual contributes to the sinful burden of guilt that descended on Jesus's shoulders when his heavenly father could not bear to look at him and turned away when Jesus was dying on the cross, prompting Jesus to cry out, "My father, why hast thou forsaken me?" Gibson makes a personal testimony to this point of view by featuring his own hand holding one of the nails as it is hammered through Jesus's hand and into the cross (Grace).

Even though such signs as poor dental hygiene and poorly formed facial features may be overly simplistic ways to mark evil, such marking is done for cinematic effect. Despite such surface marking, the film asserts that the evil is amongst us, within us all, and inescapably so. We all participate today in a horrific event that occurred two thousand years ago, and the nuances of this assertion are cloaked in an ideological fundamentalism that negates the very possibility of itself. For example, viewers are encouraged to hate those responsible for Jesus's death but simultaneously admit their own culpability in his demise. Rather than deal with contradictions like this, the film distracts viewers from it in order that it sinks deep into the subconscious without much recognition or analysis; this makes room for the powerful combination of religious ceremony and violent orgy that Grace calls "ritualoid entertainment." In this case, the ritualoid entertainment connects with viewer penance on several different levels.

Foucault has pointed out that most people crave discipline and punishment and will even internalize punitive forces to satisfy their craving. Even so, many contemporary theologians reject the idea of atonement for various reasons—historical,

biblical, and social (Grace). Because society creates this need within individuals, it makes sense that certain religious views will encourage these self-punitive behaviors in a religious environment in which church institutions are no longer allowed the freedom to be regulators of law and morality to the extent of times past. *The Passion's* violent centerpiece, the scourging scene, encourages intense guilt in viewers and removes the more popular Christian focus of love from the narrative: "Gibson prefers the whip to the cross [. . .] because death is a mystery and pain is not. Gibson wants his Christianity literal and the wages of sin visible" (Hagelin 155). Gibson's focus on Christ's torture advocates an absolutist view of Christianity that encourages a particularly brutal form of self-flagellation that has as one level the mere act of watching the film, which is its own kind of torture.

A viewer who leaves the theater making a choice to be further affected by the movie even after the credits roll has to navigate yet another form of atonement more akin to an internal self-flagellation—the process of self-blame and its ensuing subjective effects. A possible subconscious process may go something like this: "If Christ was perfect and still had to suffer crucifixion for me, as a daily sinner, what must I deserve? How can I possibly repay him this debt?" Women are especially vulnerable to this type of thinking simply because they are culturally pressured to accept more than their share of the responsibility for the work and wrongs of the world. Christian Right women, especially, seem to wholeheartedly accept this burden. The result of conservative religious traditions that target women, such as the much-touted scriptural references to childbirth pain being payment for the sins of Eve, have paved the way for further subjectivity construction that encourages Christian women to see themselves as

responsible for not only Christ's crucifixion, but Mary's pain, as well. Because *The Passion* is about the agony of Mary the mother in addition to the agony of Jesus, it stands to reason that Christian Right women watching the movie would feel an affinity for Mary; their own identities, whether or not they are actually mothers, is so tied into the biological essentialism of motherhood that they inevitably empathize with Mary and perhaps feel responsibility for her pain. Accepting this responsibility without questioning its fairness is one way Christian Right women could justify the contradictory positions in which they find themselves within the society of their faith and wider society as they discover imaginative ways to accept their "place" in both worlds.

Christian Right women viewers of *The Passion* form their own spectator community within the audiences in the cinema and elsewhere, but around which of the film's ideological centerpieces do they gather? The film's message of sacrifice expressed through pornographic violence leaves them shaken yet resolved to increase their own willingness for self-punishment through sacrifice and martyrdom; they will find solace in creating a community to support them in this endeavor. The cinematic techniques employed by Gibson lend a realism to the film's narrative that coerces viewers into believing in the director's vision of the crucifixion. Not only does Hagelin think the graphic violence, as previously discussed, persuades with a false reality, but the violence, she goes on to say, "does cultural work not because on-screen violence encourages violence but because on-screen violence encourages (in fact, compels) consent to the film's worldview. *The Passion's* approach to its viewer models its ideas about how human beings should respond to faith" (159). And for Christian Right women, this acceptance of the film as reality in conjunction with an acceptance of the film's

vision of faith can be problematic. Potentially, the effects on their subjectivity construction as they fit the brutality of the martyrdom of Jesus into their own negotiations of self-sacrifice and submission can further constrain their sense of agency and negate whatever amount of power they claim in their submission. Just as the Madonna paradigm is an impossible ideal toward which all women can only hope to strive, Jesus's martyrdom is "the" unreachable pinnacle of selflessness; the Christian Right woman's emulation of these two figures in an environment of fundamentalist absolutism has the potential to transform any powerful submission into sanctified victimhood.

Christian culture already sees itself as victimized, and so Christian Right women will also be part of the viewer community that commiserates with Gibson's goal to assert power in a popular culture he insists is hostile to Christianity. The part of their subjectivity that proclaims their victimhood as Christian women often discounted in a supposedly secular world will rise up as they spend their money and cultural capital on Gibson's revolutionary artistic endeavor. And although the film's financial success is now a matter of public record, there hangs about Gibson and everyone connected with the movie an inexplicable sense of martyrdom that, despite the huge amounts of money made, somehow sends a message that sacrifices were made, too, and these sacrifices were both costly to the film's creators and beneficial to the film's purposes. Perhaps it is the film's success in light of its contradictory purposes—creating religious communities and entertaining viewers—that are most disturbing to the film's detractors. Although religion and entertainment have long been linked, it is still an associative chain that smacks of disingenuity, hypocrisy, and propaganda.

Concerned Women for America:

Proof that Christian Right Women are Postmodern Victims

All of the contradictory aspects of the Christian Right woman's public ethos can be better explained, if not resolved, through an analysis of the private subjectivity represented in popular Christian texts, which is, not surprisingly, fraught with contradictory complexity, too. The prosopoiia of the Christian Right woman results in a subjectivity that can be likened to a patched together mask that combines scraps of fundamentalist Christianity with its archaic gender codes of submission and capitalism, part of which depends on the gendered role of the wife as the "family consumer." And most importantly, even though she is part of what is currently the dominant force in America, the Christian Right woman also believes herself to be and behaves as a victim of secular forces. Through their connections to sacrifice, both the Madonna/Whore paradigm and the notion of powerful submission coalesce into the formation of a subject position of victimhood that the Christian Right woman claims for herself. Oxymorons be damned; according to Kintz, there is an ever-ready fundamentalist panacea: their version of woman "is not contradictory because—always already—God does not contradict himself" (37).

As was discussed in Chapter Two, postmodern subjects suffer from a kind of schizophrenia Frederic Jameson explains as a breakdown of the signifying chain. This

breakdown is an effect of the inability of the postmodern subject to successfully unify the past, present, and future, resulting in a kind of schizophrenia that is “a series of pure and unrelated presents in time” (568). Women of the Christian Right negotiate a mixture of historical contexts in their efforts to unify biblical texts and capitalism, old gender performances, and contemporary revisions of these performances. They are also coerced by all of the historical notions of class and race. Their prosopoiia is even more frenetic than the subjective facemaking of other kinds of American women. Nevertheless, they wear the patched mask of the Christian Right with a pride that threatens to supersede the other powerful forces in American politics.

The popular Christian Right texts previously discussed in Chapters Two through Four perpetuate a form of subjectivity construction that encourages Christian women to fracture themselves even further than the average American women. *Left Behind*, bestselling Christian women’s self-help books, and *The Passion of the Christ*, especially when taken together, paint a contradictory picture of Christian Right women’s subjectivity that is nonetheless consistent in its inclusion in almost all available forms of Christian discourse with a female audience. It could be argued that that this form of Christian Right subjectivity, although found in popular Christian Right texts, is not necessarily an accurate reflection of Christian Right women’s subjectivity. However, it is not just consumer products, like the books and films above, which contain these subjective seeds. All of the reductive ideas and the fractured subjectivity found in these texts are also perpetuated in the socio-political texts of Concerned Women for America, the political action powerhouse of Christian Right women.

Thinking of the collective ethos of Christian Right women as a patched mask provides an entry point into exactly what makes them such interesting subjects of analysis—their construction as gendered beings who continually construct and disperse a contradictory picture of themselves and their moral frameworks. They insist on their biological difference from men, welcoming the strict boundaries inherent in essentialism, while utilizing stereotypical patriarchal forms of modernist argument and power as their chosen rhetoric. Rather than asserting themselves differently from the masculine norm, they mimic patriarchal rhetoric and objectives, effecting their own masculinization. Yet Christian Right women also police the boundaries between “male” and “female” just as dutifully as they do the separations between themselves and feminists, never realizing how much they rely on each for their own identity politics and subjectivity.

As if this all were not complex enough, because the Christian Right, men and women, are part of a larger movement that is strictly conservative, Christian Right women must incorporate capitalist arguments into their religious rhetoric so thoroughly that right-winged conservative capitalist politics becomes synonymous with Christianity. The standard criticism of the Christian Right “buy-in” to capitalism as hypocritical allows for a too-easy dismissal of the power the capitalistic character of the Christian Right enables it to wield. The stereotype is so prevalent that it is a typical way of branding American politics as a whole in other countries, especially European countries, where it is considered an apparent hypocrisy that a country claiming to be Christian makes domestic and foreign policy decisions based on economic self-interest rather than the wider good of the people involved. This is where capitalism and the free-market come into play in the Christian Right, and many have trouble reconciling the contradictory aims

of the two schools of thought. Name-calling and the use of terms like “hypocrite” are an easy way to reconcile this confusing phenomenon, but like many simple solutions, this one cannot stand up to scrutiny. The sincerity of the Christian Right as a whole cannot be underestimated, so critiques of them must include some sort of explanation of how capitalism fits their worldview instead of simply chalking it up to hypocritical greed.

The Christian Right is a powerful political force that must be taken seriously. While they hold the rights to a “holier-than-thou” attitude, many of their critics might be described as having a “more-intellectual-than-thou” superiority complex that enables quick dismissals of the Christian Right as unsophisticated, anti-intellectual, and shallow. Many people even align the Christian Right with the South, an association that is no doubt attributable to the prominence of evangelical conservative Christianity in the Bible Belt. Thus, the stereotypes of Southerners—redneck, clannish, and, most significantly, ignorant—transfer easily in many people’s minds to the Christian Right, especially when leaders like Jerry Falwell, citizen of Lynchburg, Virginia, or the reverend Bob Jones of Greenville, South Carolina, are thought to epitomize the face of the Christian Right. Even our Texas-raised President George W. Bush, a born-again Christian inspired by Reverend Billy Graham (of Charlotte, North Carolina), is frequently summed up as unintelligent, a characterization that is often tied to poking fun at his “anti-intellectual” evangelical Christian beliefs. But assuming the Christian Right to be primarily Southern and therefore pitifully lacking intellectual savvy is one of the great misunderstandings of them—a misunderstanding that may even, to some extent, be intentionally perpetuated by the Christian Right. James Dobson’s Focus on the Family is located in Colorado, while both Concerned Women for America and the Heritage Foundation are headquartered in

Washington, DC, and the sophistication of their methods is so impressive that it would not be farfetched if one thought the stereotype of Christian Right redneck intentionally planted by many closeted efforts to encourage the American public, especially the liberal public, to underestimate the Christian Right.

To be sure, the Christian Right is a powerful political group this is aligned with right-winged conservative American politics. In fact, considering the political stances taken by the Christian Right is one of the best ways to distinguish them from other Christians, as “membership” in the Christian Right cuts across most Christian denominations. The Christian Right is a politically activist group. They are involved in “pro-life” (anti-abortion and anti-euthanasia), “pro-family” (anti-homosexuality and same-sex marriage), “family values” (anti-feminism) campaigns, and pro-Israel efforts and movements supporting the teaching of creationism and allowing prayer in public schools. Identifying the Christian Right according to what they *do* provides an important window into who they are—activists who have a mission to change the world, not by conversion alone, although this is certainly an important part of their vision. The Christian Right is and has been actively and purposefully creating revolution in America by attempting to implement radically conservative changes in all aspects of American life, from social relations to public policies. However, their portrayal of themselves is not as an offensive force; rather, they consider themselves to be in the defensive position. By claiming the position of the victim oppressed by powerful secular forces, they preserve their right to fight for “justice” against an all-encompassing enemy not far removed from the ubiquitous Beast Movement of Tim LaHaye’s *Left Behind*. There are countless organizations with limitless resources committed to this objective, some of

which include Focus on the Family, The American Family Association, The Heritage Foundation, The Christian Coalition, the Family Research Council, and Concerned Women for America (CWA).

Concerned Women for America and the Face of Christian Right Women

The last group mentioned above, CWA, offers a “site” in which to locate the identity of the Christian Right woman. Representing one of the largest Christian Right groups for women (if not *the* largest) and the largest “pro-family” women’s group in the country, CWA claims 500,000 members, has a ten million dollar operating budget, a monthly newsletter that goes out to 200,000 subscribers, a daily syndicated talk show on 25 stations, and “what may be the most effective multi-issue, grassroots lobbying network in existence” (Steven Gardiner <http://feminism.eserver.org/cw-of-a.txt>).

For Concerned Women of America, establishing credibility is an important part of politics, but CWA is not attempting to establish credibility with everyone; rather, their attempts at establishing credibility are aimed at a particular cross-section of society—American, middle-class, white, conservative Christian women who are probably already sympathetic to their message—that thinks through many of the same modernist frameworks they do. Having this narrow of a range makes establishing an ethos much easier, and the extensive CWA website makes it easy to discern for whom this ethos has been created.

CWA’s website portrays a version of their public ethos that makes it clear that they are not trying to convert non-Christians to their faith. They use terms that portray their expectation to reach only those readers who are not only Christians, but a very

conservative, politically aware, and fundamental type of Christian. Furthermore, their aim to excoriate other types of women is apparent from the outset, and they aggressively attack other views with a sharp, condescending, and sarcastic tone. CWA's ethos is also very much in line with conservative Republican politics, and their mainstream neoliberalism is calculated in order to contribute to this cause instead of compete with it or question its motives in any way. Modernist arguments are prevalent in the discourse of CWA and in most conservative discourse because many tenets of modernity complement the absolutes of conservative politics.

The Ethos of CWA and Modernism

Because modernism and postmodernism are often contested terms, I turn to the explanation offered by Carolyn DiPalma and Kathy Ferguson in "Modernism, Postmodernism, Feminism," which, although it resists definitions, does very effectively unpack both notions. Often, modern thinking utilizes absolutes and claims to know which version of truth or science or history is the best. One of its objectives is maintaining order and clarity, and one of its hallmarks is categorizing. Power is considered a force in modernist thinking, and politics is the struggle over that power, while gender analysis seeks to empower women to struggle against patriarchy and envision a different world. DiPalma and Ferguson even point out that Foucault went so far as to claim that the modern historical consciousness centers on revolution, and this is certainly true when one looks at the strides made in the modernist struggle for women's emancipation. According to modernist schools of thought, there is a stable distinction between what appears to be and what is, and the subject is centered and unified.

It is easy to ferret out the modern tenets relied upon by the Christian Right. Take for example, “Exposing CEDAW: Concerned Women for America Strongly Oppose CEDAW,” an article posted on the website of Concerned Women for America that opposes the international treaty created by the United Nation’s Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). CEDAW is most often called an international bill of rights for women. Its preamble and 30 articles define discrimination against women, and it delineates what nations belonging to the convention must do to end discrimination against women when it occurs. CEDAW was adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly, and as of 2006, 183 countries, or 90%, of the United Nations members belong to the convention. The United States is the only industrialized nation that does not belong to the convention ([www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw 6/2](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/6/2)).

Although “Exposing CEDAW: Concerned Women for America Strongly Oppose CEDAW” was written in 2000, it is the CEDAW article (out of currently 113 Concerned Women for America-authored articles listed in a CEDAW search of the organization’s website) that most aptly unveils the group’s collective ethos in their appropriation of modern anti-feminist patriarchal discourse. CWA’s vehement opposition to CEDAW is based on the premise that the international treaty “is not necessary and would challenge the laws and culture of the United States” (Hulbert), which is a modernist claim that assumes the singular and absolute reality of American “culture” (white, male, heterosexual, Christian, capitalist). Furthermore, this claim that is the foundation for the rest of their argument against CEDAW depends on the modern (and patriarchal) notion that power relies on force and domination, and any alternative viewpoints are a

confrontational challenge to the dominant ideology that must be eradicated. Indeed, because of its attempt at the political subversion of traditional, masculine power, the treaty and its supporters are vilified by these women, whose religious activism is often actually a *postmodern* (and counterintuitive) discourse mix that furthers the hegemonic order of the New Right.

The rest of the article on CEDAW is divided into sections according to the articles of the treaty, and the authors “expose” the faulty rhetoric that they claim would be counterproductive for women of the world, beginning with the treaty’s basic definition of discrimination, asserting that “CEDAW’s definition of ‘discrimination’ is all-encompassing and dangerous. It goes beyond trying to establish equality, which U.S. laws already afford women. CEDAW is actually a global Equal Rights Amendment, a tool for radical feminists, who deny any distinctions between men and women” (Hurlburt). Not only do the authors criticize the treaty’s goal to modify the traditional, biologically and religiously based roles of men and women in order to gain the egalitarian ideal of choice, but they also denigrate the quest for equal pay for women, claiming that it is anti-capitalist. Furthermore, according to their “facts,” there is already equal pay for equal work, and statistics asserting otherwise are doctored by feminists. Relying heavily on categorization, the section that includes the equal pay issue draws boundaries around men and women, gender roles, and economic structures, and does so in a way that any argument is categorically refuted by their assumed definitions of the terms. Not surprisingly, this commentary also opposes the treaty’s feminist stance on reproductive rights and homosexuality.

Concerned Women for America is positing an illusory reality that can do nothing but bind them with its coercive production of identity. Many of their arguments are completely dependent upon strictly modernist forms that utilize such ideas as dichotomies and absolute truths. They conceive of politics in the traditionally modern vectors of power and struggle and are certainly aggressively possessive of their views in a way that they would term masculine were it indicative of a feminist's behavior. However, the very modernism of their ethos intersects in many places with their own ideas of masculinity so frequently that it brings into question their absolute gender. Based on the shaky foundation of many kinds of essentialism, a patriarchally produced ethos like the one represented by this particular article leaves no room for any other discourse other than the dominant Neoliberalism of Christian Republican politics. The collective ethos of CWA is, however, internally shifted and changed by the very postmodernism its fundamentalist side attempts to erase. Although they distance themselves from postmodern ideals, the ethos and subjectivity of CWA and by extension, all Christian Right women, are perpetually influenced and shifted by both modernity and postmodernity.

The Ethos of CWA and Postmodernism

One of the ways that postmodernity shifts CWA's ethos and political stance is by insinuating itself into their discourse. Once again, I am relying on DiPalma's and Ferguson's unpacking of the modern versus postmodern, which are dependent upon one another for their respective meanings. Postmodernism is concerned with disrupting modernism's stability, and it calls into question many modern techniques, such as

categorizing and unifying. Postmodernism is rather occupied by dispersing and pluralizing. Language is most especially a site of postmodern play, and words are often redefined into infinity, while irony tips meanings upside down. In postmodernism, subjects are definitely not centered and are an effect of social forces instead of a cause. Similarly, rather than reflecting reality, postmodern representations actually produce it. In this schema, gender becomes a space in which one can problematize the modern classifications of masculine and feminine, and postmodernism tends to dislocate the very boundaries between power and struggle—and indeed, everything else (DiPalma).

CWA and Feminist Frameworks

One of the most postmodern aspects of the collective ethos of the Christian Right women is their propensity to unwittingly utilize the same theoretical frameworks claimed by many of the very groups whom they rank highest among the hell bound, most notably feminist academics and activists. This borrowing blurs the demarcations between these groups in a distinctly postmodern fashion and increases the temporal schizophrenia of the Christian Right woman's ethos and subjectivity. In many of the cases to be discussed here, it is debatable whether or not feminism is the origin of the frameworks shared between the two supposedly diametrically opposed groups, but origination of thought is not the interesting issue. What is interesting is that the politically active women's movement of the Christian Right shares countless foundational premises with their arch nemeses whom they consider one of their most virulent oppressors, the feminists. Both groups tend to essentialize the other in their attempts to distance their movement's

activities and philosophies from the “evil other,” but often they find themselves, in one sense or another, on the same “team.”

Take, for example, the question of family and reproduction, which are both key issues for feminists and Christian Right women alike. Freudian ideas of family and sexuality can certainly be said to have affected both groups. According to Rosemary Tong, Freud claims that family is the force that determines everything for an individual. He asserts that family depends on the heterosexual, married mother and father coupling to produce “normal” children, who become normal adults through their indoctrination into society as boys or girls. The gender of an adult is created by his or her progress through the sexual stages, and only a normal progression will result in a normal gender. Femininity and masculinity are the natural result of the progress through these stages, and deviance from the norm proves that one of the stages was not successfully navigated within the confines of the family (31). Freud claimed that the onus of heavy sexualized responsibility is more oppressive on the girl than on the boy because both begin by loving the eroticized mother-woman. Only the girl, however, is required to switch allegiances and love another type of sexualized being. If she is “normal” as opposed to “deviant,” or lesbian, she will attach herself to a man. According to Freudian thought, an abnormal relationship with the all-important mother-woman is the cause of such deviance in boys and girls alike.

What is noteworthy here is that Freud’s ideas of family and biological determinism is a large part of what drives modern interpretations of the idea “woman.” Although psychoanalytic feminists reject his biological determinism and instead concentrate on the realms of interpersonal relations, power, and environment in the

formation of individuals, they must rely on Freud in order to define themselves as psychoanalytic. Contemporary bonding theories are direct descendants of Freudian psychoanalysis, and according to Linda Kintz, have been used in scientific discourse to blame mothers for all of children's problems (42). The Christian Right, too, is overtly concerned with the idea of family, often basing many of its arguments on the strictly defined "normal" family of a mother, father, and children. They, too, think that any kind of deviance, as they define it, can be traced back to the environmental domain of the family, and often blame women for the inadequacies of their children, especially working mothers. Furthermore, Freud's ideas of feminine and masculine characteristics as naturally occurring pieces of any normal woman or man is a fundamental aspect of the biological determinism prevalent in much of Christian discourse, both religious and political.

Radical cultural feminists, although they are classified differently from psychoanalytic feminists, also depend on what is often said to be essentialism. Both radical cultural feminists and women of the Christian Right can be said to depend on oversimplified and reductive (and modern) definitions of the idea, "woman," because both groups seem to depend primarily on the female body's reproductive capabilities for delineation of woman-ness. According to these two schools of thought, a woman's power and greatest privilege is her ability to give life through childbearing, and the natural result of this nurturing purpose are her feminine qualities. These feminine qualities are strictly classified and kept separate from the masculine qualities. Rather than trying to gain equality with men by becoming more like them, this worldview

stresses the superlative value of all things uniquely feminine and encourages women to emphasize feminine values and virtues: selflessness, empathy, nurturance, humility, etc.

This point of view may sound familiar because it is a more positive spin on the age-old masculinist argument that women, because of their mysterious life-giving abilities, are to be revered and protected from the harsher aspects of life. Often, this results in societal practices that leave women at a loss when attempting to do anything other than what has been dictated to be their purpose by masculine interpretations of their anatomy. This reverence for the feminine leads to other commonalities between the Christian Right woman and the radical cultural feminist that stem from this shared theoretical space grounding women in reproduction.

One such example is the association of the sexual act with morality. Radical cultural feminists assert that women should take no part in sexual activity that objectifies them. Therefore, sexual activity should occur only within the confines of an emotionally committed relationship, or the participants run the risk of contributing to the social milieu that results in the climate of sexual violence suffered by women everywhere. Although marriage is not part of this discussion, and indeed, heterosexuality is one of the main institutions critiqued as abusive to women in radical cultural discourses, according to the radical cultural feminist, a good woman is respectful; she does not allow anyone else to “use” her, nor does she “use” others.

Christian Right women base their acceptance of sexual activity on the definition of family and marriage as defined so clearly since the civil rights issues of the last few years: marriage is between one man and one woman and is the only union permitting sexual activity and/or intercourse. It is assumed that women and men who marry also

love one another, but that is not the most crucial piece of the morality puzzle for the Christian Right; rather, it is the institution of the spiritual and legal commitment of marriage that provides the only route to acceptable sexual activity. Any other sex is abominable in the eyes of God and certainly immoral. Like the radical cultural feminists, the Christian Right woman views the act of intercourse through a lens that minimizes its physical aspects, focusing instead on its connection to the spiritual or emotional realm of commitment and the social contract between sexual partners. Because of their propensity to repress the physical, both groups can be criticized for their otherworldly attitudes about sex, which is considered by many to be a basic physical need rather than a supernatural occurrence.

It should not be surprising, then, that radical cultural feminists are anti-pornography; for comparable reasons, battling pornography is also one of the six core issues for Concerned Women for America. In Tong's explanation of radical cultural feminists' position regarding pornography, three effects of pornography are cited as the basis for their opposition: pornography encourages men to harm women; pornography defames women by implying they have no self-respect; pornography leads men to think less of women and treat them as second-class citizens in public life (66). Many of these sentiments are echoed in web publications found on the CWA website. In "Caught in the Web of Porn: from Victims to Victors," Rosaline Bush, a CWA writer, claims that pornography is directly responsible for the increase in crimes against women and the condoning of these crimes in public life because pornography "evokes two dangerous rape myths: Violence is normal in male-female sexual relations and women enjoy rape." Her article is included in a bibliography of sorts that lists over 160 others, and it is one of

the many to include personal anecdotes from female victims of pornography. These anecdotes tell of the familial havoc wreaked by pornographic practices and are told by Christian women whose husbands are or were pornography addicts and emotionally or physically abusive as a result of their addiction.

Pragmatic Spirituality

There is another, more pragmatic, side to the women of the Christian Right, and this side counteracts some of the spirituality invoked in the previous arguments against pornography and purely physical sexual relationships. Most notable among the characteristics of these women is their ability to unify, organize, and mobilize millions of people across the nation in one of the most powerful movements ever seen in America. Everyone knows the aphorism, “Behind every strong man is a stronger woman,” and this colloquialism definitely applies to the last twenty-five or thirty years of the Christian Right movement. In the last quarter of a century, the Christian Right has transformed the American political landscape, along with the world’s, through a back-door organizational structure that is still overlooked by many liberals, regardless of its phenomenal success. This, by the way, is a large part of its power. Christian Right women are the often underestimated foundation of this wider movement that is fought from homes and churches across the country.

Participating women are informed about current issues and receive relevant paperwork at Bible studies and send their congresspersons and representatives emails and letters by the millions. Very well-organized phone trees and newsletters inform members of their duties and progress, and selected individuals are financed for travel to

Washington marches and elsewhere for conventions of larger groups that provide inspiration and instruction for the coming year. This kind of structure displays Christian Right women's modernist faith in America and its systems. They believe in the ideals of hard work begetting achievements and legislative justice. In this way, Christian Right women's groups, like Beverly LaHaye's CWA can easily be compared to Liberal feminist groups, like the National Organization for Women (NOW).

Because of their political basis, these kinds of conservative political groups can be said to share a few general characteristics. They both conceive of humans as rational beings, separated from the animals by their intellect; this conception privileges the rational over the emotional and is the foundation for the masculinist discourse of neoliberalism, which gives "rights" priority over the "good." In this discourse, everyone is free to prosper in the competitive market, and it is this right that is protected at all costs. Both CWA and NOW seek to reform the current system, rather than replace it, and this notion of reform posits a certain faith in the status quo and the existing structures as fundamentally just. It is not surprising, then, that both groups are often criticized (from their own prospective corners) as existing only for white, middle-class women because only white, middle-class America has the good fortune to be in a position to want to maintain the status quo. Both CWA and NOW are making attempts to answer these charges by casting a wider net in terms of potential members and leaders, but their reputation as WASP organizations will be a hard one to shake and with good reason.

Although the ethos of CWA, which I am positing as the representative ethos for most politically active Christian Right women, is formulated through a modern lens, there are still aspects of their public face that smack of the postmodern. Ironically enough,

these postmodern occurrences of discontinuity of collective identity and incoherence of theoretical vision destabilize the entire structure of many of the Christian Right woman's basic premises, most especially the separation between their definitions of men and women and women and feminists, both of which fall under the gender issues umbrella. This leaning toward the postmodern is not at all surprising to its students because one of postmodernism's primary features is its pervasiveness, and Christian Right women, no matter how much they wish to the contrary, are temporally situated within postmodernism. They, like the rest of us, cannot escape outside of it and have certainly not escaped its subjective effects; the postmodernism of their private subjectivities is certainly problematizing what they think is a coherently constructed public ethos. So, if one wants to better understand the modern public ethos of the Christian Right woman, it is necessary to better understand the construction of her private and postmodern subjectivity.

The Gender Code of Powerful Submission

Although many proponents of conservative Christianity insist that their version of the faith is a pure and literal interpretation of God's very word, all ideologies are bound in their particular time and space. Even the gender codes of conservative Christianity, although they may seem archaic and stagnant, cannot escape the pervasiveness of postmodernism. What can be interpreted as an oversimplified system of gender relations is in fact a much more complex negotiation that further problematizes the Christian Right woman's subjectivity construction, especially in light of its intersections with Butler's notion of gender performance and Jameson's schizophrenic subject. Part of the Christian

Right woman's more private gender performance, as opposed to the ethos projected by groups like CWA, is an internalization of the Madonna/Whore paradigm that manifests itself in the much discussed powerful submission of the Christian Right woman. Powerful submission is the ultimate postmodernizing of the ancient societal requirement of women to be subordinate in a contemporary world that calls for them to simultaneously assert themselves. The contemporary Christian Right woman, remember, chooses a submission that is powerful because she willfully links her own self-sacrifice to that of Jesus Christ, and in this way, ultimately robs her male counterparts of their most valuable role model.

All of the Christian self-help books analyzed in Chapter Three offer advice on how better to submit, especially to one's husband. This advice involves an almost playful, very postmodern manipulation of words, spiritual discourse, and relationships that allows a Christian Right woman to fulfill her duty to submit without ever completely relinquishing the idea that she is in charge. The discourse of powerful submission is an unrecognized appropriation of some forms of feminism, yet the Christian Right explicitly names the feminist the Whore, claiming Madonna status for those women who resist its allure. This version of the Madonna paradigm, as the self-help texts demonstrate, includes some subjective techniques in a woman's repertoire that are actually accommodations to the social milieu in which Christian Right women find themselves.

Christian Consumers

Another accommodation of Christian Right women is their consumerism. Political conservatism and its neoliberal goal of rampant capitalism provide another well-

worn aspect used to construct these coherently gendered subjectivities. American women of the Christian Right may be spiritually motivated, but just like their male counterparts, and indeed, all Americans, they are also created as consumer subjects by the capitalist culture from which they come. Christian products are a niche market that is no longer much of a niche but a vast territory staked out by savvy marketers who conduct meticulous market analyses. Nothing is sacred, even to the Christian marketer. If a Christian woman has problems with budgeting, she can learn to “look at money God’s way” by attending one of Doug Britton’s Christian financial planning seminars. If she wants to better understand the American war on terrorism and does not mind paying the yearly fee, one of the prophecy scholars associated with Tim LaHaye, author of the apocalyptic thriller series, *Left Behind*, will send her daily emails connecting world events to their interpretation of Revelation. Even parents who think one of their children might be homosexual can purchase one of Focus on the Family’s publications, *Love Won Out*, to “cure” their child of the illness of sexual deviance. Some of these books even advocate gendered consumerist practices, such as masculine-looking women learning to buy and apply makeup with the guidance of more experienced Christian performers of the feminine gender. Christian Right women are definitely conservatives, and conservatives believe in the most extreme forms of capitalism. Even though the discrepancies between Christianity and capitalism seem irreconcilable, this fusion successfully creates one of the parts of the feminine Christian subjectivity that, when combined with gender, is most unshakeable.

More liberal American and Western European arguments against Christianized domestic and foreign policy are based on the assertion that conservative Christians are

hypocrites because self-serving capitalists cannot be “loving their neighbors as themselves.” However, this is a categorical confusion because liberals cannot possibly conceive of the metaphors that sustain and justify the conflation of capitalism with contemporary Christianity. This conflation is confusing to anyone outside of the fundamentalist loop, but a coherent and concise explanation of the powerful and meaningful myth of God as the original backer of American capitalism is accomplished by George Lakoff in *Moral Politics: How Liberals and Conservatives Think*. According to Lakoff, the conservative view that Christianity and capitalism do not contradict one another can be explained through cognitive science, which he uses to delineate the “nation as family metaphor” utilized very differently by both conservatives and their liberal counterparts. He effectively explains why conservatives and liberals cannot attempt to understand one another without trivializing the views of the opposing group. He maps countless metaphors used by both groups to understand their very different worlds. Although all of his discussion is useful, an oversimplified version of his explanation of the conservative belief that capitalism is the most morally upright system is all the given space allows.

Conservatives run their own families according to a strict “father model” that patriarchally practices a tough love, eventually resulting in children who grow up to be disciplined individuals with traditional morals:

Strict Father morality assigns highest priority to such things as moral strength (the self-control to stand up to external and internal evils), respect for and obedience to authority, the setting and following of strict guidelines and behavioral norms, and so on. Moral self-interest says that

if everyone is free to pursue their self-interest, the overall self-interests of all will be maximized. In conservatism, the pursuit of self-interest is seen as a way of using self-discipline to achieve self-reliance. (35)

In short, conservative Christians believe that God helps those who help themselves. If one considers this idea in light of different Christian ideas like the Puritan work ethic or Catholic asceticism, one can easily see how conservatism is intrinsically linked with Christianity. In essence, Christianity, political conservatism, and economic conservatism create a trinity that is self-reinforcing and self-propagating. Even conservatives who are not religious recognize the importance of supporting the status quo by supporting the values of many types of contemporary American Christianity. And when combined with the current climate of Neoliberalism, contemporary American Christianity mixes religiosity with self-reliance. Under this system, which posits that self-reliance is evidence of both morality and the ability to prosper financially, wealth equals goodness equals wealth. Although both conservatives and liberals employ modernist strategies to make sense of the world (categories, metaphors, and such), conservatives can be linked to modernism because of their love for singularity of tradition, focus, meaning, and a singular reality. Liberals, likewise, can be more closely linked with postmodernity because they more often value plurality of just about everything that the conservative considers sacredly unified and singular. Hence, it is easy for conservatives to call liberals anti-American socialists without vision.

There is even the conservative Christian view that God is a capitalist, even though this kind of anachronistic projection onto a supernatural being seems profane to some Christians. In one particular argument that has had a powerful effect on domestic and

foreign policy, Michael Novak, a member of the American Enterprise Institute, argues that the creativity of the corporation is a reflection and extension of God's natural law; therefore, restricting corporations from their activities is tantamount to a mortal sin. Furthermore, it is an American duty to give the gift of free enterprise to the rest of the world (217). Cultural and material imperialism has been redefined: "Corporate activity and the export of U.S. culture are now overtly and without apology defined as the highest expression of God's will, the missionary extension of his culture to the rest of the globe" (219).

Although these examples are drawn from Christian Right thinkers who are men, it stands to reason, given what we know about the Christian Right women's support of these men, that the women, too, support these goals of Christly capitalism, too. Not only do they participate in preserving the status quo by making all of the different Christian markets aimed at them a resounding success, but they actively support capitalism in their political movements, as well. They wield incredible power as a consumer group in all of their boycotts of companies, like the nationwide Christian boycott of Proctor and Gamble because of its support of sexual diversity and the Disney boycotts, which resulted from Disney's support of the "homosexual agenda" and the prevalence of skimpy outfits for cartoon women in Disney movies. Although a true free market would allow anything to exist that would sell, these women do not question the contradictions of their own politics.

One of the six core issues of Concerned Women for America is the preservation of the sovereignty of the United States against the rest of the world, especially the more socialist E.U. and U.N. Although they do not ever explicitly state their views of the free

market as the moral market, their arguments about sovereignty and economy assume it. They even call some of their social solutions “free market solutions,” such as their argument for “a la carte” cable pricing, the free market solution for Christian television viewers who do not want certain channels available in their homes no matter how the remote is controlled. CWA is seeking an agreement in which cable companies will allow consumers to group channels according to their own preferences rather than the channel clusters formed by the cable companies. In the wording of this online article, the words “free market solution” are inserted without explanation and in such a way that their meaning is meant to be a given to initiated readers, who are already conservative Christian Right women (Kieder).

The Christian Right woman’s subjectivity, then, cannot help but be shaped by these arguments for capitalism, and she is constructed as a consumer by the moral free market. One might argue that all Americans are constructed as consumers, but what is different about the Christian Right point of view is that now the pressures to consume are compounded and accelerated by a new pressure to do so on moral and spiritual grounds. George W. Bush did not speak in a vacuum after September 11th when he encouraged Americans to do their patriotic duty and spend money. Supporting America’s version of capitalistic democracy is now a moral imperative for all conservatives, and Christian Right women are some of the most passionate supporters of this vision, which is also the hegemonic one.

Dominant Victims

The idea of hegemony brings us full-circle to the dominance of the Christian Right viewpoint. In many scenarios, the conservative Christian viewpoint is the dominant viewpoint; conservatism has successfully incorporated parts of evangelical and fundamentalist Christianity into itself and vice versa. This is most obviously illustrated in the dominance of conservative Christianity within the ranks of the evangelical, and sometimes fundamentalist, Bush administration, although there are nationwide movements that exert perhaps more political pressure than even the White House. How, then, with all of this active political pressure from the Christian Right, can Christian Right activists claim to be the victims of a secular America? Not only do they make this claim, but they make it in such an effective way that their often fallacious reasoning is invisible to their audience. Take, for example, David Limbaugh (brother to Rush), who argues to reverse the seemingly impossible status of the dominant victim. He reframes American Christian dominance into a question of numbers by recoding it as “majority,” cites global examples of minority rule, as in the case of South Africa, and finally ends this particular rhetorical trick with a leap of logic that, while true, ignores the present dominant situation of American Christians: “Being a majority will only guarantee insulation from discrimination if that majority has the political power, coordination, and will to protect itself. We know from our experience that vocal, militant minorities often get their way, to the detriment of the majority” (355). Without ever speaking directly to it, Limbaugh has derailed the fact that not only are Christians the majority, but their’s is also the dominant ideology. Simultaneously, he has called up feelings of victimization

and grounded his victim's discourse within a few of the world's most deplorable social injustices.

Because it is impossible to quantify, the Christian Right's victimization cannot be proven, but it is certainly an influential portion of the collective Christian Right public ethos and private subjectivity, and whether or not this idea was originally planted to mobilize the Christian community, it is now a reality for millions of voting American Christians. Janet Folger, influential Christian Right political strategist and author of *The Criminalization of Christianity: Read This Before it Becomes Illegal*, sensationally insists that the culture war could well result in a liberal police state in which Christians are locked up for simply living as such. In her introduction, Folger rhetorically focuses on literal imprisonment as a motivating force behind her call to action: "There is a war going on for the future of our country. Most people know that. What they may not know is that if the Christians lose, the result won't be just public policy with which we disagree; it'll be a *prison sentence* for those who disagree" (13). Later, she states her intention to incite a reactionary activism:

I'm writing this book not to make the case for you to get involved in the issues of the day because I think it's a good idea, or even because God has commanded us to do so. I'm writing because I believe that if we don't speak up *now* on the issues in our culture, they will be used to silence us. You can stay in the closet if you like, but stay there much longer and you're going to wake up to find a padlock on the outside of the door [. . .] Yes, we have the *right* to remain silent, but if we use it much longer, we

may hear those words being read to us just before we see the inside of a prison cell. (31)

Just like much of the Christian Right, Folger believes gender to be the predominant site of struggle in America's cultural war, claiming that the "*greatest threat* to [Christian] freedoms comes from the homosexual agenda" (16). As sensationalist as Folger sounds, she is garnering the attention of many Christians, especially Christian Right women, because they are already subjectively focused on their own victimization.

An ironic twist in the gender performance and subjectivity construction of the Christian Right woman is identification with victimhood, not because she is a woman, but because she is a Christian. This identification is an extension of the Madonna/Whore paradigm and powerful submission and is yet another subjective negotiation that allows Christian Right women to reconcile contradictory ideologies under the umbrella of one consciousness. Rather than explicitly resisting, Christian Right women choose ways to fight their subjugation that can be fused somehow with the world views under which they suffer, even as they reject the notion that they are subjugated by their world views at all. Like the subjective negotiation of a powerful submission, the rhetoric of victimization must contain a subjective process by which this self-classification can be made possible without condemning conservative Christian worldviews. Christian Right women guarantee their places at the Christian table by refusing to acknowledge their own victimization from within the confines of their supposed safe zones—the church and the family—while simultaneously including the rhetoric of victimhood in their self-descriptions in reference to the secular world's treatment of them as Christians and women. However, the world is no longer so hostile an environment for the Christian

Right, and this ability to invert their own realities is perhaps what reveals these women as powerful agents. Their subject position of victim is just another reversal of their realities—like their powerful submission—to reconcile the contradictions of their postmodern subjective multiplicity. Nevertheless, claiming victimhood status is a mysterious move, and whether it is rhetorical or “real” to Christian Right women, it fashions another patch that needs to be stitched onto their postmodern subjective mask.

Concerned Women for America certainly claims the subjectivity of victims. Much of their ethos is based on a foundation that the American Way, or the Christian Way, is under attack by feminists, homosexuals, Satanists, liberals, global forces, and anyone else that transgresses the boundaries they have unilaterally set for the rest of the world. Especially virulent is CWA’s focus on gender issues in its condemnation of feminism, although their political success is, in large part, based on the success of feminist activists that created a space for the more insular, conservative Christian women’s movements. In one article, “Feminism and the Family,” CWA’s prolific Dr. Janice Crouse performs the same leap of logic accomplished by David Limbaugh when he discusses Christian victimization in terms of South Africa’s apartheid. Crouse links the potential effects of American feminism’s inherent untruths to the horrific massacres of millions at the hands of Hitler, Stalin, Lenin, Mao, and Pol Pot (www.beverlylahayeinstitute.org). Almost 200 articles discuss feminism in just this light. According to CWA, feminism is a source of pervasive immorality that is actively infiltrating everything from the public school system to the federal courts in its efforts to take over the world and especially to perpetrate abominable punishments on all Christians.

Oppositional Ideologies and the “Victimhood” of Christian Right Women

One of the only ways to effectively theorize about the subjectivity of Christian Right women is to accept their view of themselves at some point in an attempt to understand both their conscious and unconscious self-constructing, as well as their ideology’s construction of them. The conservative Christian Right’s propensity to see itself as the victim of world secularization may seem a paranoid delusion, but to millions of Americans, it is reality. Given this acceptance, the theorist makes available postmodern tools hitherto abject in the study of Christian Right women. Including the theory of the victim in analysis of this group enriches any study of these women because they are *thinking* and *behaving* as victims even as they are enjoying dominance, and this certainly affects their influence on the world around them.

Chela Sandoval’s *Methodology of the Oppressed* provides one theoretical overlay through which to view the women of the Christian Right as victims. Sandoval’s ideas shed considerable light on how these women can be linked to other groups of oppressed peoples through behaviors and strategies she identifies in her study of American third world feminists. For my purposes, Sandoval’s five oppositional ideologies and five methodologies of the oppressed are most useful in connecting Christian Right women to other groups of victims, namely the third world feminists who are Sandoval’s focus. These feminists were fighting the battle of essentialism, not only with the world at large, but also with the hegemony of white, middle class, American feminism. Although it is an almost ironic assertion, the white, middle-class, dominant group that comprises the Christian Right women’s collective is utilizing the same subjectivities and strategies

employed by American third world feminists, who are, by definition, women of color and often of lower-than-middle-class socioeconomic status. In short, American third world feminists have been victimized by society at large and by feminism itself, and their courageous reaction to this very literal victimization is their third world feminist movement.

Sandoval defines five oppositional ideologies utilized by oppressed peoples, all of which are also utilized by CWA: the equal rights form, the revolutionary form, the supremacist form, the separatist form, and the differential form. Sandoval, in her discussion of Jameson and afterward, all but calls her work on the oppositional ideologies a reaction to both Jameson's call for a new system of cognitive mapping (28, 9), as well as an answer to his lamentation that oppositional activism is no longer possible under the pervasive co-optation of postmodernism. These modes are described by the author as cultural and topographical points that map a history of oppositional consciousness as

a set of critical points within which [those] seeking to transform dominant and oppressive powers can constitute themselves as resistant and oppositional citizen-subjects. These points are orientations deployed by those subordinated classes who seek subjective forms of resistance other than those determined by the social order itself. (53)

That Christian Right women have located themselves at the same points on this map as third world feminists aptly makes the case that they are sincere in their belief that they are victims, and perhaps they are, but who are their true oppressors? The question of whether or not America is a secular nation that targets Christians is not one that can be validated or disproved here. However, that the collective subjectivity of the Christian Right

woman claims a victim's role can indeed be proven partly through an analysis of their adoption of this role using Sandoval's oppositional consciousnesses.

These modes of consciousness can also be linked historically to the different stages of feminism, which began with the First Wave, in which women sought equality with men. Women who participate in the equal rights form of oppositional consciousness argue that all differences between men and women are based on appearances or a physical reality that is not important compared to the premise that everyone is created equally, regardless of biological sex (55). This oppositional ideology is most easily seen in feminist groups, such as NOW, whose connections with the Christian Right woman has already been established. Both groups believe in the American legislative system and wish to reform this existing system rather than create a new one. Christian Right women believe they are victimized by what they consider to be discriminatory injustices they suffer at the hands of secular America and interest groups. For example, the CWA website repeatedly refers to the "homosexual agenda," which is allowed to disseminate its "propaganda" in the same public schools where "there is no place for the Bible [. . .]. Often, [parents] feel intimidated by school bureaucrats and helpless to do anything about it" (LaBarbera).

The Second Wave of feminism coincides with the revolutionary form of oppositional ideology, which is implemented by those oppressed people who have lost faith in the current systems. This ideology is in opposition to the Equal Rights form. Not only does the revolutionary form highlight the differences between men and women instead of insisting that these differences are superficial, but this form also calls for a restructuring of society. Marxist and socialist feminists belong to this group (55-56,7),

and although the Christian Right women have very little in common with these two feminist groups on the surface, they do often reveal a desire to make revolution in America, and have, in some ways, already succeeded. Christian Right women's wish to impose their religious beliefs on the lives of all American citizens through cultural means and through legislation, reveals them to be revolutionaries far more successful than the feminists they claim are conspiratorially taking over the country.

Feminism's Third Wave encompasses both the oppositional ideologies of supremacism and separatist. The oppositional ideology of supremacism glorifies the differences of the oppressed by claiming that oppressed people have evolved further than their oppressors and are more suited to lead because of their higher morals and vision (56,7). Radical and cultural feminists, as well as nationalists and the Christian Right, fall under this category. The following excerpt from a letter to President Bush from CWA portrays the kind of supremacist thought perpetuated by Christian Right groups. Note that this example is one of American supremacy that does not even mention a spiritual issue directly: "Americans are committed to liberty, as our costly efforts to bring that precious gift to Afghanistan surely show. While we understand that it will take time for Afghans to mature in their enjoyment of so great a gift—just as it did for Americans—maturation involves learning what is required and expected as a member of civilized nations" (www.cwfa.org "CWA Thanks President Bush").

Often, the supremacist form of oppositional consciousness leads to the fourth mode, which is the separatist one. Separatists have given up on being considered equal or transforming the world and have decided that their differences—differences which make them superior—should not be tainted through interactions with the inferior, outside

world (56,7). CWA supports the sometimes separatist practice of homeschooling, citing the following as some reasons parents choose to homeschool: “many find the worldview and curricula of evolution, liberal sex education and ‘value-neutral’ theories objectionable. They want their children’s education to include character and biblical principles” (www.cwfa.org “Home Schools Set New Standards”).

The fifth and final mode of oppositional consciousness^{xvi} is the differential form, which allows adherents to move at will within and between the other four modes, depending on which mode is best suited to the task at hand. Sandoval explains: “Out of the imperatives born of necessity arose a mobility of identity that generated the activities of a new citizen-subject, and that revealed yet another model for the self-conscious production for resistance” (42, 3). Sandoval likens the differential mode of consciousness to the

clutch of an automobile, the mechanism that permits the driver to select, engage, and disengage gears in a system for the transmission of power.

The differential represents the variant; its presence emerges out of correlations, intensities, junctures, crises. Yet the differential depends on a form of agency that is self-consciously mobilized in order to enlist and secure influence; the differential is performative. (57)

The Christian Right woman is performing her role within the realm of the differential mode of consciousness as she moves in and out of the other four modes of consciousness: equal rights, revolutionary, supremacist, and separatist. What is not clear is whether or not this is a conscious strategy; it is a subjective negotiation very similar to the powerful submission philosophy adopted by contemporary Christian Right women. After

postmodernism made it impossible for Christian Right women to continue their existence without recreating their subjectivities (unless they were completely committed to separatism as an oppositional mode of consciousness), their evolution included temporally schizophrenic adaptations that spread through necessity and modeling between women participating in the grass-roots action of prayer groups and potluck suppers.

However, there is one important distinction that must be made between Sandoval's differential consciousness and the movement between oppositional ideologies accomplished by the Christian Right woman. Sandoval's differential consciousness is posited as a technique of third-world feminists reacting to hegemonic feminism, who demanded "a new subjectivity, a political revision that denied any one ideology as the final answer, while instead positing a *tactical subjectivity* with the capacity to de- and recenter, given the forms of power to be moved" (58, 9). Christian Right women are employing the differential mode of consciousness in order to achieve the inverse of this goal; their desire is to establish their ideology as the center and re-modernize the postmodern in every way. They are, in this scenario, in the role of the hegemonic force, but they are successfully adapting the tools of the oppressed in order to further conquer.

Methodologies of the Oppressed and the Christian Right Woman's Definition of "Family"

Along with the oppositional ideologies identified by Sandoval, Christian Right women also utilize the technologies with which the oppressed dismantle both literal and figurative colonization through their practice of differential consciousness. With the explanation of these technologies, Sandoval claims to have answered Foucault's

admonition that in order to advocate the use of differential consciousness, theorists must first identify and sharpen the “inner technologies” that assist in its development in the internal and material lives of those who will use it (67). Sandoval’s summary of these five methodologies and their connections is so concise that it cannot be paraphrased:

The first technology is the semiotic perception of objects-in-culture as signs of power to be taken in, read, and interpreted. The second is the method for the decolonization of meaning through its deconstruction [. . .]. The third, “meta-ideologizing,” like the previous two, requires *differential movement* [another technology] for its existence, first in the movement through perception demanded by the “inner” technology of semiology, and then in the “outer” and differential movement of identity itself through social order in the effort to effect change. [. . .] Under the recognition of meta-ideologizing as a technology, poetry, silence, and all other technologies can be viewed as ideological weaponry [. . .]. These skills [of using said weapons] [bring] about new ethical and political standards in the name of egalitarian and democratic social change: the technology of “democratics.” (113)

In fact, by looking at how Christian Right women attempt to define “family,” we can see their use of these technologies within each mode. Because they are not attempting to understand the concept “family,” but rather create an exclusive *definition*, their efforts provide a fertile site from which to examine their need for boundaries between themselves and those whom they consider to be their oppressors. Policing gender is a large part of this quest, which is certainly a moral and spiritual obligation for

these women. CWA, in fact, lists the definition of “family” as one of its six core issues and includes hundreds of articles written for their website from 1996 until the present as part of its argument for its own definition. The Christian Right’s definition of family is portrayed by CWA as the union between one heterosexual man and one heterosexual woman united in legal and holy matrimony who are planning to have their own child or children or have successfully had a child or children. Using this definition, I will explore the Christian Right women’s use of the five technologies of oppositional consciousness identified by Sandoval.

The Christian Right woman’s definition of family reveals her utilization of semiotics because their definition of family ignores its categorization as a historically produced concept and propagates instead an alternative reality of its definition as a natural reality. Their reclassification of family ignores, as well, the inclusions and exclusions inherent in such a narrow definition of this concept. By including certain families as such and excluding others, they create and perpetuate an unjust system that legally and morally recognizes the sign of “family” as a location of vast resources of power and alienation. In order to create this definition, Christian Right women deconstruct alternative concepts of family in order to better understand the most effective way to reconstruct it for their own political ends. Both semiotics and deconstruction are used in their arguments against homosexual marriage and adoption, and although most oppressed people use these methodologies to return meaning to a more *mobile* state, Christian Right women use them to restabilize the signifier “family” and the signified “family.” Meta-ideologizing, which is the creation of new significations of a higher level created on a foundation of the old ideology, intends to “repoliticize language” (110), and

is a tactic that Christian Right women use when they conduct the aforementioned reconstruction of the concept family for their own purposes. It becomes conflated with godliness, goodness, and all that is American, and in all of this conflation rises a new ideology of the Family.

Differential movement, a power of differential consciousness, allows Christian Right women to navigate through the consciousness by way of the above methodologies and is therefore, utilized in the space between each of these technologies. Sandoval explains that differential consciousness allows the oppressed to “occupy or throw off subjectivities in a process that at once enacts and decolonizes their various relations to their real conditions of existence” (53), and differential movement is the actual performance of this consciousness between ideologies or methodologies. In short, it is the movement between subjectivities. According to the worldview of the Christian Right woman, the practice of what Sandoval refers to as democratics, rather than being the use of the above weapons for egalitarian social change, would be the quest centered on conservative Christian values and the status quo of current Neoliberalism. Christian Right democratics is part of the process of defining family because it is the over-arching concept of their moral objective that acts as the code under which they justify the machinations of the family as a construct. The attempt to define family is, in large part, a defensive strategy, at least according to Christian right women, who claim it is their responsibility to protect their worldview and way of life from all of the secular forces who incessantly threaten it.

Victimhood is a subjective role adopted by many women who are not at all associated with the Christian Right and one that contributes greatly to many women’s

process of feminist self-actualization. Christian Right women do not, by any means, hold a monopoly on any of the subject positions we have attributed to them and for that matter, they are only one example of the postmodern schizophrenic subjectivity suffered by all American women. Because of the subjective conditions in America, women are conflated as sex objects and active agents, and they are constantly confronted with negotiating these contradictory subjective roles. What sets the Christian Right women apart is the extremity of their temporally schizophrenic subjectivities, their refusal to recognize that their public ethos and private subjectivities are anything but cohesive and solid wholes, and most importantly, their effects on America at large and other American women in particular. Christian Right women are furthering a goal of the Christian Right to reform American society in their own image. Their quest for revolution, according to many accounts, is working, and one of the main reasons for its success is the politically active Christian Right woman.

Sandoval, in her explanation of differential consciousness, links Christian Right women to yet another feminist theorist who is working against the reductive essentialism of some forms of feminism. Kathy Ferguson's *The Man Question: Visions of Subjectivity in Feminist Theory* provides an analysis of the categories that comprise the subjectivities of the main schools of feminist thought. In it, she examines what she refers to as mobile subjectivities, the genealogical approach that is her preferred feminism. Working within mobile subjectivities, one has the opportunity to utilize multiple lenses, each of which provides different, even contradictory ways of seeing the world. Using these different lenses, one can combine contradictory ways of seeing into one multi-faceted and inclusive entity of thought. In this manner, Christian Right women navigate their

Christian identity within other multiple sites of subjectivity, and they often employ a double, triple, even sometimes quadruple vision in their subjective negotiations between Christianity and capitalism, modernism and postmodernism, anti-feminism and feminism, and the rhetorics of dominance and victimhood. But in defining their subjectivity within these sites, Christian Right women part company with Ferguson. Ferguson stresses that “The identity practices of mobile subjectivities are produced by institutional realignments and material circumstances as well as by discursive deployments and shifts. When the structural arrangement of collective life changes, the people inhabiting them are often forced to resituate themselves and to renegotiate some elements of their identities” (175-6). Christian Right women, on the other hand, although they achieve subjective negotiations, still insist on pinning down clear definitions, which restricts their ability to activate differential consciousness in their movement from one technology to the other; this desire to define and claim knowledge of the “Truth” impedes their mobility, for “Mobile subjectivities are too concrete and dirty to claim innocence, too much in-process to claim closure, too interdependent to claim fixed boundaries” (Ferguson 161). As the example of the definition of family illustrates, Christian Right women seek to demarcate the boundaries between all subjectivity formation in their world, from family and marriage to Christian and non-Christian, and most fundamentally, man and woman.

Christian Right Women: Strategic Victims

Until recently, the Christian Right was discounted and condescended to by academic theorizing, and thus was encouraged to continue its subversion of American progress behind the scenes. Although she is a powerful force in America, special

condescension is reserved for the Christian Right woman because she is viewed as even more intellectually impoverished and misguided than her male counterparts. Many even consider her to be a harmless and impotent extension of her masculine protectors. Perhaps the reasoning behind these assumptions is based on her adoption of the victim's subject position through the confluence of the Madonna/Whore paradigm and the Christian notion of powerful submission. Because the Christian Right woman appears to be a victim, it must be so, and hence we fail to recognize her power. In actuality, Christian Right women are empowered by cloaking themselves in victimhood. They strategically gain the upper-hand over America and their husbands through the same methods of engendering superiority in their "opponents." A powerful submission is just another way of being underestimated by the "other."

Notes

ⁱ Star Parker, one of the few African-American Christian Right figureheads and activists, received a standing ovation at a Christian Coalition convention for using biblical text to prove that God is a capitalist.

ⁱⁱ 46% of Americans define themselves as Evangelicals (Gallup Poll, 12/9/2002)

ⁱⁱⁱ Tim LaHaye is the creator of the series and co-author with Jerry Jenkins, an experienced and successful Christian author whose influence is politically negligible when compared to the long-standing Republican reformer status of LaHaye and his wife, Beverly. Not surprisingly, LaHaye and Jenkins are not equal partners in their *Left Behind* publishing endeavors because Jenkins is reputedly not included in a new spin-off Apocalyptic series planned by LaHaye. Because it is LaHaye's political influence, when combined with his brainchild, *Left Behind*, that has returned the End Times to popular culture, I concentrate on LaHaye in this analysis. When I refer to "the author," I am referring to LaHaye only and feel justified in doing so because Jenkins is most easily likened to a ghostwriter, even in his own descriptions of himself and his writing process: "I get a fairly ambitious workup from Dr. LaHaye [. . .] I immerse myself in that stuff [. . .] I'm constantly referencing the prophecies and the commentary of Dr. LaHaye" (LaHaye LB Handbook 19).

^{iv} Although most Christians would probably regard the cross as an abstract symbol of loving sacrifice, it is more literally linked to the violence of the crucifixion, and so, in an inverse way, fits the narrative of *Left Behind* more effectively when considered in opposition to its more abstract and most common interpretation.

^v Historically speaking, conservative Christians who are also believers in the prophecy of Revelation have always been suspicious of technology due to the ways that popular prophecy has linked it with the Beast System—retail UPC codes have been said to be predecessors of the Mark, for example. *Left Behind* registers a definitive change in this stance, at least in regards to Apocalyptic fiction.

^{vi} In an attempt to reduce confusion about whether or not I am referring to the *Left Behind* series as a whole or the first book of the series, *Left Behind*, I will always refer to the series as such. When I use the title, *Left Behind*, I am referencing the first book of the series only.

^{vii} This series includes *Every Man's Battle*, *Every Young Man's Battle*, *Every Woman's Battle*, *Every Single Woman's Battle*, *Preparing Your Daughter for Every Woman's Battle*, *Preparing Your Son for Every Man's Battle* and countless guides, workbooks, and "Promise Books" to accompany each title.

^{viii} At least according to the book review included on the web site of *Publisher's Weekly* (www.publishersweekly.com)

^{ix} Just for the record, Beverly LaHaye's four temperaments are borrowed verbatim from her husband's numerous writings on the subject: *Spirit-Controlled Temperament*, *Transformed Temperaments*, *Understanding the Male Temperament*, and *Why You Act the Way You Do*. Tim LaHaye also developed his own personality measuring instrument, the LaHaye Temperament Analysis (LTA), which is advertised in the back of his and his wife's books.

^x For further clarification, I looked up the Table of Contents of the predecessor and young man's counterpart to *Every Young Woman's Battle*, which is entitled, *Every Young Man's Battle: Strategies for Victory in the Real World of Sexual Temptation*, and found that its authors, Stephen Arterburn and Fred Stoeker, did not have a corresponding chapter. Although there is no "Becoming Mr. Right," there is a chapter called, "What Girls Think," but somehow this title doesn't send the same message.

^{xi} Jesus's parable of three servants whose master, before he departed on a journey, gave them different sums of money, according to their differing abilities, and judged them each upon his return. The servant to whom he gave the least amount of money (one talent) had protected it by burying it, rather than investing it and increasing its amount like the other two servants. This servant is banished for his supposed laziness and negligent refusal to utilize his master's gift (Matthew 25:14-30).

^{xii} I am not neglecting to cite Dr. Robinson's credentials; Dr. and Mrs. LaHaye simply call her a "medical practitioner."

^{xiii} Peggy Law, 57, of Wichita, Kansas and Jose Geraldo Soares, 43, of Belo Horizonte, Brazil both died of heart attacks that occurred during a showing of *The Passion*.

^{xiv} All of the information regarding *The Passion of the Christ* in this first paragraph is taken from a review titled "Sacred Savagery: *The Passion of the Christ*" written by Pamela Grace and published by Cineaste on page 13 in its 3rd issue of the 29th volume on June on June 22, 2004.

^{xv} By categorizing certain traits as masculine and certain traits as feminine, I am not attempting to engage the argument so popular in essentialist discourses, but rather pointing out prevalent stereotypes that are problematized in my reading of *The Passion of the Christ*.

^{xvi} The Differential form of oppositional consciousness can be included in the Third Wave of feminism, but I prefer to think of it as being the antecedent of a new era. Although Sandoval does not explicitly say this, I believe her text lends itself to this interpretation.

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