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Surfing the Tide of Sex Anarchy:
How Sexual Co-Revolutionaries Remade Evangelical Marriage, 1960-1980

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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with a concentration in American History
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ABSTRACT

This project examines the conservative evangelical response to 1960s era sexual revolution in order to explain how and why evangelicals both resisted and adapted tenets of sexual modernity in a process that transformed the theological foundations underlying the conception of Christian marriage and sexuality. Though evangelicals and conservatives are typically portrayed as resisters to cultural and sexual change, my research reveals the ways in which conservative evangelicals agreed with key critiques of the sexual status quo in the 1960s, and deliberately worked to change Christian teachings and attitudes to keep them vibrant and attractive to postwar generations. Previous examinations of evangelical thought on sexuality has focused on rhetorical analysis and social history to the exclusion of examinations of the close ties between evangelical marital theology, sexual practice, and political activism. This project seeks to integrate all three into a cohesive historical framework that reveals evangelical response to sexual revolution as more complex and adaptive than it is typically described.

Close readings of conservative evangelical texts from 1960 to 1980 combine the long term editorial trajectory of *Christianity Today* magazine with ideological and theological texts from the 1960s with popular, practical texts from the 1970s to demonstrate that the evangelical marriage project was deliberate, deeply rooted in a modern hermeneutic of Biblical interpretation, and nimble in its ability and willingness to adapt changing sexual attitudes to accommodate Christian theology and practice. The resulting portrait of evangelical response to sexual revolution is more complex, contextualized, and nuanced than previous narratives.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

To evangelical Christians in America in the 1970s, a typical family's day neared its conclusion when Dad returned home from work, weary from fighting commuter traffic and irate customers, to find Mom freshly bathed, perfumed, and coiffured, waiting for him in the foyer wearing nothing but Saran wrap (the unsuspecting children presumably safely locked in their rooms). Feminists derided this astonishing image as sexist and retrograde, and more than two decades later critics still attributed it to advice given by Marabel Morgan in her book *The Total Woman*.¹ While this scene attracted enough attention to even be featured in the film *Fried Green Tomatoes*, Morgan never actually advised wives to trade their clothes for plastic wrap to seduce their husbands at the end of the day (although she did recount the story from one of her workshop attendees who actually originated the idea). The truth aside, the anecdote has survived as a buffoonish representation of Morgan's marital advice specifically, and evangelical Christians' marital admonitions generally. But despite the efforts of their cultural opponents, evangelicals are publishing books in ever greater numbers about marriage, sexuality, and family life. They are reacting to continuing perceived threats from the 1960s counterculture that they view as disruptive and destructive to what they term “traditional families.”

Historians, and the general public, typically describe the changes in American attitudes

1. Mark Oppenheimer, “In the Biblical Sense: A guide to the booming Christian sex-advice industry,” *Slate.com*, November 30, 1999, http://www.slate.com/articles/briefing/articles/1999/11/in_the_biblical_sense.html (accessed December 11, 2013). A greatly abbreviated version of this anecdote serves as the sole reference to Morgan or her book by John D’Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1988), 330.

regarding sexuality that began to dominate popular culture and practice in the 1960s as the sexual revolution. Evangelicals initially reacted to the sexual developments of the 1960s with critical disapproval, but by the 1970s sexuality became a major theme of evangelical literary culture. Historians have examined evangelical involvement in American society primarily from the standpoint of political involvement in presidential campaigns and national organizations such as the Moral Majority. While politics has been a prominent battleground in the culture war, contemporary evangelical politics is rooted in disputes over changing American sexuality. For evangelicals, the only legitimate and healthy form of sexuality is expressed in heterosexual marriage. The increasing importance and value placed on sexual expression by American popular culture influenced evangelicals to create a corresponding emphasis on formation and maintenance of “traditional families” and “family values.” While rhetorically appealing to family forms legitimized by their valued role in a mythical American past, the idea of the “traditional family” is a modern creation that relies on incorporation of key elements of popular culture into its ideological matrix in order to thrive. The “traditional family” as a dominant political and cultural motif is a second generation response to the sexual revolution of the 1960s. The first generation response, that of evangelicals in the 1960s and 1970s, focused more directly on the sexual revolution itself.

Conservative evangelicals may be typically understood as opponents of the liberalizing sexual trends that became dominant in the 1960s, but their role in that revolution is more complex than simple opposition. Evangelical publications with wide appeal, like *Christianity Today*, joined with evangelical authors to present to both Christian and secular communities a response to the sexual revolution that attempted to blunt its damage to Christian sexual norms and values by absorbing some of the impact of its criticisms in ways that changed evangelical

involvement with American culture and the social institution most prized by evangelicals: marriage. In this effort, evangelicals joined secular American society in embracing therapeutic culture and science as credible contributors to the construction of social and cultural values. Therapeutic culture played a key role in shaping the evolution of evangelical rhetoric about marriage, sex, and the family. Therapeutic culture inclined Americans towards turning to and accepting sociological and psychological perspectives about social and personal problems. Evangelicals also learned to incorporate these approaches into their arguments about sexuality and marriage, in some cases relying on them more heavily than scripture in attempts to convince the public to adhere to Christian sexual ethics.

Evangelicals saw the sexual revolution as a rejection of Christian sexual values and a direct threat to marriage, but they also came to believe that Christianity had strayed from its original roots regarding sexuality and marriage, and that this theological deviation had directly led to the secular, social challenges to Christian sexual ethics in the middle of the twentieth century. In order to effect the transformation of marriage that they saw as necessary in order to restore it to “authentic” Christian standards, evangelicals first acknowledged and validated certain aspects of the counter-culture's critique of Christianity and marriage. They acknowledged that sexual repression was a serious problem in American society, and identified the Christian components that demeaned even marital sexuality as stemming from ancient pagan infiltration into Church theology. They countered this “heresy” by interrogating Biblical texts anew and “restoring” what they contended were their original and ancient interpretations about sex. Next, they set out to reinvigorate Christian marriage as a sexual ideal, incorporating into it aspects of the new sexual and therapeutic prerogatives of the postwar era by tying them to apparent scriptural mandates. In this way, during the 1960s and 1970s, evangelicals increasingly sought

“the progressive enlightenment of the Church” as their primary means of cultural defense, claiming that “only when it can say, sincerely and without equivocation, 'thank God for sex,' can it begin to respond in any authentic manner to the challenge of the Sexual Revolution.”² But due to their strategy of absorption and deflection, I contend that evangelicals of the postwar generation were sexual co-revolutionaries rather than counter-revolutionaries. Evangelicals criticized what they saw as the excesses of sexual revolutionaries like Hugh Hefner, but they also embraced key elements of the secular, sexual zeitgeist, and in doing so transformed evangelical Christian marriage and evangelicals' own role in society. What began as a secular attempt to liberalize sexual values and reject Christian moral limitations prompted evangelicals to become more involved in politics, education, and public policy, and eventually stimulated the creation of new, subcultural, evangelical movements dedicated to abstinence and sexual purity. The contours of the sexual revolution eventually changed the evangelical landscape itself, so that by the twenty first century, sexual politics and sexual culture have become as integral to evangelical identity as they are to secular American society.

Though evangelicals have been part of the fabric of American society since early European settlement of North America, in the second half of the twentieth century evangelicalism became not just a description for a particular style of Protestant Christianity, but a distinct movement with a social and political agenda beyond a strict religious focus. Robert S. Ellwood pinpointed 1950 as the pivotal year in American religious history when evangelicalism became a separate movement within mainstream Protestantism. This evangelical movement was diffuse throughout American denominations and united through shared associations with parachurch organizations such as “educational institutions, publishing houses, radio ministries,”

2. David Mace, *The Christian Response to the Sexual Revolution* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1970), 134.

and publications like *Christianity Today*.³ The new evangelicalism appealed to a nostalgia for the flavor of old-time religion, but updated its transmission with modern communications and mass marketing, while benefiting from the rising discretionary income of the postwar middle class.

The subculture of evangelicalism has attracted the attention of scholars from departments of religion, sociology, and political science, though historians have focused on it primarily due to its relationship to modern conservatism and the post 1960s Republican party. Academic evaluations of evangelicalism cast it as an anti-modern force in American society that yearns for a nostalgic past and battles the onrush of a modern, secularizing present and future. This essay integrates theological, cultural, and political perspectives through close readings of evangelical texts in order to demonstrate how late twentieth century, conservative evangelicals refashioned and modernized their belief system into an assertive force in American society.⁴ Anti-modernism continues to be a potent element of conservative, evangelical perspectives on theology and society, especially in their rhetorical expressions, but, in contrast to the prevailing academic assessment, I contend that contemporary evangelicalism is no longer squarely within the anti-modern camp alongside Christian fundamentalism. In the 1960s, evangelicals' embrace of therapeutic culture and the language and technique of science began to blur the boundaries of anti-modernism in ways that have been largely unrecognized by observers used to viewing evangelicalism solely through an anti-modern lens.

This essay builds on the work of historians such as Elaine Tyler May, Lisa McGirr, Bethany Moreton, and Beth Bailey, whose histories of the conservative movement and post war

3. Robert S. Ellwood, *1950 Crossroads of American Religious Life* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 188.

4. For a thorough examination of the long trajectory of anti-modernism see T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981). Lears focused primarily on an earlier time period, but he also offered occasional musings about anti-modern sentiments in evidence in the 1970s.

sexuality parallel the development of contemporary evangelicalism.⁵ Middle to late twentieth-century evangelicals raised families in the shadow of the Cold War, rallied for Barry Goldwater, joined Phyllis Schlafly's Eagle Forum, lamented changing sexual norms, and went to church as part of lifestyles that integrated political, social, cultural, and theological values and aspirations. Evangelicals responding to the sexual revolution were simultaneously Christians and voters, parents and consumers, Cold War anti-communists and Walmart shoppers, functioning in society with a cohesive outlook that shaped their religious, social, and political beliefs and actions.

This essay is informed, firstly, by a foundation of knowledge regarding evangelical culture that primarily has been the domain of collegiate departments of religion and religious sociology, rather than history. Professor of American religions Randall Balmer toured multiple sites of evangelical culture, from church services and revivals to summer camps and Christian band concerts in order to pen *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory: A Journey into the Evangelical Subculture in America*.⁶ While unified by its rejection of Roman Catholicism, evangelical religion encompasses broadly diverse theologies and worship styles, which Balmer described from his personal standpoint as a self-described liberal evangelical. Balmer offered important insights into the role that millennial theology has played in influencing evangelical political and social engagement with American society throughout the Twentieth Century, and how the creation and maintenance of evangelical subcultures both shields evangelicals from “worldliness” and draws them back into participation with American culture as a whole. Balmer's perspective is somewhat unsympathetic towards evangelicals whose piety expresses itself in both

5. Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988); . Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Bethany Moreton, *To Serve God and Wal-Mart: The Making of Christian Free Enterprise* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2009); Beth L. Bailey, *Sex in the Heartland* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).

6. Randall Herbert Balmer, *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory: A Journey into the Evangelical Subculture in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

doctrinal and practical ways that Balmer disagrees with. But as an evangelical himself, he offered critiques that he clearly intended to be constructive, although they often come across as somewhat paternalistic. What Balmer accomplished most thoroughly was a series of observations about both the vitality and sustainability of conservative evangelicalism due to its construction of a subculture that is not just isolated from secular America, but is actually insulated from it by evangelicals' sense of cultural martyrdom. This generated conflict between conservative evangelicalism and popular culture often takes the form of contempt and disdain towards secularism, but primarily functions to create positive energy within evangelical communities.⁷ However, Balmer's conception of evangelicals' insularity fails to explain the electoral and political momentum enjoyed by evangelicals beginning in the late 1970s, because he sees conflict between conservative evangelicals and secular society as an evangelical rejection of modern society rather than a battle for influence.

Though evangelicals are usually understood to be in conflict with secular society, evangelicalism is itself a form of religious and ideological conflict. Jon R. Stone has argued that a “boundary approach” is necessary to understanding evangelicalism's central defining characteristic: its effort to stake out a triangulating position for itself between fundamentalism and liberal Protestantism.⁸ This triangulation established evangelicalism as a distinct movement within Protestantism by the middle of the twentieth century, but the multitude of competing organizations and leaders rallying support for an ever increasing number of social and political

7. Other relevant books by Balmer trace the theological shift from postmillennialism to premillennialism, the merger of evangelicalism with right-wing politics, and the long standing close connections between American religious and political traditions. Randall Herbert Balmer, *Blessed Assurance: A History of Evangelicalism in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999); Randall Herbert Balmer, *The Making of Evangelicalism: From Revivalism to Politics, and Beyond* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2010).

8. Jon R. Stone, *On the Boundaries of American Evangelicalism: The Postwar Evangelical Coalition* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 43-49, 178-184.

issues subsequently fractured its unity into competing factions in the late twentieth century.⁹ This fracturing prevents emergence of a singular leadership figure, but in no way diminishes the political clout of evangelicals who unite in common causes, if not under the same banner. A variety of scholars contributed to exploring the fractious nature of mid to late twentieth century evangelicalism in *The Variety of American Evangelicalism*. They highlighted the role of premillennial theology in modern evangelicalism, discussed the relationship of evangelicalism to fundamentalism, and outlined numerous denominational facets of the movement, from Baptists to Pentecostals, Mennonites, and the Holiness movement.¹⁰ Though internal divisions over ideology, factional infighting, and competing leaders often spell doom for organizations, the evangelical movement has thrived in spite of its internal contentions.¹¹ A significant aspect of the movement's long term success is related to its engagement with secular society, particularly its efforts to circumscribe contemporary sexuality.

Political science professor Michael Lienesch spent the majority of *Redeeming America: Piety and Politics in the New Christian Right* focused on evangelical engagement with secular American society. He covered evangelical views on the the self, economy, politics, and the world. But he also reviewed evangelical views on the family, specifically focused on gendered roles within family life, and raising children. He relied heavily on the 1970s and 1980s writings of Tim and Beverly LaHaye.¹² Lienesch focused especially on the apparent paradoxes of patriarchy and submission imposed on evangelical marriages by popular nonfiction authors such as the LaHayes. Evangelical guides to marriage in the 1970s instructed husbands to be strong

9. Stone, *On the Boundaries of American Evangelicalism*, 172-178.

10. Donald W. Dayton and Robert K. Johnston, eds., *The Variety of American Evangelicalism* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1991).

11. Christian Smith, *American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 20. See chapter 3 of this paper for more on this point.

12. Michael Lienesch, *Redeeming America: Piety and Politics in the New Christian Right* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993).

leaders in their marriages by being sensitive and understanding of their wives, and wives to achieve power by being submissive.¹³ Much like Balmer's book, *Redeeming America* functions best as an overview or primer on evangelicalism as an ideological world view rather than as an in depth study of individual elements of evangelical thought. Similar to Balmer, Lienesch portrayed conflict between evangelicals and secularism as one of mutual rejection, which discounts the ways evangelicals incorporate modern elements into their world view.

In *A Transforming Faith: Explorations of Twentieth-Century American Evangelicalism*, David Harrington Watt wrote that “in the 1960s and 1970s evangelical magazines often seemed to be little more than self-help compendiums.”¹⁴ However, Watt devoted a chapter of his book to exploring how early twentieth-century, evangelical fundamentalists not only rejected modern psychology and the therapeutic culture, but were actively hostile to it. Early psychology, which was heavily Freudian, was viewed as anti-Biblical and even Satanic by many fundamentalist Christians before mid-century. Watt portrayed the eventual acceptance of psychology and the therapeutic culture by evangelicals as emblematic of their decision to constructively engage with American society.¹⁵ The history Watt uncovered about evangelicals' changing attitudes towards the therapeutic culture helps to identify it as a deliberate strategy by which evangelicals both incorporate secular ideas into religious practice, and insert religious ideas into secular forms.

The connections between theology and secular society within evangelicalism informed James Davison Hunter's report on a sociological study of students at evangelical post-secondary colleges and universities conducted during the early 1980s. Hunter commented on the central role of theology in evangelicalism and the theological changes taking place at the time. He also

13. Lienesch, *Redeeming America*, 52-76.

14. David Harrington Watt, *A Transforming Faith: Explorations of Twentieth-Century American Evangelicalism* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991), 150.

15. Watt, *A Transforming Faith*, 142.

included a chapter on the history of American families, evangelical interpretations of that history, and the “mythic” role that family centered theology acquired within the evangelical movement.¹⁶ Since conservative evangelicals view sexuality as only properly located within a marital family structure, these views and their tension with secular American culture are important to understanding evangelical views about sex education and public policy regarding non-marital sexual activity. Evangelicals layer psychology and sociology on top of their theology in order to build social policy. Hunter also offered a sociological interpretation of the history of the Western family to challenge the ubiquitous evangelical ideas about normative gender roles with regard to sexuality, marriage, and family.¹⁷ Demonstrating that functional families existed in Western societies in other forms than those popularly promoted by evangelicals strikes directly at the heart of the dilemma posed by the incorporation of the therapeutic culture into evangelical theological practice. If “non-Biblical” family forms can be healthy and functional, then healthy functionality is a poor argument for the correctness of “Biblical” family structures. The same line of reasoning can also apply to abstinence campaigns and fulfilling sexuality: if great sex could exist *before* marriage after all, then great sex in marriage is less of a reason to pursue premarital abstinence. Evangelicals' ardent denials that either could be the case continue to characterize the contemporary abstinence and purity movements.

Michael Lienesch emphasized the central importance of family in evangelical theological and social thought, and other scholars have noted that family and marriage are inextricably linked to evangelicals. An essay by sociologist W. Bradford Wilcox, an evangelical himself, on the family and sexuality linked the demographic revolution after the 1960s that featured the declining role of marriage as a “publicly recognized vehicle for lifelong, heterosexual love, and

16. James Davison Hunter, *Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 78-115.

17. Hunter, *Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation*, 91.

by dramatic increases in childrearing outside of marriage,” with increased crime, economic inequality, poverty, and substance abuse.¹⁸ He cited evangelical Protestantism as a lonely holdout against the tide of popular accommodation to this demographic revolution, and identified evangelicals' ideology of a “Biblical family” as a key feature of resistance.¹⁹ Evangelicals sought to preserve marriage as a central aspect of religious and social life, and centered within it derivative social experiences such as sexuality and parenthood. This “Protestant familism is rooted not only in its distinctive religious ideology, but also in its commitment to a traditional form of Americanism that links the health of the nation to the health of the family.”²⁰ Seen in this light, evangelical concerns with secular, feminist, and liberal erosion of “traditional values” are not merely personal, but also national in scope and impact. This mindset depicts the entire fate of the nation at stake in the culture wars. Public policy fights over sexual practice, marriage and family, then, to evangelicals become about more than just saving one's own children, but also preserving the future of an entire generation, for generations to come.²¹

In the 1970s, as evangelicals began expanding their attention and activism to encompass social issues, the movement's political dimension began to cement a connection with conservatism ideologically, and the Republican party in electoral politics. Jimmy Carter's election as an evangelical Southern Baptist in 1976 was the Democratic party's last successful attempt to appeal to evangelicals as voters.²² Bill Clinton and Al Gore in 1992, 1996, and 2000 received no such evangelical support, despite their personal Southern origins. Historians such as

18. W. Bradford Wilcox, “How Focused on the Family? Evangelical Protestants, the Family, and Sexuality.” In *Evangelicals and Democracy in America: Volume I Religion and Society*, ed. Steven Brint and Jean Reith Schroedel (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2009), 251-275.

19. Wilcox, “How Focused on the Family?” 253.

20. Wilcox, “How Focused on the Family?” 255.

21. Winthrop S. Hudson, *Religion in America* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1981), 437-456. This book broadly covers American religion from the Colonial period up through the 1970s, and includes a chapter on religion and politics during the 1970s.

22. Chip Berlet and Matthew N. Lyons, *Right-Wing Populism in America: Too Close for Comfort* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2000), 223-224.

Lisa McGirr have incorporated a study of evangelicalism into their presentation of the “origins of the new American Right.”²³ McGirr studied Orange County, California's transformation into a right-wing enclave as a convergence of suburban, middle class concerns with anti-modern sentiments to produce a populist, free market ideology centered on family, consumerism, and a diffusion of Christianity throughout society. Central to McGirr's project was dismantling previous characterizations of conservatism as the rearguard of nineteenth-century anti-modernism. Though modern conservatism's history does possess those historical links, McGirr demonstrated how the modern movement transformed to embrace elements of progress that were hidden by a model pitting right-wing traditionalism versus liberal modernism. This transformation of right-wing politics paralleled the similar transformation within the evangelical movement, and McGirr exposed how “suburban warriors” in Orange County were part of both movements, their voting booth choices reflected in their Sunday religious observations, and vice versa. Evangelical religion and right-wing politics merged because their participants were often the same activists. Right-wing politics became concerned with public policy regarding sexuality because its evangelical foot soldiers held family, marriage, and sexuality as a major concern. Along with evangelicalism as a religious movement and its political dimension, previous studies in sexuality provide another relevant aspect framing a study of evangelical texts.

In the final five chapters of their book, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*, John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman covered American sexual attitudes and norms from the 1920s to the 1980s, focusing on legal and political boundaries regarding sex, the impact of science on sexual discourses, contributions from feminism and leftist radicals to changing sexual morality, and the commercialization of sex, to name a few. Most important to this project,

23. McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*, 241-243, 257-61.

they identified a focus on purity rather than chastity as a locus of rhetoric and meaning for the sexual politics of the “New Right.” They identified the “sexuality of youth” as the “unifying element” in the political campaigns waged over abortion, homosexuality, sex education, and other sexual issues.²⁴ But I argue that evangelicals have not been concerned with youth sexuality simply because of age, but because they believe that those youth become adults with values shaped by their experiences. Evangelicals focus on youth in order to influence future families and generations through the connections evangelicals have drawn between sexuality and the fate of civilization, as will be seen in chapters three and four of this essay.

To understand the impact of the 1960s on middle America, Beth Bailey focused on Lawrence, Kansas as a locus for both sophistication (it is home to the University of Kansas) and the metaphorical center of American life styled the heartland, a blend of democratic individualism existing uneasily within nuclear families and traditional Christian values that emphasize collective responsibility. Bailey devoted an entire chapter to “Sex and the Therapeutic Culture,” exploring the ways in which psychology and social science expanded its authority in debates over sexual norms and attitudes.²⁵ The expanding influence of science over sexuality is important to understanding the subsequent intrusion of the social sciences into theology, and in turn their accepted use by theologians and clergy. In subsequent chapters she used multiple analytical metaphors as tools to explore sexuality as revolutionary, as a social and political weapon, and as a impetus for social change regarding gender roles and restrictions on sexual behavior. Bailey's focus on “middle America” and the “heartland” revealed the sexual revolution as a major force throughout society, not just San Francisco or other metropolitan areas, but her passing references to Christianity and Christian contention with the sexual revolution obscures

24. John D'Emilio, and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 352.

25. Bailey, *Sex in the Heartland*, 45-74.

the origins of the political and social battles fought in the culture wars. Evangelicals provided the moral fervor that translated the conservative movement's ideological framework into political and electoral battles over public policy.

In a corollary to D'Emilio and Freedman's emphasis on youth sexuality, fears regarding unplanned pregnancy as a key component of the risks associated with a woman's sexuality and society's imposition of sexual restrictions on women constituted the main premise of Constance A. Nathanson's sociological work *Dangerous Passage: The Social Control of Sexuality in Women's Adolescence*. Nathanson argued that Western society has conceptualized the transition from girlhood to womanhood so that it carries uniquely gendered risks and dangers, and that society has used the threats that young women are exposed to during this transition in order to justify and establish social controls over young women's sexuality and lives, and by extension, establish social controls over society at large.²⁶ That those risks are obvious to both the public and policy makers is a *discursive assumption* that Nathanson dissects in detail. She identified two “moral boundary crises” during the past two centuries that relate to the social control of young women. The first was the late nineteenth century crusade to raise age of sexual consent laws, criminalize prostitution, and end white slavery. The second arrived in the 1970s and centered on preventing adolescent pregnancy.²⁷ Nathanson critiqued the conceptual formulation of a 1960s “sexual revolution” by pointing out that social scientists in the 1960s focused on the sexual behavior changes of middle-class, white women to the exclusion of non-white women and men of any socioeconomic class, both of which were assumed not to have experienced changes in their sexual behaviors or attitudes.²⁸ The key evidence for Nathanson was that social scientists

26. Constance A. Nathanson, *Dangerous Passage: The Social Control of Sexuality in Women's Adolescence* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), 9-10.

27. Nathanson, *Dangerous Passage*, 15.

28. Nathanson, *Dangerous Passage*, 33.

only became concerned when they realized that middle-class, white women began accepting sexual activity outside of marriage as morally equivalent to marital sex, followed by adolescent pregnancy becoming a “social problem” within a decade and the subject of dozens of federal legislative initiatives over the succeeding decades. The “revolution,” to Nathanson, was less a matter of society at large than it was an attitudinal shift among middle-class, white women that aroused the political and social attention of the dominant socioeconomic class in American society which saw its privilege threatened by the actions of the upcoming generation of its daughters.

The threat to those daughters' fortunes also underwent a shift in the 1960s. Previously, it was the marriage prospects of a woman that was threatened by her sexual behavior, but after the 1960s her sexual behavior posed risk of unplanned pregnancy that would interfere with, disrupt, or destroy her career ambitions. “Liberation,” then, really only involved the substitution of a new threat for the prior threat, and social controls to mediate those threats in women's lives were warranted.

Nathanson's major contribution to understanding the evolution of sexuality in the United States is her exploration of the discursive production of threats to society by the sexual activities of young women, and the resultant social mechanisms deployed to influence and control those activities. These occurred externally through contraception funding (to name just one), and internally through instilling in young women a sense of their sexual reputation before the 1960s, and the threat of pregnancy on their career prospects after the 1960s. This analysis enables a deeper understanding of the legislative and rhetorical efforts directed at adolescent pregnancy. From this standpoint, efforts to fund programs related to adolescent sexuality, shape the nature of that funding as pertaining to contraception and abstinence, as well as efforts to cut such funding,

all involve the social control of adolescent women, albeit along somewhat different trajectories. This complicates the usual political rhetoric of who “cares” most about children, as all sides in the political debate are thus seeking control over sexual decision making. However, at the same time that her analysis brings young women to the foreground, it obscures concerns over the socialization of young men, and the critical necessity for society to invest young men in the existing social, economic, and political structures of society in order to ensure their continuation. Efforts to control the sexuality of young women may also be, albeit by an indirect route, efforts to control and direct the sexuality of young men in directions that promote social harmony, family formation, and family stability. After all, it is disenfranchised and desperate young men who constitute the soldiers in bloody revolutions, not young women.

There have been a handful of previous examinations of evangelical texts related to sexuality and marriage. Rebecca L. Davis contributed a chapter titled “Eroticized Wives: Evangelical Marriage Guides and God's Plan for the Christian Family” to the book *The Embrace of Eros: Bodies, Desires, and Sexuality in Christianity*. She focused on the 1970s work of Marabel Morgan, an evangelical Christian who published two books and conducted seminars to teach wives to satisfy their husbands through sexuality, affection, and visual appraisal of their wives' femininity, directed towards preserving marriage and enriching the entire family's spiritual life.²⁹ The chapter provides this project with a methodological example to follow in examining other evangelical texts, and provides context for merging studies of theology, gender, and sexuality. It also demonstrates the validity of examining evangelical texts as artifacts of broader American cultural, social, and political history.

Jennifer Heller combined explorations of evangelicalism and sexuality in her article

29. Rebecca L. Davis, “Eroticized Wives: Evangelical Marriage Guides and God's Plan for the Christian Family.” In *The Embrace of Eros: Bodies, Desires, and Sexuality in Christianity*, edited by Margaret D. Kamitsuka, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 165-180.

entitled “Marriage, Womanhood, and the Search for 'Something More': American Evangelical Women's Best-Selling 'Self-Help' Books, 1972-1979.” She surveyed nonfiction bestsellers authored by evangelical women in the 1970s that responded to feminist attacks on traditional gender roles by emphasizing the unique power of feminine vulnerability expressed through christianized marriage. These evangelical women, such as Marabel Morgan and Beverly LaHaye, offered uniquely Christian formulations of spousal relationships, romance, and even housework in order to address the same domestic ennui that Betty Freidan tapped into in *The Feminine Mystique*.³⁰ Heller explained how these evangelical women conceptualized traditional gender roles as not only theologically sound, but also therapeutically beneficial to the healthy, stable, and happy development of their marriages. These authors told women that emphasizing their femininity regarding hygiene, personal appearance, and sexual interactions with their husbands would improve their relationships with their husbands, and improve their own marital satisfaction. Heller's examples highlighted not only evangelicals' advocacy regarding marriage and healthy sexuality within marriage, but also emphasized the increasing importance of sociological and therapeutic benefits to the way evangelicals conceptualized their spiritual responsibilities. Though Davis and Heller noted the connection between evangelicals' theology and their conception of marriage, they stopped short of linking these concerns with evangelicals' budding social and political activism over the same period, but in fact there is considerable overlap between evangelicals' concerns over sexuality, marriage, and society.

Amy DeRogatis has done the most extensive and recent scholarly work examining the sexual ideology of evangelicals. She outlined the 1970s development of evangelical Protestant literature that not only celebrated marital sexual expression, but also explained in explicit detail

30. Jennifer Heller, “Marriage, Womanhood, and the Search for 'Something More': American Evangelical Women's Best-Selling 'Self-Help' Books, 1972-1979,” *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture* 2 (Fall 2002).

how men and women could stimulate and satisfy their spouses. These evangelical writings paralleled and capitalized on the popularity of secular sex manuals such as 1972's *The Joy of Sex* by Alex Comfort. DeRogatis pointed out that evangelical literature about marital sex established gendered norms about both sexual pleasure and emotional fulfillment through marital sexuality.³¹ She also provided accounts of the evangelical purity culture that by the 1990s involved formal father-daughter functions, young adult literature, and Christian music concerts promoting purity pledges. From DeRogatis' work, it is clear that the earlier evangelical emphasis on marital sexuality later expanded into abstinence campaigns encompassing both public policy through sex education in schools and more personal advocacy through churches and families. DeRogatis' focus was on the rhetorical expressions of evangelical theology beginning in the 1970s, rather than its substance. By reaching further back to 1960, I will demonstrate that evangelicals' 1970s rhetoric was more than stylistic, but was in fact rooted in what they believed was a contemporary theological crisis centered on sexuality within marriage. Evangelicals' concerted efforts to resolve that crisis during the 1960s established the foundation on which the LaHaye's and other authors wrote marital admonishments in the 1970s and beyond.

Davis, Heller, and DeRogatis provided key insights about evangelicalism and sexuality, but none posited an evangelical transformation of marriage as the central contribution of evangelical thought and theology during the 1960s and 1970s. Evangelicals writing during this period were not merely advocating against the sexual revolution or for better marriages, they were establishing mutually satisfying marital sexuality as the central aspect of evangelical marriage. Since they viewed marriage as the indispensable foundation of the family, and the family as the indispensable institution undergirding society, this transformation in evangelical

31. Amy DeRogatis, *Saving Sex: Sexuality and Salvation in American Evangelicalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2015), 70.

theology provided a launch pad for evangelicals to become vocal advocates on issues of sexual public policy in the 1980s and beyond. Sensing this trend, historian Bethany Moreton has woven together the intersecting threads of sexuality and political conservatism that resulted from evangelical engagement with the sexual revolution, but her citing of abortion and homosexuality as the dominant flash points for evangelical ire are slightly misleading.³² Certainly those political issues attracted substantial evangelical activism, but behind the headlines evangelicals were constructing a sexual subculture focused on marital sexuality and premarital abstinence that has endured and grown without dependence on political controversies. Evangelical marriage has become a self-perpetuating subcultural force that absorbs elements of conservative political ideology, consumerism, and free market capitalism, but is more than merely the sum of its parts. Once a discursive production of the collision of 1960s sexual revolution with conservative evangelical Protestantism, by the 1990s evangelical marriage had become a movement unto itself.

W. Bradford Wilcox examined the sociological impact of this movement on the lived experience of evangelical marriages, and found subtle but significant distinctions between conservative Protestants, mainline Protestants, and the religiously unaffiliated. From three sets of nationally representative survey data, he concluded that conservative Protestant married fathers “are consistently more active and expressive with their children,” and “are more consistently engaged emotionally in their marriages.”³³ While Moreton tied the evangelical movement's evolution primarily to the post war development of capitalism and political conservatism, Wilcox provided evidence that the evangelical movement is thriving not just because of politics and

32. Bethany Moreton, “Why Is There So Much Sex in Christian Conservatism and Why Do So Few Historians Care Anything about It?” *The Journal of Southern History* 75 (August 2009): 722.

33. W. Bradford Wilcox, *Soft Patriarchs, New Men: How Christianity Shapes Fathers and Husbands* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 13.

economics, but also because it grants substantial emotional and relational benefits to its adherents. Whether evangelical families are in some sense objectively better off than non-evangelical families is a debate for sociologists, but lived experience provides evangelicals with their own primary source of confirmation, and they believe it whole heartedly.

Historical treatments of the sexual revolution do make apparent that while “traditional” values and lifestyles surrounding sexuality were pushed out of the behavioral and cultural mainstream after the 1960s, they did not disappear, nor did their most ardent adherents entirely abandon them. Historians of the sexual revolution admit forthrightly that they study the norms of the white, middle to upper classes in America. They acknowledge that resistance to the sexual revolution existed, and that there were and are subpopulations of American culture that have evolved less or differently than the American population as a whole when it comes to sexual practice and morality. However, while recognizing that Catholic and evangelical Christianity has been the main opponent and critic of the sexual revolution, there is far less study about how Christian resistance has adapted the tenets of the sexual revolution, adopted some of its core understandings, and reconfigured both historic Christian teaching about sexuality and prevalent Christian understandings of chastity, virginity, and purity.

This project focuses on Christian responses to the sexual revolution consisting of evangelical oriented literature, from periodicals such as *Christianity Today*, which began publication in the 1950s, to Christian themed self-help, marriage, and family guides published from the 1960s through the 1970s. These popular sources brought the battles of the sexual revolution into the homes and lives of even those Christians who had otherwise managed to keep them safely distant.

In chapter two, I outline the evangelical movement's history and composition, focusing

briefly on its historical origins and theological distinctiveness from mainstream Protestantism. Chapter three highlights three social controversies that evangelicals most fervently targeted as social diseases afflicting American society in the 1960s, and demonstrates how evangelicals were aware of, extremely concerned about, and determined to battle a sexual revolution in society as early as the year 1960. In chapter four, I examine texts presenting an evangelical interpretation of sexuality, marriage, and the sexual revolution. Read together, these sources reveal the theological underpinnings of the evangelical reaction to the sexual revolution, but also show how evangelicals adapted modern sexuality to recreate evangelical marriage, effectively making evangelicals into sexual co-revolutionaries rather than counter-revolutionaries. Evangelicals' hostility to secular sexual modernity resulted in the creation of their own marital and sexual subculture rather than simply clinging to the past. In chapter five, I outline the trajectory of evangelical sexuality into the 1990s, highlighting the ways in which evangelical purity culture arose from the marital subculture that was established by the 1970s and grew into mainstream political activism in the 1980s.

Evangelicalism has long been a feature of American life because of its ability to adapt to social and political changes. Evangelical marriage after the 1960s has created a sexual subculture that affects political debates at the national and local level, from sex education curriculums adopted by school boards to mandates for abstinence education in federal grants. Though issues such as abortion and homosexuality are perennially contentious, evangelical thought about sexuality thrives among its adherents due to the positive impacts they perceive it providing to their marriages and families. This project examines the centrality of marital sexuality to modern evangelicalism, revealing how sex moved from the margins to the center of evangelical marital

theology, and how the resulting evangelical subculture is central to understanding how the culture wars impact modern American life.

CHAPTER TWO: WHO ARE EVANGELICALS AND WHAT DO THEY WANT?

Identifying evangelicals as a sociological group within Christendom is challenging because evangelicalism is essentially a cross-denominational, para-church movement. There are self-identifying evangelicals across the theological and denominational gamut of Christendom running from Calvinist Protestants to Roman Catholics, and every doctrinal variant in between. Though some denominations may be broadly termed evangelical, there are denominations that would officially reject the label though they contain evangelicals within their membership.³⁴ Thus, for example, it is possible to be Southern Baptist but not evangelical, to be evangelical but not Southern Baptist, and to be both evangelical and Southern Baptist. A survey published in 1998 indicated that seven percent of the population, or approximately twenty million Americans identified themselves as “Protestant, churchgoing, and 'evangelical.’”³⁵ Evangelicals across the denominational spectrum unify in their identity not through denominational conventions, conferences, or ecclesiastical bodies, but through participation in para-church organizations such as Youth for Christ, Fuller Theological Seminary, *Christianity Today* magazine, or Pat Robertson's *The 700 Club* on television. In some respects, being an evangelical is a stronger identification for some Christians than their denominational membership.

Discussing evangelicalism as a movement requires careful definition, because the term

34. The Southern Baptist Convention is an example of the former, and the Lutheran World Federation is an example of the latter.

35. Christian Smith *et al.*, *American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 1.

evangelical may be used both to describe an approach to Christian conversion and discipleship, and as a label for the movement that is the subject of this paper. The two are related, but should be understood distinctly to avoid confusion. In the broadest sense, evangelicalism is a frame of mind that understands Christianity as a needful dimension within all human lives, because of its saving power from sin, and its ability to establish an eternal spiritual connection between mankind and the divine. It is in this sense that even the Roman Catholic church uses the term evangelical to describe its conversion efforts, since evangelize is a synonym for convert. Thus, Christianity as a whole is properly understood in this first sense as an evangelical religion from its inception, because its adherents seek to convert in order to increase its ranks.

Understanding evangelicalism as a movement begins with issues of its origins. Barry Hankins identified Martin Luther as the first evangelical, dating the movement to 1517, when Luther nailed his 95 challenges to Catholic dogma to the door of a church in Wittenberg.³⁶ This interpretation of Luther's actions rests on a historical hindsight that diminished his role as a Catholic reformer in favor of claiming him as a founder of a new movement. His latter role was at best inadvertent, but, while Luther's protests certainly contributed significantly to what became the Protestant movement, it is more precise to focus on its modern incarnation and date the American origins of the evangelical movement to the First Great Awakening of the eighteenth century and the preaching of Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield. Edwards has the more recognizable name, due to the inclusion of his sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" in modern American historical and literary anthologies, and he is credited with launching the initial revival of the First Great Awakening from his Northampton, Massachusetts pulpit by attracting nearly every adult in town to become a member of his congregation by 1734.³⁷ This

36. Barry Hankins, *American Evangelicals: A Contemporary History of a Mainstream Religious Movement* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2008), 3.

37. Hankins, *American Evangelicals*, 5. Edwards preached this sermon for the first time in 1741.

awakening, or revival, of the population to ardently embrace Christian belief and practice spread to other towns, and eventually throughout the colonies. Englishman George Whitefield's prolific work as an itinerant preacher was integral to both the national and international character of the First Great Awakening, as he carried both spiritual fervor and a consistent message to audiences across thousands of miles, creating the "first major transcolonial event in American history."³⁸

Two features of revival are important to understanding how both the First and Second Great Awakenings are part of the evangelical movement's history rather than solely part of more limited individual church histories or of religious history in general. Itinerant revival preaching involved audiences from diverse denominational and theological backgrounds, and led to increases in Christian affiliation throughout the community rather than gathering converts solely into the preachers' own individual churches.³⁹ Specific congregations encouraged, supported, and often instigated revivals, but they gathered entire communities into Christendom as a whole, and church membership throughout a community increased during revival.⁴⁰ This ecumenical form of revivalism was possible because of the focus of revival preaching. Rather than being concerned with doctrinal orthodoxy or theological controversy, revival preaching focused on motivating the audience to establish a relationship with God based on their need for personal salvation from sin. This central message of revival preaching established the form of revival as a cross-denominational, or para-church, movement, and, especially in the Second Great Awakening during the early nineteenth century, pushed evangelicalism away from strict orthodoxy.⁴¹ This

38. Hankins, *American Evangelicals*, 10.

39. For a specific example of the structure, origin, and style of revival in the Second Great Awakening, see Paul Keith Conkin, *Cane Ridge, America's Pentecost* (Madison, Wis: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990).

40. For a case study on the effects of revival in a community during the Second Great Awakening, see Mark S. Schantz, *Piety in Providence: Class Dimensions of Religious Experience in Antebellum Rhode Island* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000).

41. Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 71-73, and Donald G. Mathews, *Religion in the Old South* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1977), 49-51.

form continues to characterize evangelicalism as a distinct religious movement across the denominational landscape. This same style of preaching allowed late twentieth-century Christian broadcasters such as Jim Bakker, Jerry Falwell, Jimmy Swaggart, and Pat Robertson to attract audiences from across the denominational spectrum. Their television audiences could support their evangelistic efforts through donations without ever leaving home or joining a specific congregation.

Various mainline denominations have increasingly emphasized ecumenism during the late twentieth century as a response to the fracturing of denominations into fragmented religious bodies.⁴² Ironically, evangelicalism is perhaps the original ecumenical movement within modern Christianity due to its general disinterest in doctrinal controversy, in spite of the fact that evangelicalism has simultaneously promoted church schism by inflaming the twentieth century liberal versus conservative theological divide over central doctrinal tenets. Ecumenism seeks to develop and enhance interdenominational understanding, fellowship, and cooperation based on the understanding that self-identification as a Christian should trump doctrinal disagreements. It is thus an attitude that leads to denominations joining together rather than splitting apart.⁴³ Ecumenism typically seeks to bridge doctrinal divides over specific issues such as infant baptism or various forms of worship. Evangelicalism largely avoids these same controversies, but its adherents insist on conformity regarding core doctrinal points that mainline Protestant denominations deemphasized or modified considerably during the twentieth century. A study of movement evangelicalism by Mark Ellingsen published on behalf of The World Lutheran

42. Fragmentation has characterized Protestantism since the Reformation, but the late twentieth century witnessed schisms that bear directly on the growth and influence of evangelicalism.

43. A prominent example of this occurred in the 1957 union creating the United Church of Christ, when the General Council of the Congregational Christian Churches merged with the Evangelical and Reformed Church, which was itself a merger of the Reformed Church in the United States with the Evangelical Synod of North America in 1934. Note that the word evangelical in the titles of these churches identifies them not as members of the evangelical movement, but as broadly evangelical in terms of proselytizing.

Federation in order to foster unity among evangelicals and non-evangelicals within its own ranks, as well as ecumenism with evangelical denominations, stated plainly that “the real problem dividing evangelicals from the mainline is theology.”⁴⁴

The precise theological boundaries of the core tenets of evangelicalism are difficult to pin down, and this should be no surprise since there is no evangelical authority in the form of a central office, policy committee, or ecclesiastical body. Ellingsen's study of the evangelical movement noted that the American Lutheran ecumenical dialogue completed in 1981 with evangelicals from within its ranks could not even “agree on a common definition of the term *evangelical*”!⁴⁵ However, he further reported that dialogues between Lutherans and evangelicals, as well as between the Roman Catholic Church and evangelicals did establish common doctrinal ground despite this basic obstacle. The very ambiguity surrounding evangelical identity appears to be a key feature of the evangelical movement: its identity is elusive, but its members do share some common identifiable beliefs. The extent to which the definition of an evangelical is fluid and subjective allows members of diverse Christian denominations to adopt the label with ease. The extent to which those beliefs are in conflict with mainline Christian denominations constitute the fault lines that have split some of those denominations apart or severely depleted the evangelical portion of their membership.⁴⁶

Scholars who have attempted to list the core beliefs of evangelicalism typically create lists that vary in terminology but nevertheless possess similarities and continuities. Ellingsen noted that Lutherans' dialogue with evangelicals established common ground regarding Scripture

44. Mark Ellingsen, *The Evangelical Movement: Growth, Impact, Controversy, Dialog* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1988), 36.

45. Ellingsen, *The Evangelical Movement*, 38.

46. American Lutherans and Presbyterians have split into separate denominations, and the United Church of Christ has lost approximately half of its membership from a peak of 2 million in the late 1950s, hence the denominational impetus for ecumenism with evangelicals.

as “the sole standard of doctrine” and that “salvation is by grace alone,” a clear salvo directed at the Roman Catholic Church's authority and teachings.⁴⁷ James Davison Hunter listed biblical inerrancy as the central tenet of evangelicalism and emphasized its critical role in the departure of evangelicals from mainline Protestantism during the twentieth century.⁴⁸ He argued that belief in the Bible as a divinely inspired and error free revelation possessing final religious authority was a key underlying component of Protestantism until the late nineteenth century, when some theologians began discarding it, at which point it “crystallized into the formal doctrine of inerrancy.”⁴⁹ Two recent books rely on a formulation of the “four essentials of evangelicalism as (1) Biblicism, (2) crucicentrism, (3) conversionism, and (4) activism.”⁵⁰ Biblicism is simply the argument for inerrancy. Crucicentrism is a focus on the crucifixion of Jesus as a key element in salvation from sin, by contrast to liberal Christianity's emphasis on Jesus as a moral witness.⁵¹ Conversionism harks back to the Puritan conception of conversion as a life altering event with clear demarcations, whereas modern liberal Christianity's focus is that “all people are children of God all the time.”⁵² Activism points to the original definition of evangelicalism: preaching in order to convert the world. Hankins summarized this formula of evangelicalism as two beliefs and two actions: belief in the Bible as God's word and the death of Jesus as mankind's salvation from sin, and that believers must first experience conversion themselves followed by attempting to convert others.⁵³

Though it began publication in 1956 and has positioned itself as the flagship periodical

47. Ellingsen, *The Evangelical Movement*, 38.

48. Hunter, *Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation*, 20-24.

49. Hunter, *Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation*, 21.

50. Hankins, *American Evangelicals*, 1. This same list appears with different terms, but with no essential differences in meaning in Steven Brint and Jean Reith Schroedel, eds., *Evangelicals and Democracy in America, Volume 1: Religion and Society* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2009), 6-7.

51. Brint, *Evangelicals and Democracy*, 6.

52. Hankins, *American Evangelicals*, 2.

53. Hankins, *American Evangelicals*, 2-3.

for evangelicalism, *Christianity Today* magazine did not publish any thorough exploration of evangelicalism's core beliefs until 1965. Harold Lindsell, a leading evangelical author, wrote that the historic beliefs of evangelicals were: "1) man's sinful condition before a holy God; 2) man's need for salvation; 3) the revelation of the grace of God in Jesus Christ; 4) the authority of the inspired Scriptures; 5) the necessity for a birth from above or regeneration; and 6) justification through faith alone, apart from works."⁵⁴ Five years later, Klaas Runia explained the core belief of evangelicals as regard for the Bible as inerrant, divine revelation.⁵⁵ While there are some distinctions among these various definitions of evangelical beliefs, the common thread is the primacy of the Bible for religious authority and the centrality of the death of Jesus in saving mankind from sin. These are hardly innovations in Christian belief, but the fact that evangelicals keep emphasizing them as distinctive features of the movement is itself a significant clue to another aspect of evangelical identity: its embattled posture.⁵⁶

Since the 1960s, mainstream American culture has systematically become more secular and less constrained by Christian moralizing with regard to personal conduct, media, and manners. One might expect that more liberal mainline Christian denominations would see their memberships expand under such conditions, but they have actually shrunk while conservative evangelical churches have flourished. Though some self-identified evangelicals remain members of mainline Protestant churches, large numbers have left for other denominations or joined non-denominational congregations that have a strong evangelical flavor. Sociologists of religion have investigated these developments with a view to modeling how religious movements

54. Harold Lindsell, "Who are the Evangelicals?" *Christianity Today*, June 18, 1965, 3-6.

55. Klaas Runia, "What do Evangelicals Believe?" *Christianity Today*, December 4, 1970, 3-6.

56. The results of a sociological survey regarding religious belief yielded highly interesting findings regarding self-identification and the beliefs enumerated above. Self-identified evangelicals and fundamentalists were nearly twice as likely as Mainline Protestants and Liberals, and nearly three times as likely as Catholics to believe the Bible is literally true. See: Smith, *American Evangelicalism*, 23.

conceptualize themselves and how this relates to whether they thrive or fade. One such study conducted during the last years of the twentieth century found that evangelicalism enjoyed “a religious vitality” “that surpasses every other major Christian tradition in the country,” “whether gauged by belief orthodoxy, salience of faith, robustness of belief, church attendance, participation in social and religious mission, or membership recruitment and retention.”⁵⁷ The authors concluded that evangelicalism “flourishes on difference, engagement, tension, conflict, and threat.”⁵⁸ It is important to understand that the form of evangelicalism these scholars examined is the form that survived and thrived during and after the 1960s counterculture, when American society underwent tremendous social change brought about at the nexus of the Vietnam War, civil rights protests and legislation, campus unrest, and the proliferation of sexuality as both a commodity and a fundamental element of identity. The evangelical movement has a long history, but its evolution during the latter half of the twentieth century has shifted its focus away from theological divisions towards social issues relating to marriage and the family, which are at the heart of the continued tension, conflict, and threat between evangelicalism and secular American society.

Evangelicalism, like most ideological movements, has waxed and waned over generations, and has long been in competition with its philosophical sibling, fundamentalism. Evangelicalism shares certain doctrinal commonalities with fundamentalism, namely the inspiration and infallibility of the Bible and the central role of Jesus Christ's deity in personal atonement for sin.⁵⁹ A crucial distinction emerged between the fundamentalist and evangelical movements in the 1920s, as controversies over evolution, modernity, and theological liberalism

57. Smith, *American Evangelicalism*, 120.

58. Smith, *American Evangelicalism*, 121.

59. James Davison Hunter, *American Evangelicalism: Conservative Religion and the Quandary of Modernity* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1983), 7.

ignited power struggles and schisms within major American Protestant denominations. Fundamentalists battled the encroachment of modernity and science into realms they believed belonged exclusively to religion, such as the origins of life on earth. Legislators introduced thirty-seven anti-evolution bills in twenty states, but the Scopes trial in 1925 turned the tide against the fundamentalists' view.⁶⁰ In the aftermath, fundamentalists began to see modern society as irredeemable, while evangelicals dedicated themselves to reclaiming society for Christianity. Fundamentalism came to denote “the mentality of a religion that senses itself under siege and feels anxiously compelled to safeguard its boundaries. Evangelicalism, while still protective about the language of faith, is more outgoing and relatively less legalistic, prepared to mount conversion-minded sorties away from the citadel.”⁶¹ Evangelicalism retained the core doctrinal tenets of fundamentalism, while asserting a proactive posture of engagement with secular society rather than withdrawal. In essence, fundamentalism sought a retreat from the secular world, while evangelicalism sought to convert the secular world.⁶² This pushed fundamentalists away from politics in the late twentieth century, but evangelicals into politics over the same period.

Ultimately, evangelicals are best identified as those who self-identify as evangelicals. This is important because any list of strict criteria risks including Christian groups who deliberately eschew the evangelical label. Further, evangelicalism is better described as an attitude towards Christianity and the Bible than as a rigid set of doctrines. Broadly speaking, evangelicals believe that the Bible is vital and relevant to modern life because they believe that God is its author and God intended it to be vital and relevant to life for all time. They further

60. Clyde Wilcox, *Onward Christian Soldiers? The Religious Right in American Politics* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996), 30-34.

61. Ellwood, *1950: Crossroads of American Religious Life*, 192.

62. Ellingsen, *The Evangelical Movement*, 97.

believe that converting the world to this belief is a Christian imperative laid out by Jesus in the Great Commission before he ascended to Heaven. They assert that on matters where the Bible speaks, it is superior to human knowledge and reason, and where it is silent then human knowledge and reason may prevail. Finally, and crucially, evangelicals believe that personal morality cannot be separated from spirituality. Televangelists like Jim Bakker and Jimmy Swaggart, whose personal sexual and financial transgressions attracted widespread ridicule and contempt in the 1980s, were especially embarrassing to evangelicals because their moral failings inspired doubts about their spiritual claims.

Thus, when it comes to sex, marriage, and family, evangelicals believe that the Bible is both a *valuable* and *authoritative* resource that lays the foundation for any further consideration of those topics. This final point highlights a key distinction with the theological liberalism that evangelicals spent much of the twentieth century disavowing and reacting to. Unlike fundamentalists, who were content to retreat from a secular onslaught of atheistic science, modernity, and secular humanism, evangelicals fought back against it with the aim of defeating secularism through conversion where possible, and appropriation where useful, thereby sustaining their fight to establish and maintain Christian norms throughout society.

Christian Smith described evangelical Protestants in nineteenth century America as “the establishment,” whose influence over manners, morals, and society was profound and ubiquitous.⁶³ But from the final decades of the nineteenth century through the first two decades of the twentieth century, the prestige of the Protestant world view declined as it came into conflict with scientific discovery and suffered the waning of the postmillennial doctrinal hold over Christianity.⁶⁴ From the 1920s through the 1940s, fundamentalists withdrew from

63. Smith, *American Evangelicalism*, 2-6.

64. Postmillennialism held that society could be perfected through increasing Christian piety, which would trigger a thousand year reign of Christ on earth before Judgment Day. Premillennialism, which replaced it as the

mainstream Protestantism and founded separate denominations. Christian Smith identified the 1942 founding of the National Association of Evangelicals as the beginning of the modern evangelical movement.⁶⁵ “Neo-evangelicals” such as Charles Fuller, Billy Graham, Carl Henry, and Harold Lindsell joined two hundred other like-minded evangelicals to establish the NAE as a counterweight to the fundamentalist American Council of Christian Churches established the previous year by Carl MacIntire, and the Federal Council of Churches which the neo-evangelicals viewed as controlled by the liberal wing of Christianity.⁶⁶

In stark contrast to fundamentalists, neo-evangelicals prioritized education alongside denominational politics, and established numerous colleges, universities, and seminaries that would “value scholarship and take an active interest in society while maintaining traditional Protestant orthodoxy.”⁶⁷ In 1947, radio evangelist Charles Fuller and Boston pastor Harold Ockenga founded Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, which became the most prominent among neo-evangelical schools which also included Trinity College in Indiana and Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in Massachusetts, both founded in 1969.⁶⁸ Neo-evangelicals also acquired control over older institutions such as Bethel University in Minnesota and Asbury Theological Seminary in Kentucky, founded in 1871 and 1923, respectively. These educational institutions branched out from their origins as seminaries to establish graduate schools offering advanced degrees in education, nursing, and especially psychology and

dominant view, held that society would grow increasingly worse until the utter depravity of mankind triggered the apocalypse. Naturally, the horror of the First World War was a huge blow to postmillennial optimism, though it had already been waning.

65. Smith, *American Evangelicalism*, 1,11.

66. Smith, *American Evangelicalism*, 13. I name these individuals because they were significant national figures within the movement. Several will be referenced in chapter 4 due to their contributions to *Christianity Today*.

67. Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), 213.

68. For a thorough examination of the new intellectual and academic emphasis undertaken by post war evangelicals, see George M. Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987).

counseling. The founders, faculty, and graduates of these and like minded institutions led an “intellectually aggressive evangelicalism” that sought to bring academic rigor to bear on both theological and social issues.⁶⁹ Fuller Theological Seminary, especially, cross-pollinated other evangelical endeavors in ministry and publishing.⁷⁰ Notably, the founding editor of *Christianity Today*, Carl Henry, was also on the faculty of Fuller Theological Seminary, and Billy Graham later became a trustee at Fuller. Harold Lindsell, contributor to *Christianity Today* and author of the 1970s bestseller about premillennialism, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, was also on the faculty of Fuller. While fundamentalists grew despondent about the effect of modernity on education after the Scopes Trial, evangelicals worked to harness educational institutions as a means of exerting intellectual and social influence.

The NAE, associated seminaries and colleges, Billy Graham's highly publicized crusades, and the launch of *Christianity Today* magazine in 1956 provided the modern evangelical movement the wide base of popular support and visibility that allowed it to compete with the older Protestant establishment, and easily eclipse fundamentalists, for prominence within American Christianity. Key to neo-evangelical success was its ecumenical approach, gathering in conservative branches of Protestantism that the fundamentalists rejected (*i.e.* Pentecostals, Anabaptists and Holiness), while standing firmly against the theological liberalism that dominated the hierarchies of the long established mainstream Protestant denominations.⁷¹

From the 1940s onward, neo-evangelicals deliberately positioned themselves to seize the momentum within American Christendom from the established authorities of the mainstream

69. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, 219.

70. George M. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 72-73.

71. In the introduction and subsequent chapters I refer to neo-evangelicals simply as evangelicals, since they are the dominant force within evangelicalism, and this also conforms to their own self-identified nomenclature. It only serves a purpose in this paragraph to distinguish the “neos” from their 19th century predecessors, who otherwise either became 20th century fundamentalists or stayed within the mainstream Protestant denominations.

Protestant denominations while also marginalizing the separatist fundamentalists who nevertheless shared much of the neo-evangelical doctrinal outlook. In short, neo-evangelicals set out to become the new Protestant establishment through rigorous intellectual challenges to liberal theology, vigorous evangelizing and conversion, and robust media representation. Their offensive strategy largely succeeded, and as mainstream Protestant denominations lost membership to NAE affiliated churches and fundamentalists became increasingly identified as theological extremists, neo-evangelicals have set the terms of the religious and social debates within American Christendom during the second half of the twentieth century. The theological heft of neo-evangelical seminaries and affiliated colleges, the grass roots organization evident in electoral success, the popular name recognition of neo-evangelical voices, and the legislative campaigns over social issues since the Reagan administration demonstrate that the movement became a significant social and political force within the United States and continues to exercise popular appeal and power. The neo-evangelical movement was the principal site of popular Christian resistance to the 1960s counterculture, and has constituted the core of the Religious Right's involvement in the culture wars since. Fundamentalists ranted about the 1960s but nobody noticed because they were saying nothing new, liberal Protestants slowly embraced the sexual revolution, Roman Catholicism remained basically unchanged, but neo-evangelicals simultaneously rejected, adapted, and domesticated the sexual revolution in ways that transformed both the movement's approach to sexuality and marriage, and the subsequent political and social dynamics of the decades to come.

CHAPTER THREE:
**THE TIDE OF OBSCENITY, THE PLAYBOY PHILOSOPHY,
AND THE NEW MORALITY**

Independence Day may have taken on a sinister meaning to those reading the July 4, 1960 edition of *Christianity Today*. The editors dedicated the issue to examining the “The Depth of the Crisis” in sex morality, as the lead article termed it. Pitirim Sorokin, who had just finished twenty-nine years as Chairman of the Department of Sociology at Harvard University, outlined nine claims demonstrating a decline in the standards of sex morality in the United States. They included the increasing rate of divorce, increasing rates of non-marital sex, increases in sex crimes, “striking sexualization and sex obsession of practically all compartments of our culture and social life,” and the prevalence of pornography and obscene advertising.⁷² In an accompanying editorial, the editors deemed the current situation as a “modern crisis described by some sociologists as a sex revolution.”⁷³ The following year, in a panel discussion among the editors, Dr. Carl Henry reaffirmed that “the conviction is now widespread that America is undergoing a revolution in sex morality.”⁷⁴ Evangelicals focused on three issues as the most threatening challenges to Protestant, middle class sexual norms: obscenity, Hugh Hefner's “Playboy Philosophy,” and the “new morality” or situation ethics. Though at times these issues were also contentious within the counterculture and left wing movements such as second wave feminism, evangelicals interpreted them as cooperating forces that together constituted a unified

72. Pitirim Sorokin, “The Depth of the Crisis: American Sex Morality Today,” *Christianity Today*, July 4, 1960, 3.

73. Editorial, *Christianity Today*, July 4, 1960, 6.

74. Editorial, *Christianity Today*, January 30, 1961, 20.

assault on Christian sexual ethics, marriage, and general moral standards.

While other writers over the following decades would highlight many of the items on Sorokin's list, pornography and obscenity seemed to especially excite the ire of writers in *Christianity Today*, as it was referenced almost incessantly in the magazine's pages during the 1960s as both a symbol and a cause of declining moral standards. What seemed to inflame evangelical writers the most about obscenity was that, unlike exposure to actual acts of transgressive sex that could be avoided, obscenity threatened the public with a constant, ubiquitous visual assault that was almost impossible to avoid. Christian parents might be able to police their children's activities, but it was impossible to censor every advertisement they might see on television or in popular magazines.⁷⁵ Immoral visual cues were understood as a real threat to the proper moral development of youth, as an article titled "Sodom and America" pointed out in 1962. The author argued that obscene literature portraying sexual immorality was prevalent in stores and was corrupting youth due to the fact that thought was a necessary antecedent to action.⁷⁶ An editorial in January 1964 proffered the "relentless, incessant exposure of the mind, through the printed page, through pictures, and through the latest adulteries of Hollywood idols" as reason for the "unrestrained sexuality" that had "debauched youth as never before in our national history."⁷⁷ But in October of 1964, John C. Cooper, assistant professor of philosophy at Newberry College, penned an article that uniquely stood out from the pack for offering hope to its readers. He wrote that "there can be no further doubt of a tremendous resurgence of the

75. The supposed threat of bad media corrupting good morals has been a constant refrain for decades, but it does have some backing from sociological studies that find correlations between media consumption and sexual attitudes, even among religious youth. See Brian K. Simmons, "Media Cultivation and Perceptions of Sexual Morality in Church of Christ Adolescents," in *Sex, Religion, Media*, ed. Dane. S. Claussen (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2002), 253-264. It is, of course, possible that the effect goes in the opposite direction from what moralists claim: more permissive attitudes could be responsible for "bad" media habits rather than vice versa.

76. Stanley C. Baldwin, "Sodom and America," *Christianity Today*, October 25, 1963, 14-15.

77. Editorial, *Christianity Today*, January 24, 1964, 27.

conservative temperament in American religious and political opinion," citing as evidence the rapid growth of conservative churches, the success of *Christianity Today* magazine, public support for Billy Graham's evangelistic efforts, and Barry Goldwater's nomination for President.

But apparently Goldwater's defeat just weeks later ended any such hopes for a moral transformation, because in 1965 there was an especially profuse series of condemnations of obscenity across multiple issues of the magazine. An editorial in March called the present "A Time for Moral Indignation" and lamented the ubiquity of sex in media as a form of modern idolatry.⁷⁸ Another editorial in April claimed America was "Facing the Tide of Obscenity" and was "breeding a generation of sex giants with mustard-seed spirits" such that "those who read the signs of the times hear the roar of Vesuvius readying its terrible judgment upon our sex-debauched society."⁷⁹ In May, an article called for "A Moral Counterattack," targeting a reduction in the sex-saturation of the culture, media, and advertisements, and a "return to the Christian ideal in sex relations."⁸⁰ In November, pornography was described as "Pollution of the Moral Waters" that encouraged sexual license and violent crimes like murder and rape, and was thus a threat to civilization itself.⁸¹

While the Comstock Law of 1873 had prohibited the use of the postal service to deliver contraception devices and information, and also included "stringent provisions about obscenity," by the 1960's, various court rulings had narrowed the definitions of obscenity until such prohibitions were essentially unenforceable.⁸² Though various citizens groups over the intervening decades organized to lobby politicians, galvanize the public conscience, and demand prosecutions, their efforts became negligible in terms of policy due to lack of cooperation from

78. Editorial, *Christianity Today*, March 12, 1965, 28-29.

79. Editorial, *Christianity Today*, April 9, 1965, 30-31.

80. Joe E. Trull, "A Moral Counterattack," *Christianity Today*, May 7, 1965, 9-10.

81. Russell J. Fornwalt, "Pollution of the Moral Waters," *Christianity Today*, November 5, 1965, 11-12.

82. D'Emilio, *Intimate Matters*, 277.

the legal system. However, the impotence of public policy to restrict sexually suggestive or explicit material inflamed rather than diminished the rhetorical engagement of those who viewed obscenity as a social threat, and politicians were adept at utilizing those concerns. Whitney Strub has argued that “by the late 1960s the Republican Party had begun to claim a monopoly on such evocative phrases as 'decency,' 'moral order,' and ultimately 'family values.' ”⁸³ Writers in *Christianity Today* steadfastly restricted themselves to general broadsides against obscenity without specifically naming names, perhaps in a deliberate strategy to avoid sending its readers off to investigate smut for themselves. But those writers were also aware that specific condemnations were pointless without the ability to enforce legal prohibitions. Keeping readers discursively outraged was the only remaining weapon that could be used against obscenity in the face of the Supreme Court's broad interpretation of First Amendment free speech guarantees. Whitney Strub argued that exploiting this “political capital of moralism” was key to cementing an alliance between religious and political conservatives, as Republican politicians were eager to attract support from within a Democratic Party that was fragmenting under the pressure of the Vietnam War and social unrest.⁸⁴ In addition, Strub argued that “morality began superseding communism as an organizing principle” around which the Republican Party and the young but growing conservative movement led by William F. Buckley could unite.⁸⁵ The issue of obscenity allowed Republican politicians to tap into evangelical concerns about the stability of the family, which the counterculture appeared to threaten in more direct and personal ways than communism could. Denunciations of obscenity in the 1960s, then, were part of a long trajectory of Protestant, middle class concern with policing moral boundaries that had enjoyed bipartisan support until

83. Whitney Strub, *Perversion for Profit: The Politics of Pornography and the Rise of the New Right* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 118.

84. Whitney Strub, *Perversion for Profit*, 119-120.

85. Whitney Strub, *Perversion for Profit*, 179-180.

obscenity laws became unenforceable, and one political party stepped forward to lead a rhetorical fight as a substitute for public policy that had been rendered ineffective by the courts.

Whitney Strub's discussion of right-wing politics during the 1960s was laced with skepticism about the motivations of politicians such as Ronald Reagan, Richard Nixon, Strom Thurmond, and Jesse Helms who used appeals to morality to bolster support for their candidacies and administrations. The contention that politicians found ample support among evangelicals for moralizing rhetoric and jeremiads against contemporary culture is easily supported by the articles and editorials published in *Christianity Today* during the 1960s, which were buttressed by evangelicals writing books about sexuality and marriage. However, I found no evidence in the articles or monographs reviewed for this essay that evangelicals placed any faith in the political process to address their concerns about obscenity. The rhetoric deployed by evangelicals on the topic of morality ignored politics beyond blaming the court system for opening the floodgates of filth. Instead, evangelicals focused on arousing and sustaining the outrage of the faithful until an end game might present itself, born along on a tide of public opinion demanding a return to previous moral and legal standards. Whether or not politicians and movement conservatives were genuinely outraged about contemporary moral standards, grassroots evangelicals certainly were, and it is not surprising that politicians eventually spoke to those concerns, regardless of their actual ability to substantively change the legal terrain.

Unlike the vague generalizations against obscenity in *Christianity Today*, evangelicals who wrote books dealing with sexuality and marriage took careful aim at specific cultural targets. Hugh Hefner's *Playboy* magazine was immensely popular among young men by the late 1960s, and two evangelical authors took the phenomenon seriously as an ideological enterprise warranting an ideological counterattack. They viewed Hefner's "Playboy Philosophy" as more

than a tantalizing approach to publishing or marketing, but also as a direct assault on the moral values undergirding the evangelical conception of marriage and sexuality.

In his preface to *God, Sex and You*, published in 1971, psychiatrist M. O. Vincent wrote that “if you are a loyal follower of the *Playboy* philosophy or the New Morality, or just interested in 'sex without hurting others,' then this book is written with you in mind.”⁸⁶ Unlike *Christianity Today* magazine, or most books written by evangelicals, Dr. Vincent addressed *God, Sex and You* to secular readers who were unlikely to be persuaded by simple appeals to scripture. Unlike books directed at an evangelical readership, Vincent grounded his arguments in the concerns of secular society and then contrasted contemporary secular solutions with those posed by a Christian perspective rooted in the Bible, with the backing of contemporary social science evidence.

In the first third of the book Vincent laid out the contemporary sexual scene, focusing on the negatives of the counterculture, arguing that “as things now exist, sex seems to be related to a great deal of confusion, unhappiness, discontent, hypocrisy, and moral uncertainty.”⁸⁷ He followed evidence from media and the social sciences with chapters on sex while single and married. Vincent made much of statements from medical colleagues that highlighted the negatives of unconstrained sexual expression, including some that even echoed decades old concerns about civilizational collapse: “I personally think that premarital intercourse is medically dangerous, morally degrading and nationally destructive.”⁸⁸ Vincent argued that sex without social and moral constraints was thus harmful to both the individuals involved and society at large. Proponents of the counterculture agreed with Vincent's list of symptoms related to sexual discontent, but they blamed them squarely on the restraints of sexuality imposed by taboos

86. M. O. Vincent, *God, Sex and You* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1971), 11.

87. Vincent, *God, Sex and You*, 17.

88. Vincent, *God, Sex and You*, 37-38.

against promiscuity and non-marital sexual expression, “maintaining that sexually exclusive marriage itself was a manifestation of what was wrong with Western sexuality.”⁸⁹

Vincent and like-minded evangelicals viewed sexual discontent as a contemporary effect of insufficiently policed sexual boundaries, while sexual revolutionaries viewed discontent as historically endemic within the entire system of Western, and Christian, sexual values. “Sex, in the counterculture, was fun and free,” privileging the value of pleasurable experience over marital commitment, which inverted the value system of evangelicals like Dr. Vincent.⁹⁰ Though evangelicals criticized the counterculture's value system as obsessed with meaningless sex, some counter-cultural revolutionaries “argued that sex was far more than simple copulation,” and instead was involved in a “higher ideal” of “total sexuality” that encompassed the “whole body” and even created “a feeling of communion.”⁹¹ Contrasted with the violence of the Vietnam War, making love instead of war was seen by sexual revolutionaries as the vehicle for ushering in a peaceful, harmonious, and just society. But even this vision of “free love” was challenged by second wave feminists “who almost always located oppression in their inability to escape *being* sexualized.”⁹² To them, sexual freedom primarily meant freedom *from* the imposition of men's sexual attitudes, and some of them “saw freewheeling sexual relationships simply as an extension of the male-dominated sexuality of American society at large,” a criticism that was also implicit within evangelical objections to obscenity and the Playboy Philosophy.⁹³ Ultimately, both evangelicals and sexual revolutionaries agreed about the existence of Western sexual dysfunction. Their fundamental disagreement revolved around blaming each other for causing it.

In the middle of his book, Vincent examined four perspectives about sexuality that

89. Timothy S. Miller, *The Hippies and American Values* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2012), 27.

90. Miller, *The Hippies and American Values*, 26.

91. Miller, *The Hippies and American Values*, 28, 33.

92. Beth Bailey, *Sex in the Heartland* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 178.

93. Miller, *The Hippies and American Values*, 37.

reflected the contemporary sexual zeitgeist and its opponents: the Playboy Philosophy, the New Morality (situation ethics), legalistic interpretations of Christianity, and Vincent's Biblical interpretation of sexuality that focused on love as a primary value. Vincent offered the first three perspectives in order to refute them, and offered the fourth as the most reasonable path to achieving a healthy sexuality for self and society. Vincent's overall rhetorical approach was straightforward, rebutting secular perspectives on sexuality that depended on either hedonism or “false” interpretations of Christianity, and offering a more “authentic” version of Christian sexuality as the only remaining viable outlook.

Vincent framed the Playboy Philosophy as a “trinity” consisting of man, pleasure and sex. He claimed that according to Hefner, “freedom of the individual to do what he likes” was “the essence of humanity,” but that the man who read *Playboy* magazine was actually ensnared in a consumerist ethos of the next cool gadget or trend as defined by *Playboy*, and that this constituted a “new kind of tyranny” rather than actual individualism.⁹⁴ Vincent also pointed out that the Playboy Philosophy's supposed benefits primarily accrued to men at the expense of women, offering as evidence the many jokes and cartoons within the magazine that he claimed ridiculed and dehumanized women. Hefner's notion of pleasure, Vincent contended, was merely a resurrection of hedonism, which had its “greatest appeal for the young and the 'beautiful people,' ” but offered little in the face of the “tragedies and vicissitudes of life or the aging process.”⁹⁵ Vincent concluded that sex had a “strange but important place in the Playboy Philosophy” because “on the one hand it overestimates the necessity of sexual intercourse,” while in Vincent's opinion it was better understood as a desire than a need, “while at the same time underestimating its value” as a unifying relational and social force hinging on commitment

94. Vincent, *God, Sex and You*, 64.

95. Vincent, *God, Sex and You*, 66.

and responsibility.⁹⁶ In his final evaluation of “Hefnerism,” Vincent addressed several of Hefner's criticisms of Christianity and deployment of psychoanalytic theory, denying in each case that Hefner had the correct assessment. Predictably, Vincent concluded that the Playboy Philosophy was a failure as a moral system.

A handful of years after Vincent published *God, Sex and You*, Harry Hollis published *Thank God for Sex: A Christian Model for Sexual Understanding and Behavior*. Hollis possessed a Th.D. from Southern Baptist Seminary and at the time of publication was the director of family and special moral concerns for the Christian Life Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention. The book was based on his dissertation and subsequent lectures, and grew out of his frustration that churches failed to impart a thankfulness and positivity regarding sexuality. Like Dr. Vincent, Hollis singled out Hugh Hefner's Playboy Philosophy for a special rebuttal. He began by labeling the Playboy Philosophy as a brand of hedonism that did not take sex seriously enough because it stressed the pleasure element in a “one-sided, self-centered view.”⁹⁷ Hollis summed up the Playboy Philosophy as serving up sex “as a part of an entertainment package” that stressed the sexual freedom of the individual independent of church or state injunctions to the contrary.⁹⁸ Whereas Vincent allowed only that Hefner had valid points against “some distortions of Christianity,” Hollis acknowledged that Hefner was correct in criticizing contemporary sexual hypocrisy, the church's silence about sex and the single individual, and his contention that pleasure was an important dimension to sex.⁹⁹ However, Hollis judged the Playboy Philosophy as inadequate, claiming that it was an oversimplification of a complex relational experience dependent on communication, integrity, commitment, and mystery.

96. Vincent, *God, Sex and You*, 66.

97. Harry Hollis, *Thank God for Sex: A Christian Model for Sexual Understanding and Behavior* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1975), 45.

98. Hollis, *Thank God for Sex*, 47.

99. Vincent, *God, Sex and You*, 67, and Hollis, *Thank God for Sex*, 49.

Perhaps due to the fact that their evaluations were relatively brief (Vincent's treatment of Hefner running ten pages, and Hollis' seven), both of these critics of the Playboy Philosophy somewhat oversimplified Hefner's positions. Elizabeth Fraterrigo's book length treatment of the Playboy Philosophy underscored how "the playboy was neither a freeloading hedonist nor an ascetic overachiever, but a man who exuberantly pursued a full life of work, pleasure, and play."¹⁰⁰ Certainly, Hefner's philosophy seemed to work for him, and it created aspirational fantasies for countless young men who ogled the centerfolds and possibly even read the articles, and of course it inspired a sufficient number of attractive young women to audition to be included in the magazine's pictorials. But critically for Vincent, Hollis, and its evangelical detractors in *Christianity Today*, the Playboy Philosophy served as a convenient symbol of what they saw as the sexual revolution's excessive preoccupation with irresponsible sexuality. Responsible sexuality, in the evangelical view, required recognition of God's role in determining meaning in human life, and thus God's standards for human sexuality as revealed in the Bible were the only valid starting point for sexual ethics. For a brief period of time, there might have been some overlap between the concerns of evangelicals and some elements of the sexual revolution, such as feminists who also criticized the objectification of women through pornography, media, and social attitudes. Beth Bailey highlighted several examples of nascent feminism in Lawrence, Kansas in the sixties that might have found common cause with evangelical critiques about sexuality.¹⁰¹ But the opportunity for common cause soon disappeared as feminists and evangelicals staked out opposing political ground within the two party system.

While evangelicals could fairly easily rebut hedonism through appeals to Christian principles, theological advocates of the New Morality posed a more serious problem, because

100. Elizabeth Fraterrigo, *Playboy and the Making of the Good Life in Modern America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 49.

101. Bailey, *Sex in the Heartland*, 191-199.

they stressed a reinterpretation of Christian theology as the basis for a new moral system, rather than the rejection of Christianity altogether. The two theologians who dismayed evangelicals the most were John Robinson and Joseph Fletcher. John Robinson became Bishop of Woolwich in the Anglican Church in 1959, and while in that post published *Honest to God* in 1963, in which he attempted to build on the theological work of Paul Tillich and Dietrich Bonhoeffer in a way that was understandable to the average reader.¹⁰² Robinson reconceptualized God as impersonal Love, rather than possessing actual personhood, and this led him to privilege love as the most important value and ultimate determinant of conduct as moral or immoral. Writers in *Christianity Today* reacted quickly to Robinson's broadside against orthodox teaching about deity and morality. An article entitled "The New Morality" in March 1964 explicitly warned readers that Robinson's view of morality inevitably led to revisionist reinterpretations of Biblical injunctions regarding sex. Three months later, in June, "The Morals Revolution and The Christian College" warned that Robinson's views promoted new sexual doctrines and slogans that threatened to encourage sexual promiscuity among the young and unmarried. The article encouraged Christian college administrators to provide moral guidance to students, and discouraged students from accepting Robinson's sexual ethics because of the dire sociological consequences attendant to promiscuity and premarital sex. Curiously, the article relied more on sociology than theology to rebut Robinson's arguments, apparently from the assumption that sociological evidence was more persuasive to young adults. The editorial board of *Christianity Today* chimed in a year later to argue that the end result of the New Morality would be that "marriage will appear as the enemy of love."¹⁰³ Evangelicals saw the New Morality not just as an assault against limitations on sex, but also as a threat to the integrity of marriage itself.

102. John A. T. Robinson, *Honest to God* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963).

103. Editorial, "The 'New Morality' and Premarital Sex," *Christianity Today*, July 2, 1965, 21-23.

Three years after Robinson released *Honest to God*, Joseph Fletcher published *Situation Ethics: The New Morality* in the middle of his tenure at Harvard Divinity School teaching Christian ethics from 1944 to 1970.¹⁰⁴ Fletcher's terminology proved fortunate for evangelicals, as “situation ethics” served critics as both a description and a derisive commentary for Robinson's and Fletcher's ethical system. While orthodox Christian morality relied on specific commandments to govern behavior, situation ethics allowed each individual moral circumstance to be subject to a situation-specific moral assessment. Evangelicals argued that sex apart from marriage was always sinful, but situation ethicists contended that values such as love governed each individual instance of sex apart from any overarching divine injunction. “Love is all you need” was more than a Beatles' song to new moralists, and could have functioned as their anthem, according to evangelical critics. By contrast, evangelicals argued that righteousness and sin were immutable.

Dr. M. O. Vincent addressed situation ethics extensively in *God, Sex and You*, arguing that a historical overemphasis on legalism had resulted in a contemporary theological backlash that rebounded to the other extreme of license. Vincent's arguments against situation ethics primarily depended on his interpretation of the likely rational abilities and tendencies of “the average man on the street” to apply the ethical system to his own particular circumstances.¹⁰⁵ Vincent claimed that the average person would interpret the New Morality as license for promiscuous sex rather than as a directive towards higher spiritual purpose furthering love as a value. He argued that “a workable ethic must have a realistic view of man,” and that “the New Morality overestimates man's rationality, goodness, and knowledge,” all of which Vincent thought were lacking in the average person's ability to moralize about sex apart from universal

104. Joseph Francis Fletcher, *Situation Ethics: The New Morality* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966).

105. Vincent, *God, Sex and You*, 77-78. Chapters 5 & 7 deal extensively with situation ethics, explaining first its value system and then refuting it as inadequate.

rules.¹⁰⁶ While ultimately rejecting the New Morality like Vincent, Harry Hollis, in *Thank God for Sex*, agreed with its precept that “sexual behavior must be determined by the positive motive of love,” but countered that situation ethics “does not have the necessary theological framework to give content to the love that it stresses,” and that it must be balanced by “the spiritual power of religious conviction to check the destructiveness that comes when it is unchanneled.”¹⁰⁷ While situation ethics relied on love alone as a determinant of right and wrong according to changing circumstances, Hollis argued that love without boundaries became merely licentiousness.

Two critical linkages become evident from reviewing evangelical reactions to obscenity, the Playboy Philosophy, and the New Morality. First, evangelicals relied on sociological evidence at least as much, if not more, than theology to protest and refute challenges to their view of Christian sexual ethics. Perhaps fearful that secular science held greater sway with the public than scripture, and aware that even Christians increasingly accepted the authority of therapeutic culture to offer meaningful judgments about the conduct of life, evangelicals deployed scientific proofs to bolster their theological claims. Second, evangelicals believed that premarital sex was not only sinful in and of itself, but also threatened the specific marriages that people might eventually form, and the larger institution of marriage itself. On that basis, evangelicals understood the sexual revolution not as the liberalizing expansion of freedom that Hefner envisioned, but as an insidious attempt to undermine the foundation of Christian marriage and society.

106. Vincent, *God, Sex and You*, 79.

107. Harry Hollis, *Thank God for Sex*, 32,33.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE EVANGELICAL MARRIAGE REVOLUTION

As the 1960s dawned, evangelicals believed that they were already engaged in a fight over their most cherished values. With Hugh Hefner on the secular front proclaiming a “Playboy Philosophy” that untethered sex from marriage and Christianity, and New Moralists making similar theological arguments based on reinterpretations of scripture, evangelicals claimed that the United States was in the midst of a sexual revolution years before the counter-culture emerged to shine a spotlight on changing sexual norms or provide historians with a demarcation point for evolving social values. The postwar economic boom had made the depression years of the 1930s a distant memory, and the baby boom generation was growing up in a time of prosperity and innovation that rivaled any prior era. Like automobiles, television sets, and suburban homes, sex was becoming a consumer item, with its depictions available like never before at news stands, book stores, and cinemas. Past morals crusades were fought by middle class activists trying to “clean up” society, but the 1960s would bear witness to a morals crusade waged primarily by the young with the aim of loosening society's sexual restrictions, rather than tightening them.¹⁰⁸ Over the next two decades conservative evangelicals coalesced around a strategy that acknowledged sexuality as a key component of a fulfilled life, emphasized the

108. My assessment here relies on a memory of the past as understood by evangelicals assessing the 1960s, rather than history as a historian might tell it. Bohemians in the 1920s certainly challenged the social order relating to marriage and sexuality, but they did so without the sort of media spotlight that 1960s sexual revolutionaries experienced. For discussion of earlier challenges to the sexual status quo, see John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1988), 202-238.

centrality of marriage to the healthy expression of sexuality, and reinforced the nuclear family as the essential foundation of American cultural success.

The first step in the evangelical campaign to blunt the assault of sexual revolution was to handle the counter-cultural charge that Christianity promoted the idea of sex as guilt-laden and fundamentally bad. Among the evangelicals who wrote and read *Christianity Today* and like-minded publications, there was broad agreement that Christianity had historically promoted a negative view of sex that inexorably led to sexual repression, and thereby to marital and societal discontent.¹⁰⁹ At the dawn of the 1960s, *Christianity Today* printed a transcript of a recorded conversation among the magazine's editorial staff “expressing views of America's sex crisis” that concisely revealed evangelicals' prevailing understanding of the sexual counter-culture.¹¹⁰ Editor Dr. Carl Henry asked, “are some freedoms today preferable to some Victorian restrictions?” to which executive editor Dr. Nelson Bell replied, “unquestionably some of the ideas of past generations were prudish,” and editorial associate Dr. Sherwood Wirt followed with, “no doubt the Victorian view of sex, as we usually think of it, was the wrong approach: the hushed attitude, the prudery, the aggravated guilt feelings.”¹¹¹ Thus, at the very inception of their discussion, this group of highly educated professionals laid down a theoretical framework of sexuality that presupposed the “repressive hypothesis.”¹¹² But though conservatives are often understood as aligning with and yearning for tradition, the nostalgia of these editors was focused on recasting the past in a negative light. Like the sexual revolutionaries they would contend with over the

109. For a discussion of attitudes about sex in the broader American population in the 1950s, see Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), 114-134. May's analysis of longitudinal survey data revealed many people who had negative views about sex, and a variety of successful and unsuccessful sexual adjustments before and after marriage.

110. “Sex in Christian Perspective,” *Christianity Today*, July 4, 1960, 6.

111. “Sex in Christian Perspective,” *Christianity Today*, July 4, 1960, 7.

112. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol 1: An Introduction*, trans Robert Hurley (1978; repr., New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 3-49. Foucault's complex analysis of the repressive hypothesis and Victorian sexuality turned on the proliferation of rhetoric and attention that “repression” actually generated.

next decades, these evangelicals rejected repressive sexuality and labeled it as the origin of contemporary conflicts over sexuality. These evangelicals, like the sexual revolutionaries they would denounce, sought changes in contemporary sexuality.

The editorial board of *Christianity Today* intended to initiate change close to home, within contemporary Christianity. News editor David Kucharsky asked the editorial round table, “Should we give priority to finding some solutions to the sex problem within the Christian community before we tackle the problem on a larger scale?”¹¹³ Dr. Henry's immediate response was emphatic: “There is much to be said for that. The Church's skirts are not altogether clean. When we simply look to the Church for a solution we often forget that the Church came up with a solution in the Middle Ages that was far from happy: celibacy and monasticism.”¹¹⁴ Dr. Henry's line of attack against Roman Catholicism's theological interpretation of sexuality went unchallenged by his associates, and laid bare evangelicals' understanding of the sharp distinction between Catholic and evangelical Protestant thought on the subject: Catholicism had established and sustained a negativism regarding sexuality that Protestantism could, and ought to, reform. But Dr. Henry pointed out that this reformation first of all faced an internal dilemma, in that “even Protestantism has contributed an obstacle to the fulfillment of legitimate sexual satisfactions whenever it has implied if not that sex is inherently evil, that it is at least repugnant and earthy.”¹¹⁵ Rebellion against the deeply rooted connection between sexuality and sin was at the heart of the sexual revolution, and combatants on both sides fought to wrestle pleasure and meaning away from the tight grip that sin had maintained over sexual expression.¹¹⁶

113. “Sex in Christian Perspective,” *Christianity Today*, July 4, 1960, 8.

114. “Sex in Christian Perspective,” *Christianity Today*, July 4, 1960, 8. Use of the capitalized term “Church”, refers to the Roman Catholic Church throughout this paper. This is both an acknowledgement of shared religious heritage and inherited theology, and a mark of distinction separating Catholicism from Protestantism. Evangelicals and Protestants typically referred to themselves in the plural, as in “churches,” or simply by referring to Christians.

115. “Sex in Christian Perspective,” *Christianity Today*, July 4, 1960, 8.

116. For a recent scholarly survey on the topic of sexuality and Christianity, see Margaret D. Kamitsuka, ed., *The*

Over the next two decades, evangelical writers would echo the editors' concerns about the connections between sexuality and sin in their own works, advocating for a more open dialogue about wholesome sexuality within the Church. In 1961, the Canadian and National (U.S.A.) Councils of Churches sponsored a conference on Church and Family that attracted several hundred officials and administrators from thirty-three denominations across North America. The executive director of the Department of Family Life of the National Council of Churches, William H. Genne, directed the conference, and along with his wife, Elizabeth, coauthored a brief account of the conference's findings for the general public. They wrote that in order to instill respect rather than fear of sex, “real effort must be expended in keeping sex from being made synonymous with sin, as it has been all too frequently in the past.”¹¹⁷ The title of perennial evangelical author and pastor Tim LaHaye's 1968 book, *How to Be Happy Though Married*, was a satirical reference to negative views of marriage. In rare praise for the sexual revolution, LaHaye asserted that it had exposed the false concept that sex is bad, which did not originate from the Bible, but from merging ascetic philosophy with Christianity.¹¹⁸ In 1971, evangelical psychiatrist Dr. M. O. Vincent blamed negative views about sex in Christianity on “legalistic distortions of true Christianity,” and proceeded to effectively write legalists out of Christianity by all but naming them heretics.¹¹⁹ In 1975, evangelical, Southern Baptist pastor Harry Hollis gushed that “we can discover the basis for being cheerful, humorous, and playful in a Christian understanding of sex. We can celebrate sex!”¹²⁰ Evangelical author and independent scholar *Embrace of Eros: Bodies, Desire and Sexuality in Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010). Both the introduction by Kamitsuka and the first chapter, “The Bible and Sex” by David H. Jensen, provide overviews of current religious scholarship and theology that reinforce the historical arc connecting sexuality and sin.

117. Elizabeth and William Genne, *Christians and the Crisis in Sex Morality* (New York: Association Press, 1962), 66-67.

118. Tim and Beverly LaHaye, *The Act of Marriage: The Beauty of Sexual Love* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), 91-92.

119. Vincent, *God, Sex and You*, 90-93. Vincent listed Letha Scanzoni's 1968 book *Sex and the Single Eye: A Christian Philosophy of Sex* in his bibliography. Scanzoni later expanded it into the 1975 monograph, *Why Wait?*

120. Hollis, *Thank God for Sex*, 167.

Letha Scanzoni, also writing in 1975, agreed, “I’m just as glad as you are to see the passing of a stuffy, hypocritical Victorianism. The open discussion of sex in our day is to be commended.”¹²¹ Christian marriage counselor and Wake Forest University professor Dr. David Mace argued that Christians should engage with the world rather than withdrawing from its problems, including finding a way to offer Christianity as a sex-positive message.¹²² Hefner’s *Playboy* philosophy derided sexual guilt, and Mace agreed to the extent that marriage should be a guilt-free sexual zone.¹²³ Mace wrote, “the time has come...for the Church to reverse its negative and punitive attitudes toward sex, and to take a much more positive approach...If Christianity persists in presenting itself as an anti-sexual religion, it will not get a hearing in this generation.”¹²⁴ *Christianity Today* continued to publish editorials and articles reflecting these views throughout the 1960s and 1970s.

Evangelicals writing in the 1960s and 1970s frequently blamed what they acknowledged as the sexual repressiveness of the Victorian era and the first half of the 1900s on what they described as a long term doctrinal misunderstanding of sex, which they claimed had originated historically through the teachings of some of the key theologians of the Roman Catholic Church, and had been retained subsequently in Protestant thought. But even in 1960, the editors of *Christianity Today* were not, of course, revealing wholly new ideas in their conversation. Dr. David Mace published *Hebrew Marriage: A Sociological Study* in 1953, in which he provided an explanation of the sexual beliefs and attitudes in Hebrew and early Semitic cultures that would be widely accepted by other evangelicals in their own writings over the next two decades. Both

121. Letha Scanzoni, *Why Wait? (A Christian View of Premarital Sex)* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975), 8. Letha Scanzoni's prior short book, *Sex and the Single Eye*, was reworked and expanded into *Why Wait*. Her first book appeared in the bibliography of *The Act of Marriage* by Tim and Beverly LaHaye.

122. Mace, *The Christian Response*, 102-103.

123. Mace, *The Christian Response*, 103-107.

124. Mace, *The Christian Response*, 126.

Harry Hollis and Letha Scanzoni directly cited his book twenty years later in their own discussions of historic Church teachings about sex, and Mace himself was still using his research in 1969 when he delivered three lectures at Wake Forest University's Department of Religion, which he later condensed into a short book entitled *The Christian Response to the Sexual Revolution*.¹²⁵ Mace's motivation for rewriting his lectures into a book was his concern that "Christian teaching about sex has been contaminated and confused by negative and unwholesome non-Christian concepts."¹²⁶ His lectures were delivered to a university audience of students and professors, but he addressed the book to "Christians of all persuasions" in order to make plain to his fellow believers the "urgent need for a Christian reinterpretation of sex."¹²⁷ The first half of the book examined viewpoints about sex first from the standpoint of Judaism, then Christianity. Mace argued that ancient Hebrew thinking about sex was positive, stemming from their understanding that "sex was the means of pro-creation – literally, continuing the work of creation on behalf of God. The marvelous power of making new beings in the divine image was a divine endowment, entrusted to man as God's representative."¹²⁸ Mace contended that to the ancient Hebrews the act of sex was a holy act that partnered man with God in creation of new life. Family life and child-bearing were thus central to Hebrew society, and circumcision's cutting off part of the male reproductive organ was a blood sacrifice that dedicated both that male and his sexual capabilities to the holy service of God's continuing work of creation.

Mace further argued that the teachings of Jesus did not contradict the basic Hebrew understanding of sex, but simply made "a few necessary corrections and adjustments" to the dominant rabbinical teachings of the day. Mace summarized Jesus' teaching about sex into four

125. Scanzoni, *Why Wait?*, 23. Her second chapter covers gnosticism, asceticism, and the origins of sex-negativity in Church teachings.

126. Mace, *The Christian Response*, 7.

127. Mace, *The Christian Response*, 8,9.

128. Mace, *The Christian Response*, 19.

simple categories that “reaffirmed the sanctity of marriage as an institution ordained by God,” “challenged the Hebrew concept that marriage was a universal duty,” stressed that sexual purity was dependent on purity of thought rather than merely physical action, and emphasized understanding and compassion towards sexual sin rather than punitive judgment.¹²⁹ About the writings of the apostle Paul, which constitute the majority of the New Testament texts regarding marriage and sex, Mace asserted that “on the essential issues Paul unquestionably supports and reflects the positive spiritual Old Testament concept of sex and marriage.”¹³⁰

How, then, could an ancient Hebrew understanding of sex as holy combine with a sex-positive message from Jesus and Paul in the first century to produce a Christian understanding of sex as inherently sinful, and especially in such a way that a sex-negative view would predominate in both Catholic and Protestant thought twenty centuries later? Mace placed the blame for this transformation squarely on the infiltration of Hellenistic philosophies into late first-century Christian thought, which corrupted Christian sexual ethics into a series of negative doctrines elevating celibacy and debasing even marital sex as essentially sinful.¹³¹ Greek gnosticism, or dualism, held that the material world and therefore the body was inherently evil, while only the spiritual realm enabled purity and freedom from sin, and so Gnostics believed that sex must also be evil because it existed in the physical realm, though it was a tolerable necessity for procreation. According to Mace's schema, this doctrinal foundation developed into the Roman Catholic doctrines of original sin, as well as celibacy and asceticism as means of spiritual purification.

In an essential respect, Mace was challenging Catholic doctrines about the body and sex,

129. Mace, *The Christian Response*, 33-34.

130. Mace, *The Christian Response*, 36.

131. Mace, *The Christian Response*, 13. Notably, the extreme version of this view taught by some early Catholic theologians required confession and absolution for sexual activity even when carried out between a husband and wife.

particularly the idea of original sin transmitted through sex, and celibacy as a higher spiritual calling. Mace's aim was to “de-Hellenize and re-Judaize the Church's doctrine of human sexuality.”¹³² He intended this process to thus recast the sex-negative view of Christian sexuality as heretical and promote a sex-positive Christianity in its place. He thus embraced a key element of the 1960s sexual revolution and called it Christian: sex was good. To combat these “heresies”, Mace wrote that “the only way open for Christians...is to go back to the Bible and start again, at the point where the Church took the wrong path by interpreting sex in the framework of a dualistic philosophy.”¹³³

Elizabeth and William Genne, Letha Scanzoni, Harry Hollis, Dr. M. O. Vincent, and Tim LaHaye, as well as authors writing in *Christianity Today* all either advanced arguments similar to those made by David Mace, cited him directly, or agreed broadly with his historical interpretations in their own works. To these evangelicals, successfully reconceptualizing sex as positive was Christianity's primary contemporary dilemma and imperative. Critically, these evangelicals argued that a sex-negative Christian viewpoint was a product of the infiltration of Hellenistic paganism into Christian thought rather than an “authentic” understanding of scripture. Consequently, like the sexual revolutionaries and *Playboy* philosophers they derided, evangelicals rejected both sex-negativity and the apparent sexual repression that it produced.¹³⁴ Dr. M. O. Vincent even cited Hugh Hefner favorably for being right about his criticisms of sex-negative and repressive Christian teachings.¹³⁵ However, unlike the proponents of the counter-culture, evangelicals sought to upend and reverse sexual repression by revealing a sex-positive

132. Mace, *The Christian Response*, 13.

133. Mace, *The Christian Response*, 96.

134. Freudian interpretations and assumptions regarding sex, repression, and society are ubiquitous throughout evangelical writings on the subjects during this period, as they were elsewhere in society. Evangelicals didn't appeal directly to Freudian thought, but it provided a foundation for any discussion of sexual psychology during the time that psychoanalysis was the dominant psychological and psychiatric paradigm.

135. Vincent, *God, Sex and You*, 91. He lauded Hefner in this instance, but criticized his philosophy otherwise.

outlook derived from Biblical origins and sustained by marriages lived according to “authentic” Biblical criteria. This narrative laid out for evangelicals a clearly defined origin for “authentic” Christian sexual ethics, and provided a powerful motivation for challenging the theological status quo as it related to sex. Sexual revolutionaries like Hugh Hefner called for an overthrow of Christianity's sexual norms in their entirety, but evangelicals sought a restoration to its primitive roots. Both groups recognized marriage and the family as a critical locus of change, as indeed it already was in postwar American society. For evangelicals, maintenance of the linkage of sexuality to marriage and family became of primary importance.

Historian Elaine Tyler May, in *Homeward Bound*, argued that 1950s political and domestic concerns merged into a culture of “domestic containment” that “describes the way in which public policy, personal behavior, and even political values were focused on the home.”¹³⁶ According to May, this ideology deeply embedded yearnings for security and success within a framework of stable marriage to an extent that was new in American culture and had profound implications for both marriage and society more generally. While May acknowledged that American public policy was dominated by the Protestant middle-class, she did not delve deeply into that Protestant religious culture, much less its evangelical segment. Nevertheless, May's work provides an essential foundation for understanding the immediate postwar social environment with regard to marriage and family life. Within May's framework of “domestic containment” lies the core of the concept of the traditional family that evangelicals would seek to defend from the perceived attack of the 1960s counter-culture.¹³⁷ Indeed, *Christianity Today*

136. May, *Homeward Bound*, 14.

137. Two points are essential regarding the term traditional family. First, it is absent from the literature written by evangelicals in the 1960s and 1970s that I reviewed. I suspect the term became ubiquitous after the 1980 elections when explicitly Christian political organizations like the Moral Majority became influential by directly merging Christianity with political activism. Second, Stephanie Coontz extensively documented the misappropriation of the term for ahistorical and political purposes in her book *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York: Basic Books, 1992). The traditional family, in reality, is a specific nuclear family form

published an article in 1975 entitled “The Nuclear Family: Today's Whipping Boy” which argued that attacks on the nuclear family in favor of open marriage or communes were really covert attacks on Christian morality as a whole.¹³⁸ Two years later, *Christianity Today* published an article from William H. Willimon, a professor at Duke Divinity School, stating that “it was predictable that marriage would become a focal point of the revolt of the sixties. To subvert the institution of marriage, to call its values and mores into question, to uncover marriage as a tool of an oppressive society, was rightly seen as an attack on the very core of decadent 'bourgeois morality'.”¹³⁹ In a limited way, evangelicals agreed with the counter-culture warriors about the need to upend Christianity from its moorings. Willimon echoed their criticisms of “the hypocrisy of many marriages, the drabness of many marriages, the tragic enslavement of women in many marriages,” and called these criticisms “valid.”¹⁴⁰ But evangelicals sought to remake and restore marriage rather than sweep it away. William Willimon argued that “the Christian idea of marriage” was “a truly revolutionary concept for our age.”¹⁴¹ Evangelical Christianity as led by *Christianity Today* and those friendly to its mission worked to establish themselves not as a dam to hold back the onrushing tide of sexual revolution, but to instead channel its energies into a restoration of their view of primitive Christian sexual values. In doing so, evangelical Christianity would surf the waves and survive by engaging with the changing culture, rather than be swept aside into irrelevance and oblivion. The main route of this channeling would be a re-examination of marriage in light of the culture's new sexual imperatives. Some counter-culture

that isn't particularly old-fashioned (having been largely invented by the post-war middle-class suburban culture as studied by Elaine Tyler May). I use the term here only because it concisely references a larger set of cultural concerns valued by evangelicals, and they believed in its historicity. But as Coontz pointed out, the term is properly a matter of memory rather than history.

138. Harold B. Kuhn, “The Nuclear Family: Today's Whipping Boy,” *Christianity Today*, May 23, 1975, 62-63.

139. William H. Willimon, “Marriage as a Subversive Activity,” *Christianity Today*, February 18, 1977, 16.

140. Willimon, “Marriage as a Subversive Activity,” 16.

141. Willimon, “Marriage as a Subversive Activity,” 16.

advocates might have preferred a society without marriage altogether, but evangelicals intended to preserve marriage as a foundation for the family and American society. Indeed, some evangelicals evinced a belief that civilization itself was at stake if they failed in that effort.

The threat of widespread civilizational collapse as an impetus for social reform was hardly new in the 1960s, and indeed it had been comparatively recently a primary feature of Theodore Roosevelt's personal and political philosophy at the turn of the century, along with inspiring numerous volumes of academic and pseudo-academic works during the Progressive Era that alarmed the middle and upper classes of American society.¹⁴² Oswald Spengler's 1918 *Decline of the West* probably remains the most well-known work in the genre. Historian Elaine Tyler May contended that the therapeutic culture of the 1950s “was geared toward helping people feel better about their place in the world, rather than changing it,” undermining “the potential for political activism” among the postwar generation.¹⁴³ But their children, the baby boom generation, ushered in an impetus for political and social change in the 1960s and 1970s that evangelicals saw as a threat to marriage and families. Some evangelicals in the 1960s submitted their own interpretations and predictions of civilizational decline and ruin.¹⁴⁴ In a transcribed panel discussion among the editors of *Christianity Today* published in January 1961, editorial associate Dr. Frank Farrell explicitly tied sex, communism, and civilizational peril together. He contended that “free love” in early Soviet Bolshevism was soon abandoned for

142. One such was *The Law of Civilization and Decay* published by Brooks Adams in 1895, which covered the history of Western Civilization since Rome to make the case that history was cyclical and implied that American society was reaching an apex from which a decline was historically inevitable. Theodore Roosevelt published a review of the book after its release.

143. May, *Homeward Bound*, 14.

144. Michael Rogin explored the popular culture connections between sex and communism (certainly a perceived civilizational threat in the U.S.A.) in the chapter “Kiss Me Deadly: Communism, Motherhood and Cold War Movies,” in *Ronald Reagan, the Movie and Other Episodes in Political Demonology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 236-272. The emphasis on sex as a threat that Rogin outlined may have informed later evangelical writers in *Christianity Today* who were also decidedly anti-communist. There were certainly quite a few popular films that made that connection.

traditional sexual morality out of practical considerations, because nature reflects God's moral laws by providing natural consequences for sin and sexual immorality that eventually compelled even the Soviet Union's "atheistic leaders" "to call a halt for national survival."¹⁴⁵ The editors further emphasized that "sex espionage" and "honey traps" by the Soviets were made easier by a sex saturated domestic American media. Farrell's linkage was the proverbial stone that slew two birds at once: he simultaneously asserted that "free love" was discreditable for being Bolshevik ideology, and Americans further shouldn't embrace it since even the Bolshevik's abandoned it when faced with its disastrous consequences. Though Nixon had tried to impress Khrushchev with America's superior home appliances, evangelicals pointed to the superior American family structure, and the Christian sexual norms that supported it, as both superior to communist moral and social values and essential to the continuance of Western civilization itself.¹⁴⁶

Two articles published in *Christianity Today* in 1965 also trumpeted such concerns. The March 12th edition contained an editorial titled "A Time for Moral Indignation" which decried the ubiquity of sex in media, labeled the profligate pursuit of sex as a modern form of idolatry, and objected to the increasing popularity of "sex symbols" as evidence of sex becoming divested of humanity. The editors further ventured that "when 'anything goes' in sex and freedom of expression, it is society that finally goes," and "what America's present moral situation requires even more than laws and their enforcement is the arousal of a tidal wave of righteous moral indignation against a wanton exploitation of sex."¹⁴⁷ Clearly, they intended to motivate Christians to be at the forefront of that tidal wave of objection to changing sex norms. In November, *Christianity Today* published an article contending that pornography was a scourge that encouraged sexual license and violent crimes like murder and rape, and was thus a threat to the

145. "The Press and Sex Morality," *Christianity Today*, January 30, 1961, 20-22.

146. For a discussion of Nixon and Khrushchev's "Kitchen Debate" see May, *Homeward Bound*, 16-19.

147. Editorial, "A Time for Moral Indignation," *Christianity Today*, March 12, 1965, 28-29.

stability of American civilization.¹⁴⁸ In his 1971 book *God, Sex and You*, Dr. M. O. Vincent quoted Dr. Rollo May's position that termed "Eros" (the tension between sexual expression and restraint in the pursuit of passion) "the center of the vitality of a culture – its heart and soul," and that hedonism exhausted Eros to the eventual point when "the downfall of the civilization is assured."¹⁴⁹ Evangelicals viewed these perceived threats to civilization brought about by the counter-culture, the *Playboy* philosophy, the New Morality, and communism as cooperative assaults on the structure of Christian marriage and family, and those structures needed to be defended in order to defend American society itself from "downfall". In their view, the stakes in the effort to restore primitive Christian sexual ethics couldn't be higher.

With the stakes so high, and with an imperative of restoring primitive Christian sexual ethics as their driving motivation, evangelicals were both troubled and emboldened by the sexual counter-culture of the 1960s. At the start of the decade, an article in *Christianity Today* proclaimed under the subheading "A Soothing Diagnosis" that "in the whole of human history there has hardly ever been a struggle as tremendous, as dramatic, and as fateful for the future of mankind as this momentous struggle fought now in all fields of our social and cultural life and in the soul and body of everyone of us."¹⁵⁰ But the same article also offered a prediction that the current tide of "sex anarchy" could, after a few decades of zealous effort, be stopped and forced into a "decisive retreat." Though editorials in *Christianity Today* regularly criticized the apparent breakdown of middle-class Christian norms in society, authors such as David Mace drilled down into hard survey data to offer hope. He cited studies showing that sexual behavior was changing only slowly over the long term, contradicting any popular perception that non-marital sex was

148. Russell J. Fornwalt, "Pollution of the Moral Waters," *Christianity Today*, November 5, 1965, 11-12.

149. Vincent, *God, Sex and You*, 68.

150. Pitirim A. Sorokin, "The Depth of the Crisis: American Sex Morality Today," *Christianity Today*, July 4, 1960, 5.

yet normative or prevalent.¹⁵¹ But though Mace acknowledged that major shifts were taking place in American sexuality, he also claimed that “the greatest changes brought about by the sexual revolution are *in* marriage,” because that is where most sex takes place, and increasing freedom and absence of guilt impacted marital sex the most, and positively.¹⁵² Mace's formulation struck directly at the heart of the sexual counter-culture's main accusations. The New Morality's sexual ethics proclaimed sexual freedom without guilt as a motivation for delimiting sex from marriage, but Mace contended that more freedom and less guilt was good for marital sexuality, and thus marriage. Evangelical literature celebrated sexual expression within marriage, and placed it at the center of the relationship. Explicitly crediting David Mace's book, Harry Hollis contended in *Thank God for Sex* that sex should be celebrated first because it was created by God, and second because its procreative aspect allowed humans to join with God in creating new life.¹⁵³ Sexual intercourse, the duality of male and female, and marriage were all intimately intertwined in Hollis' theological framework.¹⁵⁴ The essentials of Hollis' argument was that God created humans as male and female as a prerequisite for creating sexual intercourse, established marriage as the framework of sexual union, and then joins with the marital couple in creating new human life through sex. In this view, sex thus celebrates the original creation while extending it to the present, but this celebration only takes place in a spiritually relevant sense if a man and woman adhere to God's marital plan.¹⁵⁵

Evangelicals believed that a key distinction between the counter-cultural and evangelical

151. Mace, *The Christian Response*, 91-95. Contemporary secular sex researchers would have disagreed with Mace's conclusions, but his evangelical readers would have found solace in them nonetheless.

152. Mace, *The Christian Response*, 92.

153. Hollis, *Thank God for Sex*, 58-59, 66-70. The procreative argument regarding sex is also a key theological component of evangelicals' rejection of homosexuality, although evangelicals do not typically situate procreation as so central to Christian sexuality as Roman Catholic doctrine does. Hollis offered procreation as one element of sexual celebration, but not the primary or sole element. He emphasized spiritual union in “one flesh” through intercourse as more important than procreation.

154. Harry Hollis, *Thank God for Sex* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1975), 60-61.

155. Harry Hollis, *Thank God for Sex* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1975), 63-66.

viewpoints was that evangelicals argued that “authentic” Biblical criteria regarding sex, rather than unlimited sexual freedom, created the best sex, the best marriages, and the best families and society. Their emphasis on “best” was quite explicit. Elizabeth and William Genne wrote that “when the church identifies sex with the creative intent and purposes of God it puts it at a far deeper and higher level than that of a human experience. To reclaim this God-given dimension of sex was felt to be the basic need of the church if it is to minister to our sex saturated and sex starved culture.”¹⁵⁶ Claiming that American culture was both a “sex saturated and sex starved culture” was not a contradiction to the Genne's, but instead reflected their view that popular culture teetered between the two extremes, and that God's intention for sex occupied the middle ground where the best life could be lived. In *God, Sex and You*, Dr. M. O. Vincent titled his final chapter “Marriage-Sexual Freedom, God's Way,” and concluded the book with the personal example of his own marital union of two virgins as a contrast to those with premarital and extramarital sexual lifestyles. As a practicing psychiatrist he cited extensive professional knowledge of “the intimacies of other people's sex lives,” and on that basis claimed that “where premarital or extramarital intercourse exists” “then my conviction is that rarely, if ever, does it bring those involved the degree of satisfaction that my wife and I experience” after sixteen years of marriage.¹⁵⁷ He went on to state his knowledge “from personal experience that” that “real swingers” “have not experienced what true sexual freedom and satisfaction are all about.”¹⁵⁸ Similarly, Letha Scanzoni described marital sex as an “intimacy that is incomparable and unparalleled,” and as a “closeness which in itself may be a reflection of God's image.”¹⁵⁹

156. Genne, *Christians and the Crisis in Sex Morality*, 118.

157. Vincent, *God, Sex and You*, 161.

158. Vincent, *God, Sex and You*, 161. Vincent reflected the sexual discontent Elaine Tyler May uncovered among 1950s couples in chapter 5 of *Homeward Bound*, but he was contradicted by those who desired greater sexual experience outside their marriage. Doubtless, his response would have encouraged them to focus on perfecting their marriage, though on p. 50-52 he argued that sex could easily be wrongly blamed for either marital bliss or problems.

159. Scanzoni, *Why Wait?*, 95.

When evangelical, Baptist pastor Tim LaHaye published his first book on marriage in 1968, he included an appendix that covered some of his “case files” as a pastoral counselor. In one example, titled “Spirituality and Sex,” he claimed that “two Spirit-filled partners can experience more physical and emotional pleasure from the act of marriage [LaHaye's preferred term for sex] than the average couple.”¹⁶⁰ In the follow-up book he coauthored with his wife, *The Act of Marriage*, the LaHaye's were even more strident on the theme, prominently referring to it in the introductory chapter as well as dedicating an entire chapter to the subject. In preparation for the book, they solicited couples who had attended prior “Family Life Seminars” conducted by the LaHaye's to fill out a questionnaire, to which 3,377 husbands and wives responded.¹⁶¹ The LaHaye's compared their results with those from a 1975 survey of 100,000 women published in *Redbook* magazine and concluded that “Christians are considerably more satisfied with their love life than non-Christians,” as measured both by frequency of coitus and degree of sexual satisfaction.¹⁶² They attributed the additional satisfaction among Christians to a spiritual emphasis on love as a preeminent value, and the effects of praying together. As one might expect, the next and final chapter of the book appealed to the reader to accept Christ as their savior and laid out a plan for doing so, ending with an explicit spiritual appeal. Since evangelicals like the LaHaye's believed that God created the “sublimities of sexual union,” it was only natural that sex, marriage, and spirituality should be inseparably intertwined.¹⁶³ This connection set evangelical marriage advocates apart from the secular mainstream, and directly contradicted the *Playboy* lifestyle's depiction of the “good life” as that of a free-wheeling bachelor with no

160. Tim LaHaye, *How to Be Happy Though Married* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 1968), 153.

161. LaHaye, *The Act of Marriage*, 195-217. Chapter 12 of the book covers the results of the sex survey.

162. LaHaye, *The Act of Marriage*, 206. 86% of self-described “Spirit filled” wives reported “Very Happy Above Average” sexual satisfaction, versus 78% of self-described “Non-Spirit filled”wives. The LaHaye's also reported on p.106 that 89% of Christian wives experienced orgasm, versus 40% for non-Christian wives by the 10th year of marriage.

163. LaHaye, *The Act of Marriage*, 214.

marital commitments.¹⁶⁴

Evangelicals like the LaHaye's were not merely content to denounce what they perceived as the sexual permissiveness of their time, but also emphatically advocated Christian marriage as a sexually superior lifestyle. To accomplish this persuasively, they saw a need to demonstrate that sex in evangelical marriages was both more abundant and more satisfying than non-Christian alternatives. In doing so, they necessarily elevated sexual experience to a privileged status within the evangelical lifestyle, paralleling its ascendancy within the secular counter-culture. As early as 1962, Elizabeth and William Genne forecast the increasing importance of sex in American culture and called evangelicals to action, arguing that “the church that is true to its gospel is in a position to take the most radical view of sex; using radical to indicate the root meaning of sex in human experience.”¹⁶⁵

Though evangelicals made the case that Christianity was a critical factor in optimal marital and sexual satisfaction, they did not suggest that the relationship was necessarily automatic or inherent. The LaHaye's two books on marriage and sexuality contained instructive blueprints for improving the practical aspects of marital and sexual life. The first book, *How to be Happy Though Married*, covered marital sexuality in general terms through one chapter that briefly covered anatomy, emotional considerations, and specific advice tailored to husbands and wives. The second book, *The Act of Marriage*, devoted several entire chapters to similar concerns.¹⁶⁶ Evangelicals viewed marriage and marital sex, like the practice of Christianity itself, as a set of skills and behaviors that could be improved with study and dedication. In this regard,

164. Fraterrigo, *Playboy and the Making of the Good Life in Modern America*, 134-166. The “good life” according to Hefner's *Playboy* philosophy depended on a lack of marital commitments along with an unending supply of willing, nubile women.

165. Genne, *Christians and the Crisis in Sex Morality*, 118.

166. For a thorough comparison of *The Act of Marriage* with secular sex manuals like Alex Comfort's *The Joy of Sex*, see Amy DeRogatis, *Saving Sex: Sexuality and Salvation In American Evangelicalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 42-70.

by initiating a genre of evangelical sex manuals they imitated the sexual revolutionaries whom they also sought to discredit, and endorsed the legitimacy of a fundamental tenet of the counterculture: sexual expression was an essential good to human life. Evangelicals like the LaHaye's also reflected and contributed to the increasingly high profile status of professional marriage counseling, which for several decades had helped to transform marriage into a highly romantic and erotic institution.¹⁶⁷

By the 1960s, the credibility of the social sciences had reached such a status that evangelicals routinely privileged the expertise of professionals to bolster their claims about marriage and sex, fully embracing the legitimacy of a therapeutic culture that situated solutions to social problems within the domain of professional counseling, psychiatry, psychology, and social work. The increasing credibility of the social sciences was reflected in and driven by the inclusion of clinical programs into seminary curriculum. The dramatic shift is illustrated by the fact that the number of Protestant seminaries including clinical programs tripled between 1943 and 1952, and by 1955 were included in 75% of American seminaries.¹⁶⁸ By the 1960s, evangelicals writing about marriage, sex, and the family were as likely to be counselors, psychiatrists, and sociologists as they were theologians and pastors. Dr. M. O. Vincent offered his expertise in *God, Sex and You* as stemming from his dual credentials as both a practicing psychiatrist and practicing Christian, while Letha Scanzoni burnished her professional status by coauthoring with her sociologist husband a college textbook on marriage and the family for McGraw-Hill. The 1961 North American Conference on Church and Family, from which

167. For the first few decades of the twentieth century, Christian clergymen resisted the secular professionalization of marriage counseling, seeing it as a function that primarily belonged within the confines of religious counseling. For a book length investigation into how professional counseling affected twentieth-century conceptions of marriage, see Rebecca L. Davis, *More Perfect Unions: The American Search for Marital Bliss* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010).

168. Alan Petigny, *The Permissive Society: America, 1941-1965* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 76.

Elizabeth and William Genne drew their material for *Christians and the Crisis in Sex Morality*, listed use of the “best resources of scientific research” as the second of five primary aims for the conference, and this was reflected in the privileged status given to statements from professionals with doctoral level degrees throughout the book. In *Thank God for Sex*, Harry Hollis asserted that “psychology and religion can, and indeed must, join forces” in order to seek the “restraint of the misuse of sex” brought on by the “anxiety and emotional impoverishment which led to such sexual misbehavior.”¹⁶⁹ In a section that laid out strategies for Christian counselors, Hollis urged the use of both theological and secular resources to achieve the best results. Tim LaHaye was less explicit in his embrace of therapeutic culture, but both of his books on marriage deployed secular and scientific points of view to bolster his theological statements about marriage and sex.

Though fundamentalist Christians outraged by the Scopes trial had railed against science and secular society as the primary source of assault against Biblical truths, evangelicals in the 1960s and 1970s turned the fruits of science to their advantage, lining up sociological statistics and psychological experts to verify Christian tenets. In 1967, *Christianity Today* published a news item reporting that Dr. Francis Braceland, former president of the American Psychiatric Association and current editor of the *American Journal of Psychiatry*, asserted to the National Methodist Convocation on Medicine and Theology that a “more lenient attitude on campus about premarital sex experience has imposed stresses on some college women severe enough to cause emotional breakdown,” and that “premarital sex relations growing out of the so-called new morality have significantly increased the number of young people in mental hospitals.”¹⁷⁰ It would be an overstatement to claim that the evangelical embrace of therapeutic culture meant that science had conquered Christianity, but clearly evangelicals embraced science in ways that

169. Hollis, *Thank God for Sex*, 106.

170. News, *Christianity Today*, May 12, 1967, 45.

their fundamentalist brethren never had. This merger of scientific method with theology offered a means of rationalizing Christianity to a secular audience, but it also created a potential dilemma if scientific data proved contrary to Christian interpretations. Dr. Vincent assembled a dizzying array of expert testimony in his book from psychological experts to bolster his claims about premarital sex, but it is doubtful that would remain possible four decades later.

The embrace of therapeutic culture by evangelicals certainly reflected the growing prestige of science in American culture, but theology also played a key role. Evangelicals frequently asserted as a foundational argument that Biblical directives were intended to produce positive ends for human life. In contemporary terms, those positive ends could be measured by analyzing sociological data, and spiritual truths could be framed as the attainment of sociological aims. For example, *Christianity Today* published a book review in 1974 by a U.S. Army Chaplain who endorsed the view that in the American church there is "a widespread ethical humanism which equates the good or the will of God with the fulfillment of human needs and desires and rights."¹⁷¹ Similarly, Dr. M. O. Vincent made the claim that God's "infinite knowledge made it possible for Him to know what would bring man the ultimate in physical health, emotional health, and happiness, and specifically what is good for him in the area of sex."¹⁷² In the simplest terms, evangelicals argued that God wants people to have happy lives, and He issued His commands in order to achieve that end. This view is in stark contrast to that of Jonathan Edwards, whose 1741 sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" hinged on righteousness and evil rather than any consideration of human happiness. This long term theological pivot from the early Calvinist understanding of the will of God as arbitrary and possibly capricious to being intentional and benevolent made it possible for evangelicals to link

171. Joseph Galle III, Book Review, *Christianity Today*, August 16, 1974, 31.

172. Vincent, *God, Sex and You*, 130.

scientific expertise with spiritual interpretations. This conception of God's will underlies both the way evangelicals interpreted Biblical passages about marriage and sex, and was critical to their effort to engage with non-Christian American society. Instead of being limited to a message of 'obey God, or else!', evangelicals could appeal to their neighbors with a message of 'God wants you to be happy, and here is His plan for your ultimate happiness.' Marabel Morgan applied this approach to spectacular effect in her 1973 book *The Total Woman*.

Born in 1937, Marabel Morgan paid her tuition at Ohio State University to study home economics by working in a beauty shop, until she had to drop out for financial reasons. While working as a counselor for Campus Crusade for Christ, she met law student Charlie Morgan at the University of Miami in 1962, and they married two years later, remaining in South Florida, where Charlie began practicing law as they raised two children. By 1970, the deteriorating state of her marriage led her to decide that while she couldn't change her husband, she could change herself, and she began developing and implementing a plan for transforming her marriage that by 1971 she was teaching to other wives in "Total Woman" seminars. In 1973, she released her blueprint for marriage as a book. *The Total Woman* was on the National Religious Bestsellers lists for twenty-five months, selling half a million copies in its first year, four million in its second year, and eventually over ten million copies.¹⁷³ Her follow up book, *Total Joy*, landed her on the March 14, 1977 cover of *Time* Magazine, and she appeared on the television talk circuit dozens of times before retiring from public appearances in the mid 1980s. For several years, Marabel Morgan rivaled Billy Graham as evangelical Christianity's most popular spokesperson, with numerous television appearances, magazine profiles, book tours, and workshops taking her message of marital femininity to the American public. In Tim and Beverly LaHaye's survey of

173. Jennifer Heller, "Marriage, Womanhood, and the Search for 'Something More': American Evangelical Women's Best-Selling 'Self-Help' Books, 1972-1979," *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture* 2 (Fall 2002), 3.

Christian couples conducted during her book's first year in print, *The Total Woman* was already listed by respondents as the fifth most meaningful book about marriage, indicating that it had an immediate impact on evangelicals' thinking about marriage.¹⁷⁴

Early in her book, Marabel Morgan described the disappointments that beset her marriage after the first few years of the “honeymoon period” wore off. Living in the suburbs with an attorney husband and young children, Morgan described feeling “helpless and unhappy” and unable to have any meaningful conversations with her husband.¹⁷⁵ Finally, Morgan became fed up with her dissatisfying marriage and embarked on a radical action plan to change her marriage and family by first changing herself. Her personal success at reinvigorating her marriage and family led her to create and teach a series of seminars in the Miami area, primarily conducted in homes and church basements, that eventually attracted notable participants among the wives of Miami Dolphins football players and even Anita Bryant. These successes led her to write her first book outlining her plan for marital and familial restoration, which was subsequently followed by three more. Her successful seminars and book sales put her in the national spotlight through print and television interviews for the next decade, until she stopped making public appearances in the mid-1980s.¹⁷⁶

Previous examinations of *The Total Woman* by religious scholars Jennifer Heller and Amy DeRogatis implicitly relied on assuming that Morgan saw the essential identities of husbands and wives as sexual and material consumers. While this can be supported by Morgan's use of illustrations in her text that demonstrated real life examples such as her husband buying her new curtains after an unconventional sexual romp in the dining room, Morgan's use of sexual and material consumption is actually better explained by the cultural ubiquity and dominance by the

174. LaHaye, *The Act of Marriage*, 199.

175. Marabel Morgan, *The Total Woman* (New York: Pocket Books, 1973), 17-19.

176. Heller, “Marriage, Womanhood, and the Search for 'Something More,’”23.

1970s of historian Lizabeth Cohen's notion of a consumer republic, and not a particularly evangelical expression of marital roles.¹⁷⁷ Marabel and Charlie Morgan's lives played out as sexual and material consumers because that is the postwar cultural milieu they lived in, not strictly because they were evangelical. Seen in its entirety, *The Total Woman* is primarily about a wife's *family* life, and Marabel Morgan painted a picture of an evangelical family that embraced consumerism, suburban life, and established marriage as an ideal site of sexual adventure to the benefit of both the parents and the children.

The family life that *The Total Woman* aimed at creating, and that millions of Morgan's readers presumably identified with and yearned for, essentially consisted of a domestic trifecta combining sexuality, suburban décor, and consumerism enabled by modern conveniences. One of Morgan's anecdotes neatly summarized these elements so well that one is tempted to believe that it was apocryphal rather than actual. She recounted one woman explaining that her husband who was barely speaking to her when she began following Morgan's marital prescriptions, and had never previously purchased a gift for her, after only one week bought her “two nighties, two rose bushes, and a can opener!”¹⁷⁸ The combination of romantic, decorative, and practical items created a total home environment in which Morgan's 'total woman' nurtured her family. Notably, all three of these anecdotal items were purchased, grounding healthy, happy marriages and homes as primary sites of American consumerism. Morgan's earlier anecdotes in the introduction to the book established consumerism as a key benefit derived from a happy marriage. She listed a new refrigerator and redecorated rooms in the house as measures of the success of her efforts at becoming a 'total woman.'¹⁷⁹

177. Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Knopf, 2003).

178. Morgan, *The Total Woman*, 26.

179. Morgan, *The Total Woman*, 25.

Notably absent from Morgan's portrayal of an ideal, presumably traditional American family, were any mentions of in-laws. Not only did the in-laws obviously not live in the same house, but Morgan never once mentioned the notorious mother-in-law as a relevant factor in family life. The nuclear family engaged in emotionally healthy, frequent, and enjoyable conversation and fun without daily input or interference from the grandparents. The cleavage of the nuclear family from the extended family is so complete in Morgan's suburban frame of marital bliss that problems with the in-laws never rated a single mention in her text. Morgan's formulation of family life only peripherally included grandparents, cousins, aunts, and uncles. The extended family, in this evangelical model of wifely submission to a leader husband, could only pose problems, since another father in the picture complicated an authority structure that placed God above the husband, who was above the wife, both of whom were above the children. The traditional family and the nuclear family, then, became equivalent and inseparable even in evangelical constructions that might otherwise be expected to model a broader inclusion of relatives. The injunction in Genesis 2:24 that a man who becomes a husband leaves his father and mother and cleaves to his wife thus constructs a nuclear family, in late twentieth-century evangelical terms.

Morgan's view of a nuclear family assumed the place of the husband as the head of the household. Since she wrote specifically to give advice to wives, her prescriptions for marriage focused on changing wives' behavior toward their husbands. Across chapters four through seven, Morgan advised wives to "accept him," "admire him," "adapt to him," and "appreciate him." In each case, she admonished wives to adjust their attitudes, expectations, and behavior to conform to their husbands. While feminists bristled at these ideas both in print and in media responses to the book, Morgan provided numerous examples in her text of how husbands would react to

wives who treated them as she advised. Rather than a picture of egotistical, chauvinist autocrats in their homes, Morgan's depictions of husbands with such wives showed men whose behavior immediately changed in ways that made their wives happier. For example, in the chapter on admiration, she asserted that a wife who proactively admired her husband's ability to do the things she wanted him to do (even when he didn't presently meet her expectations) would soon see her husband begin to meet and exceed her desires. One anecdote described a wife who admired her husband's muscles (even though he was quite thin) and two days later he was in the garage exercising with a new set of weights to give her more muscles to be pleased with.¹⁸⁰

Morgan asserted that a little admiration could accomplish what a lifetime of nagging could not: a husband that went out of his way to please his wife.¹⁸¹ Morgan's interpretation of wives' submission to their husbands' emotional and psychological needs largely amounted to a form of reverse psychology or behavioral conditioning through the use of positive reinforcements rather than negative punishments. For Morgan, the New Testament admonitions about submission effectively operated as the means for wives to surreptitiously transform their husbands' emotional lives to conform to their wives' standards. In a total woman's home, the wife putatively established male headship in the household, but in ways that created the emotional, communicative, and consumer oriented family that the wife desired. The man might wear the pants, but he wore the pants that cut the handsome figure that his wife praised him for. Morgan's adaptation of psychology thus transformed scriptural ideas about female submission in marriage into a platform for wives attaining the marriages and homes they craved. What those marriages and homes looked like fit a strikingly uniform pattern in socioeconomic terms.

A common thread running throughout *Christianity Today* and the writings of David Mace,

180. Morgan, *The Total Woman*, 63.

181. Morgan, *The Total Woman*, 66.

Harry Hollis, Elizabeth and William Genne, Letha Scanzoni, M. O. Vincent, Tim LaHaye, and Marabel Morgan is the middle class character of the marriage and family ideals the authors described. In most cases, that the marriage under discussion belongs solidly within the socioeconomic middle class is assumed rather than advocated, but Marabel Morgan's depiction goes the furthest in providing a blueprint for middle class respectability as a measure of marital success. The assumption of middle class status is unsurprising, given that these authors themselves (except for Marabel Morgan) were pastors, doctors, and professionals with advanced degrees. Their own educated backgrounds both lent weight to their prescriptions for success, and created a blind spot covering the lives of working class evangelicals. Middle class professionals like Marabel's husband Charlie might be pleasantly surprised by a coquettish wife, freshly bathed, scented, and appareled in lingerie greeting them at the door, but one can only imagine how that might work out in the home of a construction worker who just spent a long summer day in the sun instead of in an air conditioned office. Likewise, suburban, nuclear family life presented an entirely different set of opportunities for discreet sexual rendezvouses than did urban apartment living with both children, other adult relatives, and neighbors in close proximity. Presumably, the suburban, nuclear family was an ideal to aspire to, but it was also one that was out of reach for many Americans, especially those who did not fit the upwardly mobile, white, Protestant mold of the evangelicals writing about marriage and family life.

Yet, despite its limitations, the phenomenal sales of *The Total Woman* prompted Marabel Morgan to write three follow up books, the *Total Woman Cookbook* in 1980, *Total Joy* in 1983, and *The Electric Woman* in 1986. Her enormous success as an author was due to her ability to bring together a positive message in the Norman Vincent Peale style alongside humor, anecdotes of struggle and success, candor about her own family life, tales of suburban sexual adventure,

and earnest appeals to center marriage and family around prayer and Christian devotion. Marabel Morgan and *The Total Woman* were popular with the American public who purchased ten million copies of the book, and scholars, too, have singled Morgan out for her singular status as a female best-selling author who typified conservative conceptions of gender and marital roles while privileging marital sexuality in response to the sexual revolution.¹⁸² But these prior examinations have missed Morgan's significance within the broader evangelical marriage project. Marabel Morgan was certainly the most successful evangelical author of the 1960s and 1970s writing about marriage and family, but her work was groundbreaking for its mass appeal, not for its message. For well over a decade evangelical authors had been writing about the intimate links between spirituality, marriage, spousal roles, and the central role of sexuality in gluing them all together.

In 1964, Roy W. Fairchild published *Christians in Families: An Inquiry into the Nature and Mission of the Christian Home*, as part of the official curriculum of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, Cumberland Presbyterian Church, Moravian Church in America, Presbyterian Church in the United States, and the Reformed Church in America. Fairchild, like other evangelical writers, held both religious and secular credentials, with a Ph. D. in the Psychology of Religion from the University of Southern California, ordination in the United Presbyterian Church, U.S.A., and a background in counseling. When studied together, *The Total Woman* and *Christians in Families* reveal a pattern of evangelical thought about marriage and the family that establishes the evangelical marriage project as a long term, intentional effort to defang the sexual revolution by incorporating its palatable aspects, shouldering aside its frontal assault on marriage as an institution, and securing a solid future for marriage as a fundamental

182. DeRogatis, *Saving Sex*, 63. Also see Jennifer Heller, "Marriage, Womanhood, and the Search for 'Something More': American Evangelical Women's Best-Selling 'Self-Help' Books, 1972-1979," *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture* 2 (Fall 2002).

cultural and social value, rather than as merely one choice among many.

Fairchild began *Christians in Families* by acknowledging that the modern family was confused, and many were beset by boredom and loneliness. His prescription required both an accurate understanding of Biblical principles to reveal the purpose of life, and a reliance on modern science to reveal the psychological processes of development from child to adult. He then outlined the modern developments that threatened to upend the inherited marital order. In chapter three, Fairchild presented a plan for marriage that reads like a blueprint for what Morgan would a decade later call *The Total Woman* lifestyle. He explicitly connected spirituality, sexuality, and consumerism together into a comprehensive “script” for family and marital life that should “permeate the whole fabric of our lives together – from floor-mopping to car buying to lovemaking.”¹⁸³ He then situated sexuality at the center of marriage, making the point that the essential spirituality of sex made it critical to a healthy union. Then, highlighting the difficulties sometimes experienced in marriage, he admonished couples to remember that “the rhythm of family living is one of alienation and reconciliation.” Evangelicals writing in the 1960s and 1970s sensed the deep alienation among the young towards the social status quo, and they attempted to reconcile existing conflicts between sex, marriage, and spirituality by integrating the three into a cohesive marital philosophy.

Though Tim LaHaye's books on marriage contain chapters specifically directed at men, there remained an underlying theme throughout evangelical literature that threats to sexuality, marriage, and family were of particular concern to women. Dr. M. O. Vincent made the theme explicit in his book *God, Sex and You* by quoting C.S. Lewis's assertion that women were especially disadvantaged by promiscuity.¹⁸⁴ Sociologist Constance Nathanson has argued that the

183. Roy W. Fairchild, *Christians in Families: An Inquiry into the Nature and Mission of the Christian Home* (Richmond: The CLC Press, 1964), 48.

184. Vincent, *God, Sex and You*, 65. Quotation from C.S. Lewis, *A Mind Awake* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1968),

sexual counterculture's influence on the sexual behavior of young, middle-class women is crucial to understanding subsequent social and political developments such as campaigns to reduce teenage pregnancy. She argued that Western society has conceptualized the transition from girlhood to womanhood so that it carries uniquely gendered risks and dangers, and that society has used the threats that young women are exposed to during this transition in order to justify and establish social controls over young women's sexuality and lives, and, by extension, establish social controls over society at large.¹⁸⁵ She also argued that the 1960s sexual revolution was less a matter of society at large than it was an attitudinal shift among middle-class, white women that aroused the political and social attention of the dominant socioeconomic class in American society which saw its privilege threatened by the 'liberated sexual' activities of the upcoming generation of its daughters.

Nathanson's formulation highlights a driving force within the evangelical campaign that coalesced to fight the 1960s counter-culture. From this perspective, evangelicals became involved in social activism centering around sexuality because the counterculture effectively influenced the sexuality of middle-class young women. Evangelical discussions of American families were not abstractions, but were about the perceived threats to their own daughters and families. Unlike Progressive Era social reformers who were concerned about civilizing the working class and immigrants, evangelicals in the post-counterculture social climate were concerned about the maintenance of their own cherished social norms and structures. For these evangelicals, "threats to civilization" tied in directly with the communist threat to the West to

202-3: "A society in which conjugal infidelity is tolerated must always be in the long run a society adverse to women. Women...are more naturally monogamous than men; it is a biological necessity. Where promiscuity prevails, they will therefore always be more often the victims than the culprits. Also, domestic happiness is more necessary to them than to us...thus in the ruthless war of promiscuity women are at a double disadvantage. They play for higher stakes and are also more likely to lose."

185. Constance A. Nathanson, *Dangerous Passage: The Social Control of Sexuality in Women's Adolescence* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), 9-10.

menace American families, and these threats required a comprehensive social and spiritual response that strengthened families by enriching the marriages that established and sustained them.

CHAPTER FIVE:

EPILOGUE: FROM SUBVERSIVE MARRIAGE TO SUBVERSIVE VIRGINITY

Evangelical authors writing in the 1960s and 1970s sought to establish within evangelical culture deep roots that privileged marital theology, marital sexuality, and marital experience as the central focus of family life. In the early 1960s, evangelicals identified a cultural trend towards acceptance of sexual permissiveness as a direct and dire threat to familial and even national stability, while by 1977 *Christianity Today* perceived the permissive trend as so pervasive that it rendered evangelicals' view of Biblical marriage as “a revolutionary, downright subversive activity.”¹⁸⁶ By the 1990s, evangelicals' continuing emphasis on marriage and the exclusivity of marital sexuality had broadened into a subcultural industry consisting of literature, Internet blogs, conferences, music, concerts, abstinence pledges, and father-daughter balls. The proponents of this evangelical marriage subculture, or purity movement, encourage young people to dedicate themselves to sexual abstinence until marriage through various forms of purity pledges, reinforced by individual experience reading purity literature and communal experience through purity events. A theology of chastity and marital sexuality supported by churches laid the theoretical foundation, but these ideas grew into a social movement by continuously reinforcing its spiritual message through the broader cultural outlets of media and social events. For evangelicals, the purity movement became a key element of their religious, cultural, and social identity. The central concerns of the purity movement also provided impetus and guidance for

186. William H. Willimon, “Marriage as a Subversive Activity,” *Christianity Today*, February 18, 1977, 17.

evangelicals' burgeoning political participation. As conservative evangelicals coalesced as an electoral block in national politics in the late 1970s, the Republican Party attracted their support through socially conservative rhetoric and public policy initiatives that fundamentally affected the nature of sexual politics.

In the 1960s and 1970s, evangelicals produced literature on marriage and sexuality intended mainly for adults, but by the 1990s they had broadened the intended audience of purity literature to include teenagers and even pre-adolescents. Purity literature, aimed primarily at girls, romanticizes virginity, often likening any young girl to a princess awaiting her eventual prince to carry her off to marital bliss.¹⁸⁷ Authors use the princess theme in stories written for pre-schoolers, and continue reinforcing it all the way through adolescent literature. The fairytale motif engages the interest of young audiences while inculcating values and moral norms through metaphor and symbol. First kisses and often symbolic treasures take the place of virginity for the youngest audiences, while kings and princes represent divine authority and future marital prospects. In the stories, the princess is entrusted to cherish and guard her treasure until finally giving it to her spouse on her wedding day. Though especially intended to encourage young girls to value their virginity and its maintenance until marriage through sexual abstinence, purity literature stylized as fairy tales also emphasizes the protagonist's relationships with parents and deity, introducing family as a set of spiritually grounded relationships derived from mutual care and sacrifice. God, fathers, and mothers in these stories are more than merely authority figures, but are also portrayed as caring guides who seek the best for their young charges by giving them wise rules to follow that will maximize future happiness and minimize distress and harm. These stories also go beyond a one dimensional focus on abstinence, and further instruct young people

187. DeRogatis, *Saving Sex*, 10-27. For a list of example literature, see footnote 9 in chapter 1.

that materialism, popular social norms, and common standards of beauty are superficial and without lasting merit. These stories encourage young people to value inner resources of patience, commitment, and kindness over outward standards of appearance. In this way, evangelical fairy tales challenge normative culture in ways that parallel feminist critiques of feminine and masculine social standards. Though critics often portray conservative evangelicals as retrograde, purity literature challenges the objectification of bodies, the sexual double standard, and the commercialization and commodification of sexuality. Though secular feminists and evangelicals are often at odds ideologically and politically, their critiques of contemporary culture and values continue to overlap in significant ways, as they once did in relation to pornography and obscenity.

Purity literature intended for a young female readership typically uses metaphorical narratives featuring princesses or other symbols of purity in order to drive home lessons about leading sexually pure lives. Literature intended for young boys also use metaphor and symbolism, but focus on princes, kings, knights, and squires as the main characters.¹⁸⁸ Purity literature in the style of dramatic narrative depicts males in more active and heroic activities than the more passive princess roles for females. Male heroes go on quests and adventures seeking out danger, while female heroes focus on protecting treasures symbolizing their purity. Literature

188. Interestingly, while there are numerous books written to a male readership, I have been unable to locate a single scholarly work examining them. DeRogatis' *Saving Sex* focused on literature aimed at a female audience or at a general audience. She excluded any books aimed only at males, though she acknowledged their existence in a brief footnote. This has been the case with all of the other academic forays into this subject that I reviewed. The only possible exception I've found is *Sex in Crisis: The New Sexual Revolution and the Future of American Politics* by Dagmar Herzog, but though the author has an academic post, the book is closer to a personal critique of the evangelical purity movement than a scholarly examination of the topic. Popular titles intended for young boys are *The Squire and the Scroll* by Jennie Bishop, *Brave Young Knight* by Karen Kingsbury, *His Mighty Warrior* by Sheri Rose Shepard, *A Warrior Prince for God* by Kelly Chapman, and *Will, God's Mighty Warrior* by Sheila Walsh. Notably, only the first of these books specifically involve an allusion to sexual purity, while the rest are far more general. I could find no example that encourages a young prince to guard his first kiss, though numerous books for young girls use that theme. Most literature for young boys also have female authorship, in several cases the author writing similar morality tales for both sexes.

aimed at adolescent young men encourages them to learn sexual self-discipline and self-control, and to develop into spiritual leaders in their dating relationships and eventual marriages, all of which are corresponding expectations reinforced in the purity literature aimed at young women. Purity literature generally emphasizes a gendered construction of sexuality, with a stark dichotomy between the aggressive libidos of males and the passive sexual response of females, but it does not recreate the sexual double standard that gave males a free pass to sow their wild oats while requiring females to remain chaste. The movement depicts sexuality in gendered terms related to contrasting desires for sex among males and romance among females, and offers gendered tools for sexual self-control with regard to female modesty and male lust (and apparently never the other way around), but it does place the burden of sexual purity on both males and females.¹⁸⁹ But unlike the wide selection of adolescent and young adult purity literature aimed at a general audience, there do not seem to be many examples of children's purity literature aimed at both boys and girls simultaneously. Purity counseling conducted in groups by individual churches also tend to segregate the sexes.¹⁹⁰ By contrast, the purity movement's sponsorship of concerts and conferences bring young men and women together to build solidarity for their stance against popular sexual culture.

Starting in the mid to late 1990s, purity literature was supplemented and reinforced by

189. How balanced the approach is between the burden placed on males and females is highly subjective. Female critics who are ex-evangelicals authoring articles and blogs critiquing purity culture claim the greater share of blame for harmful sexuality is placed on female shoulders by the purity movement. If this is accurate, it may reflect the widely held evangelical understanding that females are more reliable in terms of religious adherence than males. One prominent blog claimed (without citation) that “by their senior year, girls are 14 percent more likely to have participated in a youth group than boys. And they are 21 percent more likely to have stayed involved in youth group all four years of high school.” David Murrow, “How the sexual purity movement drives young men from church,” December 14, 2015, <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/churchformen/2015/12/how-the-sexual-purity-movement-drives-young-men-from-church/>.

190. Such a thing is very difficult to quantify, but reports by Amy DeRogatis in *Saving Sex* and Christine J. Gardner in *Making Chastity Sexy: The Rhetoric of Evangelical Abstinence Campaigns*, along with numerous online reports of experiences in the purity movement align as I describe. It seems that conservative evangelicals widely believe that sexuality is too dangerous or sensitive a topic to discuss frankly with young men and women in the same room, participating in the same discussion, except in concert or conference sized groups large enough to preserve individual anonymity and exclude individual sharing of experiences apart from the main speakers.

communal purity rituals, which may involve either youth independently from their parents through concerts and conferences, or in close cooperation with their parents through purity balls or other parent-child events.¹⁹¹ At purity balls, fathers and daughters celebrate their filial bond and make a dedicated commitment to the daughters' virginity. Purity organizations such as True Love Waits, an organization sponsored by the Southern Baptist Convention, and Silver Ring Thing organize music concerts and rallies that emphasize the purported detrimental effects of premarital sex, and offer attendees the opportunity to make abstinence pledges. Personal commitments and values are often represented at these events through signed pledges, purity rings, and white roses representing purity. There are also a multitude of less formal events sponsored by churches in the forms of retreats, devotionals, and lectures that reinforce in a communal setting both the spiritual and sexual values of purity culture. These events enable evangelicals to establish personal purity not just as an individual choice, but also as a moral norm possessing social appeal and value. Peer groups outside the family or even the local congregation are established by these events in ways that promote the adherence to an evangelical identity rooted in expectations of pre-marital sexual abstinence and exquisite sexual bliss after marriage. But this is a culture focused on ideals of Christian purity, not merely sexual abstinence alone. Purity culture also encourages policing of modesty, self-regulation of sexual thoughts, rejection of contemporary dating expectations, and close parental supervision of youth activities. The purity subculture is the outcome of the collision of the earlier evangelical emphasis on marriage as the sole legitimate site of sexual expression with the embrace of therapeutic culture as a bulwark supporting that position. Purity culture firmly entrenches social pressures and influences alongside religious injunctions as powerful incentives for adhering to

191. DeRogatis, *Saving Sex*, 27-35.

the strictures of the evangelical marriage project.

By the 1980s, the new evangelical emphasis on engagement with secular opponents broadened from social concerns to include politics and public policy generally.¹⁹² In 1976, George Gallup proclaimed the “year of the evangelical” due to higher than ever self-identification with the term, and evangelicals were emboldened by a strong turnout in the presidential election, which the Gallup polling organization credited for the election of Jimmy Carter, a Southern Baptist Sunday school teacher and governor of Georgia.¹⁹³ After three years of policy disappointment with the Carter administration, in 1979 the Christian Right organized openly on a massive scale as activists from anti-gay campaigns in Florida and California joined forces to establish Christian Voice, which originated and distributed “moral report cards” to rate candidates on issues of concern to evangelicals.¹⁹⁴ The same year, conservative political activists persuaded Baptist minister Jerry Falwell to use his weekly television broadcast as a base of support for establishing the Moral Majority, which included Tim LaHaye as a founding board member.¹⁹⁵ Within a year, these two organizations together boasted 530,000 members and \$2.5 million in donations.

Jimmy Carter lost the support of conservative evangelicals by the end of his first term largely due to keeping one of his campaign promises. In October 1976, at the National Conference on Catholic Charities, he proclaimed his intention to convene a White House

192. For chapter length treatments of evangelical political activism in each presidential election from 1968 through 1996, especially relating to the organization mentioned herein, see Kenneth J. Heineman, *God is a Conservative: Religion, Politics, and Morality in Contemporary America* (New York: New York University Press, 1998).

193. Kenneth L. Woodward, John Barnes, and Laurie Lisle, “Born Again! The Year of the Evangelicals,” *Newsweek*, October 26, 1976, 68. “Even if he loses, Carter's dramatic capture of the Presidential nomination has already focused national attention on the most significant and overlooked religious phenomenon of the '70s: the emergence of evangelical Christianity into a position of respect and power.”

194. Sara Diamond, *Roads to Dominion: Right-Wing Movements and Political Power in the United States* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1995), 174.

195. For extensive discussion of the origins and activities of the Moral Majority see William Martin, *With God on Our Side: The Rise of the Religious Right in America* (New York: Broadway Books, 1996), 191-220.

Conference on the American Family in 1977. In fact, it took until the summer of 1980 to organize the conference, and it turned into a public relations debacle for the Carter administration. Numerous right-wing organizations with issue orientations ranging from abortion to the ERA mobilized to elect delegates to the conference, which soon descended into a contentious opening debate about the definition of the word family. Though “family values” delegates won some battles, they eventually staged a walk-out from the conference in protest of its purported liberal agenda and policy positions, enabling conservative activists to use the conference as a means of criticizing the “anti-family” positions of their opponents on the political left. The conference established for conservative activists strong links between the Democratic Party, left-wing policy positions, and “threats” to “traditional values” and “traditional families” posed by liberal positions on abortion, sex education, and gay rights.¹⁹⁶

Jimmy Carter's personal electoral unsuitability became crystal clear to conservative evangelicals when he hosted a White House breakfast in 1980 for prominent conservative ministers such as Jerry Falwell, Oral Roberts, Jim Bakker, D. James Kennedy, and Tim LaHaye. At the breakfast the ministers perceived Carter hedging on issues of abortion, evangelical inclusion in his administration, and the effect of the ERA on families. The ministers left the meeting convinced that Carter's administration was, in LaHaye's words, “un-Christian,” and resolved to motivate evangelicals to become politically active and supportive of “moral values” in electoral politics.¹⁹⁷

The presidential election of 1980 galvanized evangelical political activism like never before. In April, Pat Robertson helped organize Washington for Jesus, a day-long prayer rally in

196. For a thorough, behind the scenes look at Christian Right mobilization related to this conference, see William Martin, *With God on Our Side: The Rise of the Religious Right in America* (New York: Broadway Books, 1996), 173-189. This is an excellent book length survey of the early years of the Christian Right. See also Kenneth J. Heineman, *God is a Conservative* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 110-112.

197. Martin, *With God on Our Side*, 189-190.

the nation's capitol that attracted 200,000 attendees and led to the establishment of 380 organizing offices across the country.¹⁹⁸ And in August, candidate Ronald Reagan spoke at an event in Dallas attended by 15,000 ministers, pledging to “base policymaking on 'traditional values,’” cementing the political allegiance of evangelicals to the Republican Party.¹⁹⁹ But evangelicals soon had cause for disappointment with the Reagan administration, as Democratic members of Congress stymied Republican efforts to advance a conservative social agenda, and the administration itself focused primarily on economic and military policies. By 1982, the administration had advanced legislation regarding school prayer and abortion which bolstered support from the Christian Right, though major policy victories were rare. Regardless, evangelicals mobilized to support Ronald Reagan's reelection in 1984. Organized evangelical support for Reagan's anti-communism policies throughout Central America in the 1980s mirrored support for Joseph McCarthy in the 1950s emanating from Christian organizations, providing conservative Christians with a series of foreign policy victories to make up for a lack of domestic policy accomplishments.²⁰⁰

Two other organizations worked alongside the Moral Majority to dominate Christian right-wing activism in the decade after Reagan's 1980 election. In 1979, Beverly LaHaye had founded Concerned Women for America, but after the LaHayes moved to Washington, D.C. in 1985 to lobby full time the organization became a formidable force in Republican politics, claiming 600,000 members by 1992 and accruing enough clout to garner Beverly LaHaye a seat

198. Diamond, *Roads to Dominion*, 233.

199. Diamond, *Roads to Dominion*, 233.

200. 1950s groups supporting McCarthy were the American Council of Christian Churches, the Christian Crusade, the Christian Anti-Communism Crusade, and the Church League of America, while 1980s groups involved in Guatemala, Nicaragua, and the Philippines were Gospel Outreach, the Institute on Religion and Democracy, and The Unification Church. For more on Christian anti-communist activism, see Wilcox, *Onward Christian Soldiers*, 34-35; and Diamond, *Roads to Dominion*, 117-123, 237-241.

at Judge Robert Bork's 1987 Supreme Court confirmation hearings, testifying on his behalf.²⁰¹ Psychologist and evangelical author James Dobson founded Focus on the Family in 1977 to promote conservative Christian values to the public, and the Family Research Council in 1983 to conduct political lobbying. Dobson's daily radio broadcasts were carried on 1,500 stations in the 1980s, and the Family Research Council boasted 100,000 local activists by 1994.²⁰² When Pat Robertson's campaign for president failed in 1988, he used the remaining funds of his campaign to found the Christian Coalition the following year as a voter mobilization and lobbying organization.²⁰³ The simultaneous disbandment of Falwell's Moral Majority provided the Christian Coalition with orphaned activists and grassroots support to build on. The political activism of the 1980s at both the grassroots and “inside the beltway” levels combined with libertarian views on economics and nascent conservative media outlets like Rush Limbaugh's nationally syndicated talk radio program to establish strong, durable ties between evangelicals, movement conservatives, and the Republican Party that would influence national and local politics up to the present.²⁰⁴ As the 1990s progressed, political conservatives in the Republican Party increasingly echoed conservative evangelicals on issues related to schooling, feminism, abortion, and gay rights, until there was little daylight between Milton Friedman style economic

201. Diamond, *Roads to Dominion*, 243.

202. Wilcox, *Onward Christian Soldiers?*, 64. For contrasting biographies of Dobson, see Gil Alexander-Moegerle, *James Dobson's War on America* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1997) and Dale Buss, *Family Man: The Biography of Dr. James Dobson* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2005). The respective titles make clear their authors' viewpoint on their subject.

203. For extensive discussion of the origins and activities of the Christian Coalition see Martin, *With God on Our Side*, 299-328. Also: Julia Lesage, “Christian Coalition Leadership Training,” in *Media, Culture, and the Religious Right* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 295-325.

204. Movement conservatives and Christians both contributed essays expounding such links in Paul T. Jersild, and Dale A. Johnson, eds., *Moral Issues and Christian Response*, 4th ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1988). Notable contributors included Roman Catholic Michael Novak, Phyllis Schlafly, Barbara Ehrenreich, theologian Richard John Neuhaus, Jeanne Kirkpatrick, and a statement from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith of the Roman Catholic Church, covering issues such as abortion, capitalism, racism, feminism, foreign policy, and marriage. Two scholarly works covering links between Christianity and capitalism are Linda Kintz, *Between Jesus and the Market* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997) and Bethany Moreton, *To Serve God and Walmart: The Making of Christian Free Enterprise* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009). See also additional chapters cited in note 18 for topics related to Christianity and media.

libertarians and socially conservative “pro-family” advocates among evangelicals.²⁰⁵

Evangelicals like Jerry Falwell, Tim and Beverly LaHaye, James Dobson, and Pat Robertson leading political activist and lobbying organizations established Christian conservatives, or “values voters,” as a self-aware voting bloc that held immense sway in electoral politics, especially among the grassroots of the Republican Party. The inclusion of abstinence programs in sex education curriculums across the country was largely due to the influence of these and similar organizations.²⁰⁶ But sheer political power alone was not responsible for the successful inclusion of abstinence curricula in sex education programs. The advent of AIDS in the 1980s gave abstinence advocates a potent health threat to use as persuasion with audiences unaffected by the rhetoric of morality.²⁰⁷ In October 1986, Surgeon General C. Everett Koop and Secretary of Education William Bennett got into a public fight over Koop's release of a report calling for AIDS prevention via comprehensive sex education beginning in kindergarten.²⁰⁸ Bennett heavily criticized the report as an example of the lack of moral content in school sex education curriculum. Bennett and abstinence education advocates effectively won the argument through asserting that only abstinence could be one hundred percent effective against pregnancy, STIs, and the spread of AIDS. When the stakes were life and death, the morals crusaders found a persuasive tool. But abstinence rhetoric didn't stop merely with public health concerns. Echoing the evangelical arguments of the 1960s and 1970s, abstinence movements in the 1990s would

205. See Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Christianity and the Making of the Modern Family* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000), 167-174, 178-180, and Martin, *With God on Our Side*, 210-214.

206. The functional mechanism promoting the prevalence of abstinence programs have been federal laws that make funding contingent on the inclusion of abstinence in the curriculum: The Adolescent Family Life Act of 1981, Title V of the Social Security Act of 1996, and the Special Project of Regional and National Significance-Community Based Abstinence Education Act of 2001. See Laura M. Carpenter, *Virginity Lost: An Intimate Portrait of First Sexual Encounters* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 180.

207. For this assertion and discussion of the Koop-Bennett fight cited in the next sentence, see Katie Roiphe, *Last Night in Paradise: Sex and Morals at the Century's End* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1997), 176.

208. Cris Mayo, *Disputing the Subject of Sex* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2004), 71-77.

explicitly argue that abstinence before marriage leads to better sex within marriage.²⁰⁹ The construction of uniquely evangelical Christian forms of marriage and sexuality, buttressed by abstinence campaigns targeted at adolescents, have allowed evangelicals to Christianize modernity rather than allowing modernity to secularize Christianity and erase or marginalize evangelical culture in society.

Over fifty years after evangelicals sounded the alarm about sexual revolution, and with so much time, effort, and money spent to influence society and public policy, the obvious question is: what have evangelicals accomplished? Sociologist Mark Regnerus provided insight into the answer in his two books examining data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health.²¹⁰ After studying thousands of responses from eighteen to twenty-three year olds regarding their sexual attitudes and behaviors, along with their religious views and commitments, Regnerus concluded that only two factors significantly delayed the commencement of sexual activity: being dedicated to long term planfulness related to educational goals, and being deeply committed to evangelical Christianity. While it seems clear that evangelicals have largely failed to influence mainstream American culture regarding sexuality, the evangelical marriage project and the ensuing purity movement do appear to make a difference in delaying sex among strongly committed evangelical youth, which sociologists have observed before.²¹¹ Of course, as Regnerus noted, it also helps that evangelicals encourage relatively young marriage, so their youth don't

209. Christine J. Gardner, *Making Chastity Sexy: The Rhetoric of Evangelical Abstinence Campaigns* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 26.

210. Mark Regnerus, *Forbidden Fruit: Sex & Religion in the Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). Mark Regnerus and Jeremy Uecker, *Premarital Sex in America: How Young Americans Meet, Mate, and Think about Marrying* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). Regnerus is an evangelical himself, an advocate for “traditional marriage,” and the author of a separate controversial study about the welfare of children raised in households led by two gay parents.

211. Mark Regnerus' work confirmed previous sociological studies that also found a link between religiosity and willingness to engage in premarital sex. See Randal A. Wright and Mark D. Ogletree, “Family, Peers, Religiosity, Electronic Media, and the Risk of Adolescent Sexual Activity,” in *Sex, Religion, Media*, ed. Dane S. Claussen (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2002), 235-251.

have to wait nearly so long for the reputed sexual joys of wedded bliss. But there is also a large amount of debate over the effectiveness of abstinence education, and Regnerus acknowledged that abstinence pledges appear to have either no effect on or are correlated with higher rates of virginity loss among non-evangelical youth. Since most youth are not evangelical, much less strongly committed evangelicals, from a public policy standpoint abstinence-only sex education is arguably counter-productive and fails to provide sexually active young people with the knowledge and resources to avoid pregnancy and STIs.²¹²

Close readings of evangelical texts about sex and marriage reveal the ways evangelicals engaged with and adapted secular developments in American society, such as the therapeutic culture. These adaptations effectively modernized evangelical marriage in key ways, giving it cultural resilience against a liberalizing counter-culture. The resulting idea of marriage as the intersection of sex and spirituality that evangelicals embraced endures precisely because it was more fluid and adaptive than rigid and reactionary. The evangelical view of marriage continues to resonate decades later among its adherents because it is modern enough to incorporate key social developments of the sexual revolution while remaining true to “pre-sexual revolution” orthodox limitations on sexual relationships. In 1977, *Christianity Today* published an article declaring the evangelical ideal of marriage as subversive in a secular culture that embraced “anything goes.”²¹³ Two decades later, in 1998, a twenty-three year old evangelical woman wrote in the online Catholic magazine *First Things* about her “subversive virginity” in her college peer

212. For book length treatments of recent sex education curricula, including analysis of the effectiveness of abstinence programs, see Mayo, *Disputing the Subject of Sex* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2004); Alesha E. Doan and Jean Calterone Williams, *The Politics of Virginity: Abstinence in Sex Education* (Westport CT: Praeger Publishers, 2008); Isabella E. Rossi, ed., *Abstinence Education* (New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2009); Christina Fisanick, ed., *Do Abstinence Programs Work?* (Detroit: Greenhaven Press, 2010); Carpenter, *Virginity Lost*, 191-193. A sociological approach provided insight into the people and personalities involved intimately in local battles over school sex education curriculum: Kristin Luker, *When Sex Goes to School: Warring Views on Sex – and Sex Education – Since the Sixties* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006).

213. William H. Willimon, “Marriage as a Subversive Activity,” *Christianity Today*, February 18, 1977, 17.

group.²¹⁴ The evangelical marriage project began as a response to sexual revolution and the notionally subversive counter-culture, but within a few decades its proponents had embraced subversiveness as a key feature of their own spiritual and sexual identity. Evangelicals' initial rejection of sexual revolution in the early 1960s became an embrace, as evangelical, sexual co-revolutionaries transformed their conception of marriage, in order to “save” it for future generations.

214. Sarah E. Hinlicky, “Subversive Virginitly,” *First Things* (October 1998), <http://www.firstthings.com/article/1998/10/002-subversive-virginity> (accessed March 20, 2016).

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