

The Princess and the Styrofoam Cup:
Theologizing the Evangelical Purity Dialectic

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Abstract

This doctoral dissertation employs critical discourse analysis and feminist life writing to contextualize and critique North America's "purity culture," therein arguing that the contemporary popularization and commodification of girls' "purity" are influenced by evangelicalism's burgeoning subcultural influence. This project accordingly explores how "purity" as discourse is constructed in a selection of evangelical guidance literature that is written for girls and young women, and it further draws from the author's lived experience as an evangelical subcultural "insider" to elucidate how girls and women may interpret and negotiate these ideologies. Beyond premarital sexual abstinence, this project reveals how evangelical-Complementarian theological frameworks demand that girls and women embrace their inferior status in the divine patriarchal gender hierarchy in order to achieve "true" purity and become Christ's "princess-brides." Such frameworks also address girls as evangelicalism's "mothers of tomorrow" who must physically and pedagogically reproduce the next generation of "true believers" for their religious subculture. The project concludes by proposing alternative feminist theologies that girls and women may utilize in challenging oppressive purity discourses, cultivating empowered spiritualities, and engaging in restorative social justice work.

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Chapter 1

Introduction: Contextualizing Purity Culture

The state of girls' and young women's premarital sexual activities—at least, those of white, middle-class, heterosexual, able-bodied girls and young women—has garnered much attention in North American popular, political, and academic discourse throughout the past decade. Such discussions have been propagated in texts like Laura Sessions Stepp's *Unhooked: How Young Women Pursue Sex, Delay Love and Lose at Both* (2008), which warn young women about the dangers of casual sex and “hookup culture” and trumpet the virtues of sexual monogamy and traditional marriage. Other texts, such as Leonard Sax's *Girls on the Edge: The Four Factors Driving the New Crisis for Girls* (2011), focus on the “hypersexualization” of young girls specifically and argue that children's access to the adult realms of popular media and mass consumerism has caused a collective generational loss of sexual “innocence.” Despite the proliferation of these alarmist discourses, other texts have managed to address the cultural obsession with girlhood sexuality from a critical perspective, such as Jessica Valenti's *The Purity Myth: How America's Obsession with Virginity is Hurting Young Women* (2009).

When taken together, the prevalence and popularity of these writings attest to the larger cultural preoccupation with girls' and young women's “sexual purity.” While “purity” as discourse has a prolonged and contentious history, it continues to be adopted and employed in contemporary secular and religious contexts. This project accordingly addresses female “purity” as a product of North American¹ evangelical Christian theology. Indeed, evangelical Christians in

¹ Throughout this project I address evangelicalism within a North American cultural and geographic context. While evangelicals are more numerous and visibly active in the U.S., and while popular artifacts of evangelical culture are often produced in U.S. contexts (such as the purity literature examined here), such goods and practices are also pervasive in shaping Canadian evangelical religious subcultures. For further reading on the significant impact that U.S. evangelicalism has in influencing dominant Canadian evangelical theologies and subcultural practices, see Marci McDonald's 2010 text *The Armageddon Factor: The Rise of Christian Nationalism in*

the United States and Canada have been at the epicentre of the larger “purity culture” that celebrates—and, as we shall see, resolutely necessitates—girls' and young women's premarital sexual abstinence. At the same time, they have spearheaded the popularization and commodification of “purity” through numerous cultural goods and practices, such as purity rings and father-daughter purity balls,² and they have also wielded considerable political and economic influence in advocating for abstinence-only sex education programs.³ These examples collectively illustrate how purity is constructed as an all-encompassing identity and lifestyle choice for girls, and maintaining one's “technical virginity” is only one of many preconditions which they must satisfy in order to be truly “pure.” This project accordingly addresses “purity” as a fluid, multifaceted, and occasionally contradictory set of discursive practices which mediates how North American society understands and communicates about girlhood sexuality. However, it also contends that this pervasive “purity culture” cannot be thoroughly understood—nor can it be thoroughly problematized—until it is duly addressed as a complex dialectic whose historical, material, and theological facets are rooted in evangelical discursive practices *specifically*. I thus seek to unpack and contextualize this dialectic, both by analyzing how “purity” is constructed in a selection of evangelical purity literature, as well by drawing from my lived experience as an evangelical subcultural “insider” to elucidate how girls and women may interpret and negotiate these ideologies.

Canada and Sam Reimer's 2003 text *Evangelicals and the Continental Divide*. Furthermore, the dominant values and ideologies espoused by U.S. evangelicalism are thriving across the globe due to the colonizing effects of missions work, as well as U.S. and Canadian foreign policies. As such, it is pertinent for future research to investigate the pervasiveness of evangelical purity doctrines in international cultural contexts.

² These “purity” goods and practices have been investigated in non-religious critical scholarship by Bearman and Brückner (2005); Bersamin et al. (2005); Browning (2010); Doan and Williams (2008); Gardner (2011); Manning (2015); Regnerus (2007); and Rosenbaum (2009).

³ For further reading see Williams (2011).

Mapping the Parameters of this Project

I approach this analysis with a very particular set of theoretical parameters and research goals in mind. The purpose of this project is to address and problematize a set of discursive practices that is specific to North American evangelical Christianity. In this sense, I aim to elucidate the extensive and multi-faceted roots of the evangelical purity dialectic, as well as draw attention to its pervasiveness in shaping dominant evangelical beliefs about sex and gender roles. I contend that it is necessary to unpack the purity dialectic from “within” evangelical Christianity so that the perspectives and lived experiences of evangelical girls and young women—who are arguably most numerous and directly affected by its proliferation in a contemporary North American context—can be duly considered by feminist researchers who wish to deconstruct it.

This project accordingly aims to fill a gap in North American feminist scholarship by *theologizing*⁴ “purity,” therein addressing it as religious epistemology. While popular texts such as Valenti’s *The Purity Myth* rightfully critique various elements of contemporary purity culture, such texts are largely written within a non-religious theoretical framework, and thereby overlook the theological and epistemological complexities that evangelical girls and women navigate in their sexual and spiritual lives. This is principally because evangelical theology stipulates that girls and women who stray from “Biblical” purity precepts will not only compromise their sexual reputations, their desirability to potential spouses, and their sexual health; rather, they will also compromise their very salvation and status as “true” Christians. Such contentious demands are further exacerbated for girls who are required by legal, social, and religious conventions to submit to the teachings espoused by adult authorities, including parents and formal religious

⁴ In accordance with liberationist theologies, “theologizing” refers to the process of meaning-making in relation to the divine by sharing stories, insights, and experiences.

leaders, as a matter of universal and abstract principle.

For all these reasons, evangelical purity literature provides a relevant source for contextualizing and problematizing “purity” as discourse, as well as for considering the complex implications that exist for religious girls and women who operate within evangelical subcultures. While evangelical purity culture has produced numerous artifacts and rituals that are worthy of study in their own right, I selected purity literature as this project’s primary point of entry for several reasons. Following the traditions of evangelical devotional⁵ and guidance texts, evangelical purity literature is written by self-declared Christian “experts” who purport to speak on God’s behalf, therein combining Biblical “proof-texts” with the author’s personal advice for how to achieve an all-encompassing lifestyle of sexual and spiritual “purity.” This literature thus provides a poignant and revealing source for unpacking the purity dialectic, as it is produced specifically for adolescent female readers with the twofold purpose of comprehensively defining “purity” and providing pragmatic instruction for achieving it. In this way, beyond teaching girls about the importance of premarital sexual abstinence, these texts act as agents of religious enculturation and gender socialization by providing an exhaustive framework for how to attain patriarchal ideals of Christian *womanhood*. Furthermore, while various tenets of evangelicalism’s purity culture have migrated to new media, and particularly to online platforms such as blogs, these texts remain popular among evangelical readers, and their shared physical form and narrative structure conveys the sense of permanence and authority associated with traditional religious texts, namely the Bible.

⁵ As the name implies, “devotional” texts are meant to be read on a regular—and ideally daily—basis as an act of devotion to God. Traditionally, these texts have been published as books which combine Biblical passages with the author’s personal insights regarding various faith-based issues. In a contemporary context, such texts also proliferate across multi-media platforms; for example, believers may subscribe to receive daily devotional e-mail and text messages.

Notably, this project does not elicit the voices and experiences of evangelical girls and women beyond my own lived experiences and those offered by the purity literature in question. This is not to discount the importance of including diverse voices in future research on evangelical purity culture;⁶ however, the primary goal of this project is to address in-depth how “purity” operates as a dominant discourse insofar as it is constructed and perpetuated by authoritative theological “experts” in North American evangelicalism. As such, it is also pertinent to note that evangelical boys and young men,⁷ as well as girls and women who operate within other Christian and non-Christian religious, spiritual, and secular contexts, are implicated in this larger purity culture. However, as my analysis will reveal, despite its far-reaching influence in North American discussions and understandings of sexuality, “purity” as discourse is inherently gendered, and it operates as a facet of evangelical theology *specifically*. This project thus aims to fill a particular but critical gap in the existing scholarship on purity culture and girlhood sexuality more generally. I also hope that it will provoke future research to examine—and take seriously—diverse evangelical girls’ and women’s religious and corporeal knowledges by eliciting their voices directly. With these goals in mind, I will now unpack the methodological framework which guides my analysis of the evangelical purity dialectic.

⁶ Indeed, such research is already underway, at least with adult women. For further reading, see Sonya Sharma’s study *Good Girls, Good Sex: Women Talk About Church and Sexuality* (2011). To my knowledge, however, no similar research has been done with evangelical girls or youth.

⁷ Similar evangelical texts are published to educate boys and young men about the importance of premarital sexual abstinence, although they are not as numerous or as popular. While such texts are worthy of study in their own right, they arguably do not fall within the discursive parameters of this project. This is because such texts, like *Every Young Man’s Battle: Strategies for Victory in the Real World of Sexual Temptation* (Arterburn and Stoeker 2009), and *Hero: Becoming the Man She Desires* (Stoeker and Stoeker 2009), do not address male sexuality within a discursive framework of “purity.” While female “purity” is conceived as a tangible quality that will leave a girl fundamentally altered and inexplicably deficient once it is compromised, boys and young men are encouraged to exercise their “Godly masculinity” by “conquering” the sexual temptations they encounter in daily life. In this way, “purity” discourses presume that girls and women lack sexual desire, and therefore instruct them to remain ignorant of sexual knowledge and experience. In contrast, evangelical texts for boys and young men acknowledge how their divinely-ordained sexual urges pose a spiritual challenge, and instruct them to control their desires accordingly.

Methodology

My analysis of evangelical purity literature is guided by a number of intersecting feminist methodological approaches, values, and research practices. To begin, this project employs a feminist postmodern epistemological lens. However, before I explain the meaning of postmodernism and its significance to this project, it is critical to qualify what I mean by the term “feminist.” There is no single cohesive theory of feminism, and so feminism should be understood as an assertion of values that must be continually called into question (Code et al. 2, 11). As such, bell hooks problematizes the pervasive discourse that feminism's goal is to effect social equality between men and women, since men are also subject to varying oppressions and privileges in accordance with their race and ethnicity, economic class, sexual orientation, bodily abilities, and so on (19). She defines feminism as a struggle to end sexist oppression and challenge the broader ideologies of domination that normalize and reproduce injustice in all of its material and ideological forms (26). On the whole, then, a feminist ethic emerges from the injustice which stems from intersecting sex- and gender-based oppressions, and it accordingly rejects all hierarchical structures that are based in dominance and authoritarianism (Code et al. 9, 12).

While sex- and gender-based oppressions which intersect with economic class, race and ethnicity, and sexual orientation are customarily explored in feminist scholarship, this study explicitly focuses on two additional identity markers that are less frequently brought to the forefront of intersectional analyses: age and religion. Herein I accordingly address “girlhood” as a culturally constructed space which, like childhood more generally, varies across geographical and historical contexts and has complex implications for the diverse girls who occupy it. In this sense, the ways in which girls and young women experience North America’s purity culture are

invariably constrained by adult expectations concerning who girls are and how they should be. Throughout this study I further consider how such age-specific constraints intersect with the sex and gender ideologies that pervade evangelical Christianity. I elucidate how girls who operate within evangelical subcultures are doubly constrained by fundamentalist demands for the maintenance of “traditional” patriarchal gender hierarchies, as well as for children's collective “obedience” to adult authorities as a matter of universal and abstract principle. When combined with the principles of postmodern epistemology, this feminist ethical framework addresses critical questions about how such ideologies come to operate as taken-for-granted components of evangelical subcultural knowledge.

(Feminist) Postmodernism

Postmodernism can be conceptualized as an umbrella term for the cultural, social, and theoretical dimensions of the contemporary period, which have in turn influenced and altered feminism (Ferguson and Wicke 2). One distinct contribution of “the postmodern turn” has been its direct assault on the idea of universal criteria for judgment (Nicholson 74), and it thus provides a framework for challenging what Nick Lee refers to as “truth regimes” of taken-for-granted knowledge (46). Along this trajectory, Caroline Ramazanoğlu and Janet Holland argue that feminism is in some respects a postmodern theory since it allows researchers to look imaginatively at the intersections of power, language, and knowledge production (84-85). Feminist postmodernism accordingly problematizes the “common sense” knowledge that is largely produced by white, heterosexual, upper- and middle-class men within patriarchal gender, race, and class hierarchies. In this capacity, asking who the “knower” is has become a critical component of feminist research practice (Code 2).

Such critical questions regarding the nature of knowledge and knowledge production are

central to my study of evangelical purity literature. Postmodernist principles contextualize evangelical purity discourses as significant “ways of knowing” that have tangible implications for religious girls and young women, *without* seeking to validate these religious beliefs as pre-existing “truths.” I approach this project with the presumption that religious practice is both a type of knowledge and a way of knowing that is not inherently good or bad for girls and women; rather, such knowledge may contribute to sex- and gender-based oppressions when it is adopted and employed in hegemonic and exclusionary ways. A feminist postmodern epistemological lens thus allows me to analyze purity discourses from “within” evangelicalism by investigating how knowledge about girls' and young women's sexualities is produced and propagated as “truth” by adult “knowers” within the discursive realm of evangelical purity literature. It also allows me to address evangelical theology as a fluid way of knowing that is subject to negotiation and contestation, and in this capacity feminist postmodernism coalesces seamlessly with critical discourse analysis as a research method for examining the selected evangelical purity literature.

(Feminist) Critical Discourse Analysis

Like postmodern epistemology, discourse analysis has proved useful for feminist scholars who focus on the social construction and fluidity of power as it is constituted in language (Leavy 90-91). Discursive approaches to research operate under the assumption that all knowledge is contextually bound and produced within cultural fields of shifting power relations, and they contextualize language as a specific cultural construction that is perpetually subject to negotiation. Collectively, discursive research addresses the process of communication within cultural texts, just as it regards language as a social product that reinforces ideology.

I specifically employ critical discourse analysis in this study. As a research method, critical discourse analysis addresses historically contingent cultural systems of knowledge,

belief, and power, wherein language serves as the primary reproducer of ideology (Leavy 98). It is also largely informed by Michel Foucault's conceptualization of discourse. Foucault posits that power cannot be conceptualized as the overt and total domination of one group over another; rather, power is exercised and reproduced through the general acceptance of dominant ideologies as “common sense.” As such, discourse constitutes a historically variable and systematic way of specifying knowledge and truth, thus rendering it a key force in the production and dissemination of “legitimate” knowledge (Naples 28). Nancy Naples argues that, while Foucault tends to neglect gender in his analysis of power, he does emphasize the potential for resistance and the importance of questioning dominant discourses—two political enterprises that are central to feminist research praxis (27). Feminist critical discourse analysis, then, is concerned with investigating how language and ideology mediate power relations in social institutions, as well as with critiquing discourses which sustain power relations by systematically disempowering and excluding women as a social group (Weiss and Wodak 5, 14).

These theoretical attributes attest to why feminist critical discourse analysis is a relevant research method for this study of evangelical purity literature. Throughout this project I unpack, define, and problematize “purity” as a set of discursive practices that is particular to contemporary North American evangelical theology. In this capacity, critical discourse analysis operationalizes the principles of feminist postmodernism by addressing how power and ideology are constructed, reproduced, and contested within a selection of cultural texts. It is thus additionally useful to contextualize evangelicalism as a set of fluid and contestable discursive practices that operates within a dominant fundamentalist theological paradigm.

Evangelicalism as Fundamentalism

Throughout this project I address the evangelical purity dialectic as a twofold operative of

fundamentalist subcultural identity precepts and fundamentalist Biblical exegeses. In accordance with the methodological principles of feminist postmodernist epistemology and critical discourse analysis, evangelicalism can be aptly contextualized as a set of discursive practices which exists in radical⁸ relation to fundamentalism as theological praxis. While fundamentalism is a fluid and contentious term, it can be initially traced to the conservative evangelical movement that transpired throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Britain and North America.⁹ However, many contemporary North American evangelicals reject the “fundamentalist” label, given its association with cultural backwardness and anti-intellectualism. As such, rather than regard fundamentalism as a fixed religious identity that is synonymous with evangelicalism, this study addresses fundamentalism as a *theological paradigm* that is reproduced and negotiated through discourse, and which currently enjoys *dominant status* in guiding the production and dissemination of evangelical theology in North America.

Broadly speaking, Christian fundamentalism as theological praxis is distinguished by its reliance on literalist Biblical exegeses, as well as its resistance to societal changes that undermine “traditional” beliefs and practices (Bauer 228, 237; Gerami 27-28; Hardacre 129; Sandeen 103). Unlike hermeneutical readings which contextualize religious texts within their broader socioeconomic, political, and literary contexts, literalist Biblical exegeses seek to uncover and apply the “true” meaning of the text itself (Fiorenza 1984: 131). Fundamentalist exegeses accordingly regard Christian canonical texts as universally and timelessly relevant for all “true” believers, and negotiating the meaning and relevance of such texts in light of shifting

⁸ In the same way that “radical feminism” aims to address the “root” cause of sexism in society, I use this term to express how dominant evangelical beliefs are intrinsically shaped by fundamentalist discursive practices (as opposed to the common perception that “radical” always connotes degrees of extremism).

⁹ For further reading on the fundamentalist split in the evangelical movement, see Ernest Sandeen’s text *The Roots of Fundamentalism*.

material and ideological conditions is regarded as a sinful concession to the “secular world.” In this respect, Biblical texts which enforce patriarchal gender, class, and racial hierarchies must be continually affirmed simply because they are “Biblical,” and the primacy of this imperative is illustrated by the pervasiveness of Complementarian theology within the selected evangelical purity literature. This theological “movement” emphasizes the importance of universal male “headship” and female “submission” in all domestic and public social spheres in accordance with select Biblical proof-texts.¹⁰ In this sense, Complementarian theology constructs the maintenance of “traditional” gender roles as the central locus for resisting secular forces—namely feminism, “homosexuality,” and all forms of “liberalism”—that seek to eradicate Christianity's cultural and political influence.

Along this trajectory, the radical relationship between evangelicalism and fundamentalism can be further contextualized in accordance with subcultural identity theory. In his text *American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving* (1998), Christian Smith argues that contemporary U.S. evangelicals perceive themselves as a minority subculture whose beliefs and values are perpetually at risk of being compromised by malevolent secular forces. As these subcultures feel increasingly threatened by sweeping societal changes, they are more likely to implement intricate behavioural and communication codes that confirm “in group” status and maintain subcultural strength. While Smith rightfully problematizes the notion that evangelicalism is synonymous with fundamentalism, it can be argued that evangelicals broadly operate as religious subcultures which adopt fundamentalist *discursive practices* in striving to cultivate group solidarity by rejecting all forms of religious scepticism, compromise, and doubt

¹⁰ For a “definitive” evangelical-Complementarian manifesto, see John Piper and Wayne Grudem's edited collection *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (1991, 2006).

among members. In this way, fundamentalist discursive practices are based in the perpetuation of hegemonic “truth regimes” that cannot be questioned or challenged, and anyone who contests these timeless and universal “truths” is perceived as a threat to subcultural solidarity.

Beyond the realm of canonical texts, evangelical subcultures are demarcated by distinct yet varied discursive practices, several of which feature prominently in this project. Among them are what I term the prosperity gospel paradigm and the evangelizing imperative. The former refers to evangelicalism’s overarching belief that God rewards individual morality, virtue, and devotion with visible prosperity,¹¹ including economic success, good health, and spiritual well-being.¹² This precept also implies that any hardships which Christians experience are a result of immorality and lack of religious devotion; it similarly supports the pervasive North American ideology that social mobility can be attained by any individual through virtuous hard work and sacrifice. It is pertinent to note that, while charismatic evangelical denominations such as Pentecostalism are more likely to overtly promote the prosperity gospel, it can be argued that evangelical denominations that repudiate the prosperity gospel *in theory* may still perpetuate it *in practice*. As such, this project reveals in Chapters 3 and 4 how this paradigm informs the contemporary evangelical purity dialectic that is perpetuated in the selected guidance literature.

Moving forward, the evangelizing imperative refers to the belief that individual Christians are mandated to “go into the world” and share God’s truth with everyone they meet. In a contemporary North American context, this imperative is perhaps most visible in evangelical

¹¹ As with any discourse that enjoys dominant status in a given cultural context, North American evangelicals adopt and reject aspects of the “prosperity gospel” to varying degrees. Popular evangelical authors and speakers such as Joel Osteen and Joyce Meyer are often regarded as proponents of this paradigm, while others such as Francis Chan refute it.

¹² Closely intertwined with the prosperity gospel paradigm is the “name it and claim it” mandate, which is particularly associated with charismatic denominations, such as Pentecostals. This suggests that God will answer any prayer that Christians bring to Him as long as they pray hard and often enough and “truly” believe that God will respond.

leaders' use of media technology, such as television, and more recently, the Internet, to share their teachings with mass audiences (Cheong et al. 110; Corrigan et al. 11). As this analysis will reveal in Chapter 4, this imperative is central in shaping contemporary evangelical tenets of ideal womanhood and motherhood.

In a similar vein, providing children with intensive religious enculturation is a primary imperative within fundamentalist religious subcultures. Throughout this project I refer to the pedagogical reproduction of religious beliefs, values, and traditions within evangelical subcultures as “enculturation,” in contrast to the more frequently used “socialization.” While the latter term broadly refers to the process of teaching children about societal norms and roles, as well as preparing them for the responsibilities that accompany adulthood and citizenship within a given society, here enculturation refers to the intergenerational reproduction of beliefs and values that are particular to a given culture or subculture. I contend that religious enculturation is a process distinct from socialization within evangelical subcultures because these groups tend to argue that the larger “secular” society deliberately undermines their religious worldview. In this sense, evangelical subcultures acknowledge aspects of “mainstream” socialization (“this is what the secular society wants you to do”) so that such values can be repudiated through religious enculturation (“this is what God wants you to do”). In this capacity, it is pertinent to note that, while this project regards evangelical girls and young women as active interpreters and reproducers of religious knowledge in their everyday cultural worlds (Corsaro 18), it also recognizes how their abilities to exercise agency by negotiating or rejecting religious teachings are constrained by the legally, socially, and theologically sanctioned authority that adults have over children.

While I will further address the contentious discursive relationship between socialization

and enculturation throughout my analysis of the selected evangelical purity literature, I have also experienced these processes first hand. It is accordingly pertinent to explore how life writing operationalizes the values of feminist postmodernism by allowing me to problematize my position as a knower and knowledge producer within the theoretical parameters of this project.

Life Writing as Critical Practice

Feminist researchers may utilize life writing as a political tool to re-claim the knowledge that has been erased, falsified, and devalued within patriarchal hierarchies which marginalize women as “Other” (Rusk 1). Such life writing strategies of “Otherness” include intermingling fact with fictive elaboration, fantasy, and cultural critique. In this capacity, life writing works in conjunction with postmodernist principles to challenge the modernist assumption that there is an absolute separation between fiction and autobiography (Kadar 5). Life writing thereby operates as a critical research practice when it is used to challenge patriarchal truth regimes and validate women's diverse ways of knowing. Importantly, *knowing* in this sense cannot be equated with a special “woman's” perception or instinct; rather, it always involves an intersubjective dimension among knowers and what can be known in common. Life writing as critical practice both acknowledges and problematizes these contentious aspects of knowledge production, as it encourages writers and readers alike to foster their own self-consciousness (Kadar 12).

The concept of feminist auto/biography is particularly pertinent in this regard. As a research practice, feminist auto/biography actively challenges the idea that knowledge can be divorced from the lived experience of the researcher, and it works to draw attention to the perceptions and experiences of marginalized groups (Martin and Goodman 14). Such life writing practices facilitate the re-discovering of women's experiential and corporeal knowledges that have been “Othered” and silenced within patriarchal truth regimes, just as they re-frame these

ways of knowing as significant to culture and history. Of course, feminist auto/biographical texts also present dilemmas of interpretation, since they demand some knowledge of the macropolitics of gender within particular places and periods, in addition to a critical understanding of how the writer's "unique" experiences intersect with what is "held in common" by those who share particular identity markers. In this sense, while women may actively fashion their life narratives and identities through life writing, these narratives are always already shaped by dominant frames of interpretation (Eakin 5, 13). Life narratives must thereby be contextualized within a framework of intersubjectivity, wherein it is acknowledged that the writer's "self" is perpetually structured by the social (Martin and Goodman 13).

Along this trajectory, life writing as critical practice has been an important political tool for women who ascribe to religious traditions such as evangelical Christianity, wherein they continue to be marginalized by dominant patriarchal ideologies. Religious women, in turn, have written about their lived experiences in order to challenge the truth regimes that legitimize and sustain patriarchal gender, class, and racial hierarchies. For instance, Quaker abolitionists Sarah and Angelina Grimké wrote about their personal epiphanies from God to contest religious and political restrictions on women's public leadership in the nineteenth century (Coleman 96-99). In a contemporary North American context, popular writers such as Rachel Held Evans¹³ and Susan Campbell¹⁴ utilize the textual tradition of memoir to contrast the realities of their lived experiences with the patriarchal doctrines that enjoy dominant status within evangelical subcultures. Life writing thus holds empowering potential for religious women,¹⁵ and I employ

13 For further reading see *Evolving in Monkey Town* (Evans, 2010) and *A Year of Biblical Womanhood* (Evans, 2012).

14 For further reading see *Dating Jesus: A Story of Fundamentalism, Feminism, and the American Girl* (Campbell, 2010)

¹⁵ It is pertinent to note that religious women are more likely than girls to publish their critical life writing. As is the case with knowledge production more generally, adults are more likely to have access to the tools and resources

this critical practice in conjunction with a feminist ethical framework and postmodern epistemological lens to situate myself as a knower and knowledge producer in this project. While my whiteness, heterosexuality, cisgenderedness, bodily abilities, socioeconomic status, and age, among others, provide me with many privileges within North American evangelical subcultural contexts, I contend that I am part of a systemically “Othered” group therein due to my gender identity, and I accordingly utilize life writing throughout this project to contextualize these experiences and problematize the evangelical purity dialectic.

I approach this project with a critical awareness of the theoretical and ethical tensions that shape the act of “remembering.” I situate myself as a “knower” herein in accordance with the experiences and perceptions I have garnered as a girl and young woman in what I consider to be a fundamentalist evangelical subculture. However, I am aware that the knower's “self” is perpetually cultivated in relation to family members, friends, and peers, as well as formal authorities in educational, religious, and political institutions. In this sense, the narration of any life can never be confined to a single, isolated subjecthood, nor can it be viewed as a source of absolute “truth.” As such, throughout this project I can only recall and interpret my experiences from my own standpoint, and it is possible—even likely—that I will misconstrue and misrepresent the actions and intentions of other social actors as I do so.

The possibility of “remembering” my girlhood perceptions and experiences is equally contentious, as I can only strive to recall and interpret them through an adult standpoint that has

that are needed to share their life narratives through public platforms, and they are also more likely to see their narratives validated by others. This gap reflects broader societal beliefs that children are not trustworthy or competent narrators of their own lives. It is also worth noting that, in a North American evangelical context, the most popular memoir authors are white, middle-class, heterosexual, and able-bodied women.

been altered with physical and cognitive development, life experience, and education. Throughout this project I construct a narrative based on girlhood memories that I cannot gain “authentic” or complete access to, and it will surely blur the boundaries of fiction, memory, and autobiography. At best I can engage in life writing as critical practice and hope that I will contribute to the growing body of religious feminist scholarship in a meaningful way. In this sense, while I understand my experiences within evangelical Christianity to be guided by a dominant fundamentalist paradigm, I cannot define evangelicalism for the breadth of its participants; rather, I can only describe this religious tradition as I have lived it through my own enculturation, as well as contextualize it within the epistemology I have cultivated through a host of intersubjective experiences.

This process ultimately begins with my working-class roots in a predominantly white, rural town in Southwestern Ontario. Throughout the years I have learned that my mother and father were both born in Old Colony Mennonite communities in Mexico, among previous generations who fled from Germany during World War II to uphold their religious commitment to pacifism.¹⁶ They immigrated to Canada as children with their families, and they continued to uphold many of the Old Colony Mennonite traditions after they married in their early twenties. However, this changed after my mother was “born again” into evangelicalism when I was an infant, at which point she left my hometown’s Mennonite congregation and joined the Pentecostal church that I would attend throughout my childhood and adolescent years. My father, on the other hand, would always profess his belief in God in non-specific terms; however he never attended this new church with my mother, and soon his church attendance ceased

¹⁶ For further reading about Mennonite women's experiences in Canada and Mennonite history more generally, see *Mennonite Women in Canada: A History* (2008) by Marlene Epp.

completely. As I write this, I am cognizant that I have never asked him why this was the case; perhaps he only ever attended church as a matter of tradition rather than personal conviction, and felt no need to continue doing so once my mother left the Mennonite religion. Or perhaps the promise of having the house to himself once a week on Sunday morning while his wife and three daughters were away was simply too precious an opportunity to pass up.

My father accordingly remained absent from the religious enculturation of his three daughters, and for this reason he will not feature prominently in my narrative. My mother, in contrast, embraced this task with intensive dedication. Many of my earliest childhood memories consist of her reading stories from my children's picture Bible¹⁷ and praying with me at my bedside at night. Throughout the years she would teach me that we are all sinners who live in a fallen world, and that our fate was sealed when Adam and Eve compromised humanity's salvation by eating the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden. Luckily, however, God loved humanity enough to send His son—and I emphasize “His son,” as the innate maleness of God and God incarnate was non-negotiable—to die and redeem our sins. She taught me to counteract my sinful nature by reading about God, watching animated children's programs about Him,¹⁸ praying to Him, and attending church each week.

While the Christian “golden rules” of loving others as I loved myself and treating others as I wished to be treated seemed straight forward enough during my early childhood years, evangelical theology's intricate terrain would eventually prove difficult to navigate. My mother

17 While there is a multitude of illustrated children's Bibles available on the market, I grew up reading the *Read-N-Grow Picture Bible* (1984) by Libby Weed and Jim Padgett. The cover illustration, along with several page previews, can be viewed on the Amazon website.

18 The animated programs *The Flying House* and *Superbook* were among my childhood favourites. I have only recently learned that both of these series were Japanese anime programs produced in association with Pat Robertson's U.S.-based Christian Broadcasting Network. They originally aired in Japan in the early 1980s, and were later aired in English in North America and released for home purchase on VHS tapes. Interested readers can access a number of clips and full episodes of these programs on YouTube.

taught me early on that I only needed to accept the divine gift of salvation by asking Jesus to “come into my heart” in order to avoid eternal damnation after death. At the same time, I also learned from church sermons and Sunday School classes that I must submit to particular doctrines and practices to procure my salvation. For instance, I learned that “true” Christians believe every text in the Bible—wherein the Jewish Torah was known as the “Old Testament” and the Apocrypha did not exist—to be the direct and authoritative word of God, and that every passage therein is eternally true and applicable in the lives of all Christians.

I also learned to be critical of the many “false” religions throughout the world which led would-be believers astray. For instance, Judaism and Catholicism were too legalistic and tradition-oriented, and did not encourage participants to foster the intimate relationship with God that was required for salvation. Similarly, the “liberal” mainline¹⁹ Protestant denominations deliberately misinterpreted the Bible and were too accommodating of the “secular world.” It was alarming to learn that so many people who believed they were serving God correctly would actually spend eternity in Hell, so it seemed logical that we evangelicals needed to “go into the world” and share the truth that we alone had so astutely unearthed. Yet in spite of their seeming importance in leading an authentic Christian life, all these doctrines suddenly fell by the wayside as the whirlwind of adolescence blitzed toward me, at which point a new condition for salvation took centre stage—that of “sexual purity.”

Long before I understood the physical mechanics of sex, my mother ensured that I knew this mysterious act resulted in the conception of children; that it required the participation of a

¹⁹ Mainline Protestant refers to the more historically established denominations, in contrast to fundamentalist, evangelical, and charismatic denominations. The United Church of Canada is a prominent example, which is frequently derided in evangelical circles for its lax interpretations of the Bible and its concessions to secular society (for instance, by ordaining women and performing same-sex marriages).

man and a woman; and, most importantly, that it was a sin if committed outside of marriage. My first such epiphany came at the age of five, and I remember it vividly: my older sister and I had carried our Cabbage Patch dolls into our home's living room, and we were establishing the narrative framework for the play in which we were about to engage. This process always involved naming our “babies,” giving ourselves “grown-up” names, and naming our pretend husbands. However, for no particular reason that I can recall, I decided to take an alternative route during this particular play session.

“My baby's name is Chuck,” I proclaimed, “and I don't have a husband.”

It took only a moment for my mother to cease whatever she was doing in the kitchen and join us in the living room. “What did you say?” she asked. Oblivious to my moral trespass, I proclaimed once again that I was Chuck's mother, and that I did not have a husband. My mother went on to inform me sternly that God did not want me to pretend to be a mother without a husband, and that only married women could have babies. Although this sin of mine was completely unintentional, I remember feeling profoundly guilty that I had made my mother—and God, for that matter—so viscerally upset. While I did not understand the importance or logistics of only-married-women having babies, I made a mental note of the matter and never pretended to be an unwed mother again.

While an understanding of what constituted the life-altering act of sex continued to elude me, by the age of eleven I had heard the term spoken enough times to understand its critical implications for my relationship with God, as well as for my place in eternity. This all became exceedingly clear one morning at my Pentecostal church. I do not recall the larger theme of the morning's sermon; I only remember the lead pastor specifically addressing the “youth” in the congregation when he proclaimed, “I hate to say it, but if you are engaging in premarital sex,

you won't make it to Heaven.” Like all young Christians who kept a perpetual mental checklist of the necessary steps for avoiding eternal damnation, this statement resonated with me. It was as if a definitive line had been drawn in the proverbial sands of my salvation—even though I was a self-professing Christian who had asked Jesus into my heart, who prayed and read the Bible every day, and attended church regularly, it was possible to go to Hell because of one particular sin. God could forgive my lying, my disobedience to my parents, my selfishness, my gossiping, and still let me into Heaven—I knowingly engaged in these behaviours in one form or another each day, so I certainly wanted to believe this was the case. But if I engaged in premarital sex, it was too critical a breach for God to overlook. It must be, because the pastor did not single out any other sin as a sure-way ticket to Hell. Equipped with this knowledge, I resolved that, whatever sex actually was, I would not engage in it until I was married to a Christian man.

Incidentally, when I finally did learn about the mechanics of sex, it was not from my mother, nor from an impassioned church sermon. It also was not from pornography, films, music videos, or any other type of popular media so often incriminated in discussions about young people's loss of sexual “innocence.” At the age of thirteen I finally learned about the physical, spiritual, and emotional intricacies of sex, and I learned it all from Dannah Gresh. I remember the Christmas morning well: in a few months my older sister would reach the mother-proclaimed legal dating age of sixteen, and I was still equally clueless as I was curious about sex. As my family members went about their usual gift exchanges, my attention was suddenly drawn to a paperback book that Ashley²⁰ was unwrapping. Its cover illustration depicted a slender, white woman with fair hair, smiling and clasping her hands in apparent joy as she stood in a white

²⁰ I have obtained permission from my sisters (Ashley and Amanda) to include their real names in this project.

gown.²¹ The book was titled And the Bride Wore White: Seven Secrets to Sexual Purity. Thus began the prolonged and contentious process that was my evangelical sex education.

I waited several days before creeping into Ashley's bedroom to ascertain the book's whereabouts amid the heaps of clothing and magazines that were habitually strewn about her floor. After retrieving the book from atop one such pile, I nestled into another and braced myself for the veritable cornucopia of information that lay at my fingertips. I began my covert operation by surveying the book's back cover, where a photo of the author smiled up at me with impeccably white teeth, layered blonde hair, fair skin, and red lips. For reasons I cannot wholly articulate, Dannah Gresh's image²² was immediately comforting to me. It reminded me of the women and teen girls from my largely white, middle and upper class Pentecostal church who always wore designer dresses, had fashionable hairstyles, and sat next to their handsome boyfriends and husbands near the front of the auditorium. These were the women and girls who sang beautiful solos during each Sunday service, and their names were universally known and revered throughout the church. The immaculately styled Dannah Gresh seemingly encompassed everything that I fantasized I could be as I grew into a Christian woman—an ideal far removed from my painfully shy thirteen-year-old self, whose confidence was mitigated by crooked teeth, what I believed to be an abnormally large nose, and hand-me-down clothes that never quite fit right. It seemed as if this text would provide a window into an exclusive world that I longed to be a part of, and I was prepared to follow the author's lead in the hope of claiming a place therein.

I proceeded to delve into the book's contents. The first few pages were filled with rave reviews of the text, mostly provided by young women who were identified by their first name and

²¹ See Appendix A

²² See Appendix A

age. “I don't know if I can fully explain what I experienced,” wrote Lola, 16. “I met God truly for the first time.” Erin, 20, similarly wrote, “This caused me to change my dating standards drastically. I am now engaged and I know that this will have a lasting impact on my marriage.” These accounts seemed to confirm that the book in my hands would not only reveal the secrets of sex but also teach me how to become the Heaven-bound, beautiful, married, and all-around-admirable Christian woman I hoped to become.

Throughout the course of reading this particular text, I did indeed learn many critical things about my sexuality, my future, and my salvation. For instance, I learned that my “purity” was my most valuable attribute, and that it was a tangible quality that I could lose. And once this purity was gone, my body, mind, and spirit would be fundamentally altered and inexplicably deficient. This was rather unsettling for my thirteen-year-old self to discover, as I read through accounts detailing how so many young women’s lives had been completely derailed after engaging in premarital sex—how they were discarded by their boyfriends, haunted by bad reputations, experienced deep depressions, and felt alienated from their Christian families and friends.

I also learned that I needed to constantly monitor my clothing, since I would compromise the purity of my “brothers in Christ” if I were to wear anything tight or revealing that should send them into an unstoppable bout of lust. This was particularly crucial, since I also learned that men, although more inherently righteous than women due to their shared “maleness” with God, had no control over their rampant sexual desires. It became apparent that my body, whether I liked it or not, was perpetually subject to others’ desires and judgements, and that it was my responsibility to monitor my conduct so that the men in my life would not “stumble and fall.”

*On the whole, Dannah Gresh taught me that the most important thing I could possibly do as a young Christian woman was to abstain from sex, and all sexual thoughts and activities, until I was married. It became clear to me that a girl's sexual "purity" was the key factor in determining her social value, her status as a "true" Christian, and by extension, her salvation. In this sense, *And the Bride Wore White* proved to be particularly useful in helping me evaluate my value in the eyes of God and men by providing a chart to measure my level of "purity." Midway through the text, Gresh asks the reader: "In your dating relationships, are you a 'trashable' Styrofoam cup, an everyday ceramic mug that is easily replaceable, or a valuable, priceless teacup? It's all in the presentation" (76). A short quiz²³ accordingly asks the reader to rank herself as a Styrofoam cup, a ceramic mug, or a priceless teacup in categories such as the way she presents herself through her clothing choices, the way she talks to other girls about guys, the places she is willing to go on a date, and the movies and television shows she watches (75).*

To my thirteen-year-old self the implication was clear: The more "sexual" a girl was, even if it meant thinking about sex, watching films with sexual content, and wearing clothing that accentuated her body, the less "valuable" she was—she became a "trashable" styrofoam cup. Even those girls who slightly compromised these purity precepts would be easily "replaceable" like cheap ceramic mugs, and so it was evident that if I wanted to be valuable enough to attain a Christian husband and procure my salvation—I understood the two to be somehow intrinsically linked—I could aspire to be nothing less than an unblemished, untainted, "priceless" teacup. As Gresh reminds her readers: "You are a princess. Your behaviour and the choices you make must be governed by that value if you are aiming for the sunset ending in your love story. You must present yourself as you would priceless china" (79).

²³ See Appendix B

*In light of the sex education I received from Dannah Gresh, as well as from the rest of the sexual purity literature that my mother would purchase for my sisters and me throughout our adolescent years, it may seem surprising—or perhaps not surprising at all—that I allowed my “purity” to slip away completely by the age of sixteen. It was a far-reaching and contentious leap, given the teachings that I had internalized about my salvation and personal value being so intrinsically tied to my sexuality. Indeed, these teachings never ceased their protests from the depths of my mind; rather, they constantly reminded me that no Christian man would marry me, and that I would go to Hell. For this reason, I now seek to contextualize and problematize these evangelical teachings. Throughout this project I use a selection of evangelical purity literature as a discursive point of entry into North America's pervasive purity culture. I also seek to construct an alternative narrative which differs from the “sunset ending” Dannah Gresh proposes in *And the Bride Wore White*. Herein I accordingly explore how seemingly divergent religious and feminist epistemologies coalesced to teach this woman that her personal value far exceeds that of a “styrofoam cup” and inspired her to forge her own vision of “happily ever after.”*

Conclusion

This introductory chapter has addressed how “purity” operates as a fluid and contentious dialectic which mediates how contemporary North American society understands and communicates about girlhood sexuality. It has also argued why this pervasive “purity culture” should be contextualized as a specifically evangelical discursive and theological construct, and it has established why evangelical purity literature provides a rich source for unpacking and problematizing the purity dialectic. Furthermore, it has established the methodological framework for this project, including its guiding feminist ethic, its postmodern epistemological

lens, as well as its use of critical discourse analysis as a research method for analyzing the selected evangelical purity literature. It has also attempted to critically situate the author as a “knower” by investigating my use of life writing as a means of knowledge production within the theoretical parameters of this study.

In Chapter 2, *Guiding the Girls*, I begin my analysis of the evangelical purity dialectic by outlining a discursive history of sexual purity within a historical materialist framework. Here I examine the ancient roots of the Judeo-Christian tradition, wherein the patriarchal Hebrews operated as a minority religious subculture among numerous matrilineal Goddess-worshipping nations. I argue in turn that the Judeo-Christian tradition initially established subcultural strength through the collective repudiation of female sexual and political agency, and that girls' and women's extramarital chastity was deemed necessary to ensure “legitimate” father-to-son private property transfer. I then consider how “purity” as discourse reached fruition during the Victorian period, wherein evangelicalism emerged as a dominant Christian theological paradigm. Furthermore, throughout this period the “traditional” nuclear family structure became increasingly accessible to the white middle classes, and beliefs about girls' and women's innate “purity” were subsequently shaped by their new role as “angels in the house.” At the same time, “adolescence” emerged as a cultural category for girls, and the imperative to preserve their “purity” during this intermediary period of waiting for womanhood necessitated the widespread publication of guidance literature. I conclude the chapter by analyzing a selection of these texts and contextualizing them as a precursor to contemporary evangelical purity literature.

In Chapter 3, *Becoming the Princess*, I employ critical discourse analysis to explore how a selection of contemporary North American evangelical literature defines “purity” within a Complementarian theological framework. Here I utilize these texts' overarching “princess”

narrative trope to examine how the reader, who is addressed as one of Christ's future “princess-brides,” is compelled to perform evangelical precepts of “authentic purity” and “righteous femininity” to obtain salvation and live “happily ever after” with God in eternity. In this sense, while the selected texts are principally written to deter evangelical girls from engaging in premarital sex, they also perpetuate a Complementarian theological paradigm wherein Christ's “true” princess-brides embrace their inferior status within the divine gender hierarchy. These texts accordingly argue that “true” Christian girls procure salvation through “submitting” to earthly male authorities within a heterosexual marriage covenant. In this sense, female purity and righteousness are achieved by serving male needs, and men are designated as girls’ and women’s “redeemer-grooms” by virtue of their shared “maleness” with the deity.

In Chapter 4, *Guardians of Virtue*, I continue my critical discourse analysis of the selected purity literature by unpacking how girls are further instructed to achieve “authentic purity” and “righteous femininity” by submitting to adult authority as a matter of universal and abstract principle. I explore how these texts instruct girls to esteem the father-daughter relationship within a Complementarian theological paradigm, and to regard their sexual and reproductive potentials as their father's property until they are “passed on” to become the property of their husbands. I then highlight how these texts remain silent on the mother-daughter relationship, and instead address readers as evangelicalism's “mothers of tomorrow” who must physically and pedagogically reproduce the next generation of “true believers” for their religious subculture. I accordingly argue that these texts perpetuate an evangelical maternal ethos wherein girls are valued solely as future wives and mothers who are responsible for physically and pedagogically reproducing the next generation of “true” Christians for their religious subculture. I conclude the chapter by considering how mothers and daughters both stand to benefit when

children are regarded as spiritual and sexual agents who actively contribute to processes of religious enculturation.

In the fifth and final chapter, *Renouncing Purity and Re-Claiming Righteous Femininity*, I problematize the evangelical purity dialectic within a feminist theological framework. I argue that purity discourses idolize patriarchal theological metaphors which deprive girls and women of their full humanity and alienate them from their Creator. While I contend that a feminist theological framework should renounce “purity” as the dominant mode for understanding and communicating about female sexuality, I do consider how discourses of “righteous femininity” can be re-claimed within a feminist theology of liberation. I then conclude by exploring how girls and women may find spiritual growth and empowerment in woman-centred and woman-defined visions of righteous femininity which acknowledge the “divine feminine” within themselves and celebrate authentic and life-affirming modes of sexual expression, as well as acknowledge girls and women as agents who have the capacity—and the responsibility—to continue Christ's restorative social justice work.

Chapter 2

Guiding the Girls: A Discursive History of Sexual Purity

“What did it feel like?”

Eric's²⁴ diminutive sixteen-year-old body is sprawled out over mine. I open my eyes and turn my head as I consider his question. I survey the fixtures of my basement bedroom—the blood-red carpet and faux-wood paneling that my parents never got around to replacing when they moved into the house. I suddenly realize I can hear the television program my father is watching in the adjacent room; however, I find it difficult to focus on anything beyond the pungent floral smell radiating from Eric's chin-length hair. I always speculated that he used his mother's hair mousse, and at times I wanted to tell him to consider switching brands since this particular product always left his hair full of flaky white dandruff. I then wonder if it is strange to be thinking about hair mousse after the life-altering albeit brief process of “losing” my virginity.

What did it feel like? I know what I expected to feel. Physically, I was always told that it would hurt, and that a “technical” virgin like myself would experience vaginal bleeding with the breaking of my hymen. Neither of these things happened, however, and for that I feel profound relief. On the other hand, I had also been told that I would experience unprecedented bodily pleasure and a tangible sense of bliss. This had been promised to me, after all—in movies, television shows, and magazine articles. Even Dannah Gresh repeatedly emphasized how sex was “out of this world” and therefore completely worth the wait. But this was not the case, either; while the experience had not exactly been unpleasant, it was also hardly earthshattering.

In terms of my emotional and spiritual well-being, I also expected to feel overwhelmed by

²⁴ Name has been changed to guarantee anonymity.

the knowledge that I had officially “given away” my purity at the age of sixteen to a boy whom I had been dating only for several months. I expected to feel profound, aching guilt, and a visceral realization that I was now fundamentally altered and eternally severed from God’s love (1 Corinthians 6: 18-19: Every sin that a person commits is outside the body; but the fornicator sins against the body itself. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit?²⁵). Furthermore, my mother had always warned me that when I had sex with a man, even just once, I would feel so physically and emotionally attached to him that I would never be able to leave him (1 Corinthians 6:16: For it is said, 'The two shall be one flesh'). I consider this notion as I turn back to Eric. While I like him fine enough, in this moment I do not feel any differently—not toward him, myself, or God.

Indeed, the only epiphany I can muster is the realization that I have been lied to—over and over again, by everyone. I consider all the books I’ve read and the sermons I’ve heard—all about this supposedly “life-changing” act that begins and ends in a matter of minutes. It also causes me to wonder what else Dannah Gresh, my pastors, and my Sunday School teachers—even my mother—have lied about. However, for now I need to answer Eric’s question. Perhaps a more knowledgeable and experienced version of me would have let him down gently by indicating that, while this initial experience was disappointing, it would likely improve with time and practice—and, indeed, this would prove to be the case. However, my sixteen-year-old self cannot predict this outcome, so instead I answer without pretence: “It didn't really feel like anything.”

This chapter begins unpacking the purity dialectic by contextualizing it within evangelical

²⁵ All Bible verses throughout this project are quoted from the New International Version translation.

Christianity's material and discursive legacies. In this respect, in order to understand how “purity” discourses shape contemporary North American perceptions of girlhood sexuality and female sexuality more generally, we must first consider how they have evolved within the historical narratives and socioeconomic systems that shape contemporary Western²⁶ systems of knowledge. This chapter accordingly explores how cultural understandings of female “purity” are fundamentally tied to patriarchal private property ownership as a socioeconomic system. While female “purity” in this context largely refers to “technical” physical virginity, such discourses further intersect with ideologies of “innocence” which presume that children—and particularly girls—should be completely ignorant of sexual knowledge and experience. These dual discourses of purity and innocence culminated during the Victorian period as the privatized, patriarchal, nuclear family structure gained socioeconomic prevalence among the white upper and middle classes, and female adolescence emerged as a discursive formation.

It is pertinent to note that this chapter does not seek to provide an exhaustive, linear, or “objective” history of the purity dialectic. Rather, it explores how the foundations of North America’s contemporary purity culture have been paved by varied historical narratives, socioeconomic systems, and discursive practices. To that end, in the tradition of Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* (1976), this chapter elucidates how girls and women have been regulated by “purity” discourses that are embedded in and sustained by intricate social institutions and relationships, just as it considers how such power relations are shaped by subjects’ abilities to negotiate and subvert dominant discourses (82-83).

²⁶ Throughout this project I use the term “Western” to refer to broad systems of thought and belief that surpass particular temporal and geographical locations due to European and North American imperial and colonial histories. In contrast, I use the term “minority world nations” to refer to economically privileged geographical locations in their contemporary contexts, which are frequently but not exclusively located in the global Northern and Western hemispheres (as opposed to less privileged “majority world nations” that are frequently but not exclusively located in global Southern and Eastern hemispheres).

This chapter thus begins by exploring the purity dialectic's material roots. It considers how the regulation of female sexuality was an essential function in maintaining ancient Hebrew patriarchal systems of private property ownership, as well as in establishing Judeo-Christian religious subcultural strength in resistance to matrilineal Goddess-worshipping nations. It then considers how discourses of girlhood "purity" and "innocence" that enjoy dominant status within contemporary Western systems of knowledge culminated during the Victorian period. In this capacity, evangelical discursive practices played a crucial role in constructing purity as a symbol of religious morality *and* white, middle-class respectability for the privatized, patriarchal family unit. The chapter then concludes by examining how these purity discourses are evident in a selection of guidance literature from the Victorian period. In doing so, it elucidates how contemporary North American evangelical purity literature serves as a continuation of this textual tradition, wherein girls' "purity" and "innocence" are achieved through intensive rituals of self-monitoring, self-governance, and self-improvement. To begin, however, I will explain why historical materialism is a useful facet of this project's methodological framework in exploring how patriarchal systems of private property ownership emerged in conjunction with the Judeo-Christian tradition, so that the two are still regarded as fundamentally interconnected.

(Feminist) Historical Materialism

Friedrich Engels argues in *Anti-Dühring* (1877) that the materialist concept of history begins with the assumption that cultural norms and societal shifts are necessitated and reproduced by systems of economic production and exchange (292). Along this trajectory, Nancy Hartsock contends that historical materialism has much utility for feminist researchers, since it addresses how the sexual division of labour shapes women's social experiences (216-218). Nancy Naples further argues that this methodology stems from the experiential knowledges of black, Chicana,

and third world feminists that are largely neglected by dominant discourses of class and gender-based oppression (27). In the context of this study, materialist feminism supports the larger theoretical goals of postmodern epistemology and critical discourse analysis, since it raises critical questions about knowledge and subjectivity with its position that different labouring classes have distinct ways of knowing and experiencing the world.

Materialist feminism thus provides a valuable theoretical tool for contextualizing the evangelical purity dialectic. While social subjects have the critical capacities to negotiate and resist dominant discourses such as those pertaining to “purity,” such capacities are invariably constrained by the tangible effects that dominant ideologies have in girls’ and women’s material and social lives. With this in mind, I now turn to Engels’ landmark text *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884) and Merlin Stone’s feminist treatise *When God Was a Woman* (1976) to illustrate how female “purity” has not only been necessitated by patriarchal systems of private property ownership, but has also functioned as an essential indicator of Judeo-Christian religious subcultural identity.

The Material Roots of Sexual Purity

Engels’ text has been particularly valuable to feminist researchers, as he argues that humanity’s evolution toward a “civilized”²⁷ society has been predicated on the institutionalization of female oppression in conjunction with economic systems of private property ownership (25). He further argues that, prior to the development of this “civilized” patriarchal society, “savagery” comprised the vast majority of human existence, during which time women acted as the social “mothers” of their communities, and family connections were traced through the mother-line (32). It is thereby

²⁷ Engels’ analysis is based on Lewis H. Morgan’s treatise *Ancient Society* (1877).

critical to note that this period of “matriarchy”²⁸ was not a brief lapse in what is commonly believed to be the “natural” and “universal” patriarchal order; rather, it approached its apex over the course of hundreds of thousands of years.

While it is difficult to pinpoint when exactly maternal broods and clans were dismantled and replaced with the patriarchal family structure, it likely occurred throughout the intermediary period of “barbarism,” in conjunction with the development of agriculture and the domestication of livestock (Engels 1884: 197; Reid 10-11). In this capacity, the patriarchal family’s prevalence as a social institution is intrinsically linked to economic systems of private property ownership (84-86). These two shifts necessitated one another, since “legitimate” father-to-son property transfer could only be guaranteed through regulating women’s sexual activities and the children they produced. As Engels famously contends, “[This] overthrow of mother right was the *world-historic defeat of the female sex*” ([original emphasis] 85).

This socioeconomic transformation wherein girls and women became commodities who could be owned, purchased, and sold effected profound ideological shifts in regard to female sexuality. Engels explains how the concept of “promiscuity” arose for the first time in the context of the patriarchal family structure (1884: 63). Notably, sexual monogamy was only demanded of girls and women, since men of means would regularly take multiple wives and “concubines” (98). In this sense, the material demands of private property ownership conflated women's *personal* value as human beings with their *economic* value, which was ultimately determined by

28 The existence of ancient “matriarchal” societies has been duly problematized by modern anthropologists and feminist scholars. Our dominant Western framework of patriarchal authority, in which “power” is automatically assumed to mean “power over” others, commonly leads to an understanding of “matriarchy” as a social structure predicated on female superiority and male subordination. However, these pre-patriarchal cultures can be more accurately conceptualized as “matrilineal” or “matrilocal,” wherein women were esteemed and granted relative autonomy, but not necessarily at the expense of men. For further reading see Gerda Lerner's *The Creation of Patriarchy* (1986).

their premarital virginity and bodily ability to produce “legitimate” male children. It is thereby pertinent to explore how these patriarchal material demands intersect with early Judeo-Christian ideologies of religious morality, so that the regulation of female sexuality would become a central and enduring indicator of Christian religious subcultural strength.

Prior to losing my own “technical” virginity, I had learned early on to categorize my fellow female adolescents in terms of a dichotomy—those who have had sex, and those who have not. I did not exactly believe that those who had crossed this enigmatic dividing line were somehow inferior or tainted—they were just different. They had engaged in a life-changing act that would forever alter their minds and bodies, and I regarded them with profound curiosity. At least this was the case for all “non-Christian” girls I encountered, since I had learned from my mother, my church leaders, and the plethora of sexual purity literature that I read throughout my adolescent years that all non-Christians have premarital sex, while “true” Christian girls do not (Matthew 7:16: Thus you will know them by their fruits). It was also expected that the larger “secular world” would pressure Christian girls to have sex in order to compromise their salvation, and that we would be ridiculed by non-Christians for “taking a stand” for Jesus and our virginity. By the age of fourteen I had accepted and internalized these “facts,” and so I was taken aback when I began to learn about the seemingly “true” Christian girls from my church who had allegedly crossed into the great beyond of sexual impurity.

Claire,²⁹ an acquaintance of my older sister, was one such girl. She was regarded as one of our church youth group's most beautiful members with her blonde hair, tanned skin, and slender physique. While I had never spoken to her personally, I certainly knew who she was, and

²⁹ Name has been changed to guarantee anonymity.

so I recognized her immediately as I strode through the main school corridor on my first day of ninth grade, at which point my sister leaned over to me and whispered: “She has sex.”

My reaction was immediate: “But she goes to our church. Isn't she a Christian?” Even before I finished articulating the question, my evangelical logic had confirmed the answer—while Claire might perpetuate a façade of righteousness in church each week, she obviously could not be a “true” Christian. This was the first of several discoveries I would make about the non-virgin girls who walked unassumingly among their Christian peers each Sunday. I would see them laughing with their friends in the church sanctuary and wonder if anyone else knew the truth that I had discovered: They were not virgins, and so they were not “true” Christians—the connection between the two was unarguably intrinsic.

Incidentally, and for reasons I do not know, Claire's family left our church before I would complete the ninth grade. My own church attendance would eventually take a backseat to the part-time job I began in tenth grade, but every now and then I would see Claire or one of the other “fallen” girls from my congregation at school or out at a local restaurant. As I now write this, I pause and consider if, like me, sixteen-year-old Claire ever recited tearful prayers in the middle of the night, trying to negotiate the status of her salvation with an evangelical God who could seemingly forgive all sins, save for a young woman's sexual transgressions. Or, perhaps she already knew then what would take me another decade to begin understanding and believing—that our sexual activities do not define our value as girls and women, least of all in the eyes of our benevolent Creator (Psalm 139:14: I am fearfully and wonderfully made).

Female “Purity” as Religious Subcultural Strength

In addition to being esteemed community members prior to the institutionalization of patriarchal

private property ownership, women also acted as spiritual leaders whose mystical reproductive abilities inspired their cultures' deities, such as the Earth Mother and the Goddess of Fertility (Reid 11, 21). Here Merlin Stone's landmark work *When God Was a Woman* proves most valuable. She traces the evolution of the minority patriarchal Judeo-Christian religious tradition, whose early tenets were predicated on the rejection and ultimate suppression of Goddess worship. In the tradition of feminist postmodern literature, Stone establishes that her text is not intended to serve as an archaeological or historical treatise. Rather, it is “an invitation to all women to join in the search to find out who we really are, by beginning to know our own past heritage as more than a broken and buried fragment of a male culture” (xxv). In this capacity, Stone recognizes that Judeo-Christian discursive practices remain a dominant force in shaping contemporary North American sex and gender norms, and she accordingly seeks to construct an alternative historical narrative wherein female oppression is not regarded as natural, eternal, or divine.

While subsequent feminist texts have examined the evolution of patriarchy and its suppression of ancient Goddess cultures within a broader historical and geographical scope,³⁰ I employ Stone's treatise in this project for several reasons. First, while her socio-historical generalizations regarding the nature and evolution of “matriarchy” have been duly problematized by more recent studies, her founding arguments for the existence of pre-patriarchal Goddess-worshipping nations and the esteemed position that women held therein have had significant influence on feminist religious thought, and their core sentiments continue to be supported by contemporary feminist scholarship. Second, Stone draws an astute connection between the

30 For further reading see Lerner's *The Creation of Patriarchy* and Riane Eisler's *The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future* (1987).

development of the patriarchal family structure and private property ownership as an economic system, thus establishing a feminist historical materialist framework for conceptualizing the social regulation of female sexuality. Third and finally, while the scope of Stone's analysis is largely limited to Judeo-Christian mythology—namely the Christian Bible—to contextualize her claims, the contemporary evangelical purity dialectic draws upon these same religious narratives—*whether or not they are historically “accurate”*—to justify its demands for female sexual “purity.” As such, while Stone's text is neither exhaustive nor factually absolute in its historical and anthropological scope, its contribution to feminist religious thought remains relevant, and its materialist lens is particularly suited to this project’s theoretical goals.

In conjunction with Engels' materialist approach to history, Stone contends that, prior to patriarchal “civilization” as we understand it, early societies were matrilineal in structure (10-12). To that end, there is substantial anthropological evidence which suggests that these ancient societies lacked a conscious understanding of the relationship between sexual intercourse and pregnancy, and thus of the male role in procreation.³¹ Women were thereby honoured as the givers of life in their communities, and their Goddess deities reflected this belief within a broader system of mother-kinship and ancestor worship (10-11, 32). It is also critical to note that a “fearless and natural emphasis on sexual life ran through all religious expression,” (48) and it was customary for women priestesses of the Goddess religion to live within their community's temples and engage in sexual acts with men from the community to honour the Goddess (153-154).

These ancient matrilineal societies stand in stark contrast to early Judeo-Christian

31 Similar to Engels’ arguments, Lerner suggests that the domestication of livestock played a crucial role in illuminating the male role in reproduction (149).

cultures. Stone contrasts Goddess-worshipping nations with the minority patriarchal Hebrew tribes of Judah and Israel who worshipped a sole male deity (54). Referencing Israelite laws from the time of Moses, she explains how the women in these tribes could be sold by their fathers; were not permitted to inherit property; were instructed to call their husbands “master”; and, importantly, were stoned or burned to death for engaging in extramarital sex (*Deuteronomy 22:21: So you shall purge the evil from Israel*) (55-56). In a similar vein, unmarried women who were raped would be legally bound to marry their rapist, and if they were already betrothed they would be stoned to death for having been raped; similar penalties also existed for marital infidelity and abortion (58-60). Stone astutely observes that these harsh laws ultimately denote *economic* concerns, and that the fatal consequences of such offences reflect the seriousness of violating men's private property rights.

Significantly, Stone takes her analysis one step further in arguing that these laws were established in active and specific opposition to the matrilineal customs of Goddess cultures (60). Here subcultural identity theory is pertinent to consider; as is the case with fundamentalist currents in Christianity and other world religions, religious traditions thrive when they provide clear beliefs and practices that strengthen group identity and distinguish a religious subculture from the alternatives (Smith 66). Furthermore, this process often involves establishing strict sex and gender norms (Gallagher 216). Along this trajectory, the Hebrew imperative to regulate female sexuality within a patriarchal system of private property ownership reflects the larger imperative to establish and maintain religious subcultural strength. As Stone contends, “The Hebrew prophets and priests, the Levites . . . insisted that all women must be publicly designated as the private property of some man, father or husband. Thus they developed and instituted the concept of sexual *morality*—for women” (181). She further explains how “[t]he use of female

sexual infidelity as the ultimate sin—so serious that it was regarded as analogous to the betrayal of Yahweh—affords us some insight into the Levite attitude toward the sexually autonomous woman” (183), and she highlights how these laws were fundamentally antithetical to the norms governing female sexuality in Goddess-worshipping nations (182).

In this capacity, the Judeo-Christian tradition’s ancient narratives portray the patriarchal Israelite tribes as a minority religious subculture among numerous matrilineal Goddess worshipping nations. As such, in the context of Christian canonical texts, the regulation of female sexuality was not only necessary to ensure patriarchal private property rights, but also to establish and maintain religious subcultural strength. However, the Hebrews did not only construct laws to distinguish themselves from the Goddess religion; rather, they also sought to actively *suppress* these matrilineal traditions. Stone discusses this imperative within the context of the Levite-led Hebrew invasion of Canaan, which is recorded in the Judeo-Christian scriptures as a commandment from God to seize the “promised land” and kill all the inhabitants who worship other gods (*Deuteronomy 20:17-18: You shall annihilate them—the Hittites and the Amorites, the Canaanites and the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites—just as the Lord your God has commanded, so that they may not teach you to do all the abhorrent things that they do for their gods*) (168, 180).

After the initial invasion of Canaan, the dual Hebrew imperatives to implement a patriarchal system of private property ownership and establish religious subcultural strength ultimately necessitated one another. They demanded premarital virginity and marital fidelity for all girls and women upon threat of death, just as they forbade men from participating in the religious sexual customs of the Goddess temples. In the latter case, the temple priestesses would not only have children of questionable paternity, but such children would likely perpetuate

matrilineal traditions, since female religious leaders owned property and engaged in public business activities. Stone thus argues that the imperative to ensure “legitimate” child paternity inspired the Hebrew laws which denounced Goddess sexual customs as wicked and depraved, just as it provoked the Levite priests to devise the concept of “sexual morality” for girls and women (168). In this respect, the patriarchal Hebrews sought to establish and maintain religious subcultural strength through suppressing the Goddess religion (*Deuteronomy 12:3: Break down their altars, smash their pillars, hew down their sacred poles, and burn their idols with fire*) and quashing the matrilineal customs that otherwise provided women with economic, bodily, and sexual autonomy.

These efforts ultimately culminated in the creation narratives as recorded in the Biblical book of Genesis. Stone argues that the infamous “serpent” who tempts Eve to sin in the myth of “the fall” was originally written to symbolize the Goddess, since snakes were revered as female and symbolic of wisdom and prophetic counsel in Near and Middle Eastern cultures (199).³² Furthermore, this symbol appears repeatedly in historical depictions of female deities, including artifacts portraying the Goddess and priestesses with snakes in their hands or coiled around their bodies (200). She also explains how the “tree of knowledge” from which Eve ate, thereby committing the first sin, is also linked to the Goddess religion, and specifically to the Goddess Hathor of Egypt. In this narrative a sacred tree is known as the Living Body of Hathor on Earth, and to eat of its fruit is to eat of the flesh and fluid of the Goddess (214-215).

On the whole, Stone effectively contextualizes the Genesis myths of creation and the fall within the Judeo-Christian imperative to legitimize patriarchy and condemn matrilineal Goddess

³² Eisler (86-89) and Lerner (196) both echo this conclusion in their analyses of the Genesis myths of creation and “the fall.”

cultures. However, as Jeffrey Weeks observes, “It is all too easy to assume that formal [sexual] regulation has an immediate unilinear impact, but in actuality the history of sexuality is as much a history of an avoidance of, or resistance to the moral code, as of a simple acceptance and internalization” ([original parentheses] 15). As such, Judeo-Christian attempts to quash matrilineal Goddess cultures and impose patriarchal standards of female purity were prolonged and contentious; as Eisler notes, Goddess traditions, and all of the agency and authority that they afforded to women, continued to endure for centuries (140-141).³³ This legacy of resistance ultimately attests to why Judeo-Christian efforts to implement and maintain patriarchy have not only been so extreme, but also why they have been constructed as absolutely fundamental to establishing and maintaining Christian religious subcultural strength.

I have always had a contentious relationship with the legacy of the Goddess. I had learned early on in my Bible readings that the ancient pagans worshipped “idols” made of clay and stone, as well as how angry God became when the Hebrews built a golden calf to worship after Moses led them out of slavery in Egypt. However, I did not know anything about the Goddess specifically—not of her prevalence in ancient cultures, and much less of ancient matrilineal cultures themselves. I suppose I was initially confronted with a glimpse of her legacy when I first heard the story of Lilith.

I remember the encounter well: I was sitting in my Grade Twelve creative writing class,

³³ In this regard, Stone links the medieval witch hunts of the Western world to the continued suppression of ancient Goddess religions (227). For a feminist perspective on the witch hunts and their connection to prolonged Christian efforts to abolish Goddess religion, see the documentary *The Burning Times* (1990: Dir. Donna Read, National Film Board of Canada). While contemporary research suggests that the number of women who were persecuted as witches has been exaggerated in texts like these, the cultural and religious narratives which inform Western beliefs about witches and Goddess religions more generally remain significant to feminist religious thought and folklore.

discussing the semester's final project with the students seated around me. I do not remember much about the story I wrote to satisfy this particular assignment; I only know that it would haunt me well into my undergraduate years when my well-meaning mother would regularly fetch it from my bedroom for visiting relatives to read. But I do remember Mark³⁴ telling me that he was going to write a story about Lilith. Although by this time I had seen more television commercials for Lilith Fair music festivals than I could count, I initially drew a blank.

"Who's Lilith?" I asked.

"You know," he continued, "Adam's first wife."

I recall the sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach when he said this. It happened every time I was confronted with information that contradicted the theology that had been so neatly constructed for me by pastors and teachers in my evangelical subculture. In this sense my seventeen-year-old self's worldview was rife with contradictions; while I had been engaging in premarital sex for over a year at this point, and while I did not feel the visceral separation from God that I had been warned about, I still believed that my sexual transgressions were somehow compromising my salvation, and in a strange way the certainty of this belief was comforting to me. This was likely because I had also quietly begun to distrust a number of the teachings that had always been touted as "truth" in my evangelical subculture. In particular, and much to my own uneasiness, I had begun to wonder about the Bible's inerrant status as a historical text. As such, I did not respond to Mark by insisting that he was wrong, and that the Bible says Eve was Adam's only wife. Instead I asked him to tell me all about Lilith.

That day I learned that Lilith became part of Jewish mythology to reconcile the two creation accounts in Genesis. In the first account, God created men and women together

³⁴ Name has been changed to guarantee anonymity.

(Genesis 1:27: in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them) *from the same dust of the earth, unlike the second creation account wherein Eve is created from Adam's rib* (Genesis 2:20: So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals. But for Adam no suitable helper was found). *And so Lilith had been conceived as the woman formed alongside Adam in the first creation account. However, because she was made from the same dirt as her husband, she rejected God's divine commandment for female subordination and male headship; instead she ran away from the Garden of Eden and refused to return. Popular mythology had henceforth constructed her as a "devil" who causes pregnant women to miscarry; she was also believed to steal men's "seed" to create demons and "illegitimate" children.*

Upon hearing this account, my initial instinct was to dismiss the mythology of Lilith as nothing more than fiction—it was a myth, after all—but whether or not there was any truth to this story did not seem to matter. Rather, the very fact that Lilith existed in mythical form was profoundly disturbing to me. I did not find her rebellion against patriarchal rule to be empowering; instead it made me wonder why so many Christians could dismiss her legacy as nothing more than myth, when her story did not seem any more fantastical than the one I had always believed about a talking serpent and an omnipotent God who created man—who, by definition, would have a penis and the ability to produce sperm—but then created woman as an afterthought. And so I locked Lilith away into the far corners of my mind, although she lingered there and continued to beckon me, much like the men she supposedly haunted during her demonic excavations in the dark of night.

My first encounter with the Goddess was similarly contentious, even though it occurred several years after I had proudly adopted the "feminist" label. It was the third year of my

undergraduate degree, and I was taking a course on women and religion as an elective credit. I vaguely remember reading about ancient societies in which people worshipped Goddess figures and revered women for their mystical reproductive abilities. Once again my initial instinct was to dismiss this information as mere fiction, although this did little to ease my anxiety. It did not matter if the Goddess was “true”; what mattered was that, at some point in history, many people believed her story—many more people and for a lot longer, it seemed, than those who believe in the Judeo-Christian male deity. What, after all, made my male God more believable or legitimate than the Goddess? And, perhaps more importantly, why was I so unsettled by the nondescript “still small voice” (1 Kings 19:12) in my mind, asking if the two could somehow be inextricably linked as both myth and truth?

As I now write this, I have a very different relationship to both of these narratives, and the potential for their coalescing in the mythical truth of the God/dess leaves me heartened and inspired. In fact, I frequently turn to John Collier's late nineteenth-century depiction of Lilith³⁵ and am drawn to the image of her soft, fleshy body entwined by the serpent—the Mesopotamian symbol of the Goddess. I imagine joining her, along with the other ancient women who refused to yield to a life of patriarchal subservience, and laughing together at the rumours of their demonic treachery, religious heresy, and witchcraft. I now see how my own fear of their legacies was based on such defamatory narratives, just as I have learned to embrace the enigmatic nature of the divine, particularly as it manifests in the flesh and fancy of the Goddess.

While this analysis has not provided an exhaustive or “objective” history of the purity dialectic’s material and ideological roots, these texts by Engels and Stone weave a compelling narrative

³⁵ This painting can be viewed on Wikipedia.

wherein Christianity's subcultural identity is predicated on the regulation of female sexuality in accordance with patriarchal systems of private property ownership. With these narratives in mind, I will now explore how material and ideological demands for female sexual purity culminated during the Victorian period in conjunction with the institutionalization of the privatized nuclear family, thus laying the foundation for the “problem” of girlhood sexuality that remains pervasive in contemporary Western systems of knowledge. I will also elucidate how evangelicalism played a critical role in legitimizing and reproducing these material and ideological conditions, and thus establish why the purity dialectic should be contextualized as a construct specific to evangelical theology.

The Victorian Family and the Cult of True Womanhood

It is first pertinent to qualify what I mean by the term “Victorian period.” While British monarch Queen Victoria reigned between 1837-1901, the ideological influences of Victorianism can be traced from the end of the Napoleonic Wars to the start of World War I across Britain and North America (Frost 1), and the material, political, and social transformations which culminated throughout this period had been developing for many years. For instance, the growth of industrial capitalism and urbanization began in the eighteenth century and stretched into the twentieth, thus resulting in many significant socioeconomic transformations. Moreover, the systems of knowledge that dominated this period cannot be strictly relegated to the nationalist boundaries of Britain since British colonialism in North America and elsewhere propelled the geographical spread of “Victorian” values. The material and ideological legacy of the Victorian period thereby transcends the temporal bounds of the nineteenth century, as well as the nationalist boundaries of Britain, and I accordingly address Victorian discourses of “innocence” and “purity” as part of a complex dialectic. It is also worth emphasizing that this analysis focuses on the discursive *ideals*

that enjoyed dominant status within Victorian systems of knowledge, which were often inaccessible to poor, working-class, racialized, colonized, and immigrant populations.

In this regard, the privatized “Victorian family” functioned as a prescriptive and exclusionary discourse demarcating the ideal family form. However, as is the case in contemporary North American society, this discursive ideal was not universally practised. As Ginger Frost contends:

Myths about the Victorian family are almost as numerous as those about the American West. Many regard the institution as a model for modern life, full of dutiful children and loving parents. Others see it as an example to avoid—rigidly patriarchal, unloving, and riddled with class and gender distinctions. Both views, though too generalized, contain some truth, partly because of the tremendous variety of family lives during Queen Victoria's reign. (11)

Just like historical metanarratives of the “Victorian family,” those of “Victorian sexuality” should also be regarded with a critical eye. As Weeks argues, while the Victorian period is marked in Western culture's collective memory as an era of rigid sexual repression, it is also a time when sexuality pervaded social consciousness (19). He further argues that the changing symbolic role of sexuality during this time was the result of prolonged and complex socio-historical shifts that had varying impacts on diverse populations (21). To that end, while the ideal patriarchal family structure was not always practised in lived experience, its pervasiveness as ideology provided a central tenet of Victorian life, and its legacy remains prevalent in contemporary Western systems of knowledge.

Furthermore, there are strong elements of discursive continuity throughout the Victorian period that should not be overlooked, especially in regard to the prevalence of Christianity (Weeks 21-22). It is thereby critical to consider how the institutionalization of the privatized nuclear family and the female sexual regulation that it necessitated was legitimized and reproduced by evangelical ideologies that constructed the white, middle-class, privatized

patriarchal family as a haven of morality and stability in a society that was rife with social, economic, and technological changes. In this sense, evangelical and middle-class discourses which delineated the “moral” and “respectable” family form were contingent upon newly separate masculine and feminine “spheres.” Nancy Hardesty argues that, prior to about 1825, “the family” was a multi-generational structure wherein adults and children worked together to sustain family farms and business (37). This familial structure was compromised by the rapid expansion of industrial capitalism and urbanization, as “home” and “work” were transformed into separate enterprises and wage labour became the norm. This privatized nuclear family accordingly emerged as an exclusionary discursive ideal since middle-class “respectability” came to rely on men's abilities to function as sole male breadwinners, which included employing domestic workers to perform the labour traditionally done by girls and women (Burstyn 18). In this respect, while men performed work in the public spheres of business and politics wherein the values of ambition, competition, and self-interest were dominant (Hardesty 38), the harsh realities of this “outside world” required “the home” to function as an isolated moral haven (Weeks 68).

“Home” thereby became a discursive construct connoting a peaceful retreat from the industrial world of work, and girls and women were conceptualized as “angels in the house” who were innately “pure” since they did not have to face the harsh realities of the public sphere (Frost 3; Satter 30). This sentiment is encapsulated by what Barbara Welter calls the “cult of true womanhood,” wherein altruism, self-sacrifice, submissiveness, domesticity, and humility were deemed to be innate female virtues (48). Furthermore, women were regarded as “naturally” religious (Hardesty 38), and Christian piety was believed to be biologically innate to girls and women to the degree that those who seemingly lacked this virtue were considered to be “fallen

angels” or “no woman at all” (Welter 49).

Along this trajectory, ideologies of female “purity” necessitated girls’ and women’s isolation in the domestic sphere, since their exposure to the harsh realities of public life would ultimately deprive them of the virtues that rendered them at once feminine, respectable, and moral. For this reason it was deemed the responsibility of wives and mothers to maintain the home as a haven of morality, peace, and cheer so that men—whether they be husbands, fathers, brothers, or sons—who were obligated to go into “the world” each day would wish to return to the women in their lives and be inspired by their piety (Welter 51, 56). This was also necessary to ensure the healthy progress of civilization, since Victorian anthropologists believed that such a domestic existence was required to tame the aggression and depravity that was inherent to men's biological natures (Satter 35). This sexual division was ultimately used to justify women's exclusion from participation in public and political life (Billington 666), and these discourses concerning male and female “natures” reached a critical juncture when they were appropriated by evangelical social purity reformers.

Evangelicalism and Social Purity

Until the twentieth century, evangelical Protestantism enjoyed relative religious and cultural hegemony in the United States, and it was also highly influential in Britain (Gallagher 37). Broadly speaking, evangelicalism began as a populist, anti-authoritarian faith. While large segments of the population were nominally Christian and some degree of religious pluralism existed, it can be argued that the cultural vocabulary of the Victorian period was largely influenced by evangelical values of individual salvation, self-improvement, and social reform—values that were also intrinsically shaped by middle-class tenets of “respectability.” A nuanced discussion of several interrelated historical narratives is thereby required to contextualize the

many-varied ways that evangelical discourses shaped Victorian social purity reforms.

While the Victorian ideal of “true womanhood” necessitated “respectable” women's isolation in the domestic sphere to preserve their innate purity and piety, working-class women and girls were immersed in the capitalist industrial landscape as they worked for wages (Cott 6-7; Weeks 57-58). The material conditions of working-class life frequently encouraged women's participation in “improper” sexual, courtship, and marriage rituals, such as common law partnerships which produced “illegitimate children,” as well as “prostitution” when other work was scarce (Weeks 60-61). These patterns of working-class life remained remarkably resilient throughout the Victorian period (76); nevertheless, middle-class ideologies of female purity functioned as definitive markers of class respectability and religious morality, and these precepts would ultimately inspire and legitimize popular evangelical social purity reforms.

Evangelical ideologies were particularly influential in shaping discourses of “femininity” and “purity”—both of which simultaneously constrained and expanded the appropriate boundaries of “woman's sphere” throughout the period. In this capacity, working-class women performed domestic labour for middle-class families across Britain and North America, and factories began producing necessities such as bread, clothing, soap, and candles—all rendering “respectable” women's labour to be largely superfluous (Gallagher 39). At the same time, evangelical revivalism extended its “calls” for individual salvation and social reform to middle-class women who were otherwise restricted to the domestic sphere (Burstyn 135-136). To that end, Hardesty explains how many women's rights leaders from church, education, and reform organizations throughout the nineteenth century came from evangelical backgrounds, or were at least deeply influenced by evangelical revivalism (9). Many such women believed that God had called them to a “useful” purpose in the world, which led them to engage in evangelical reforms,

missions, and social work (Gallagher 32). This “Benevolence Empire” provided middle-class women with an outlet to be productive through volunteer work in the public sphere, while simultaneously affirming exclusionary precepts of “true womanhood” which rendered women to be “naturally” pious, pure, and selfless (Hardesty 109; Welter 49).

Importantly, these benevolence organizations also worked to police poor and working-class girls and women whose material lives did not grant access to middle-class ideals of femininity, respectability, and morality. Urbanization posed a particular challenge to these ideals as poor populations surged within cities and brought different patterns of work, leisure, and sexuality with them (Satter 33). In this sense, while evangelical social purity reformers were motivated by genuine religious beliefs and a desire to improve society, their ultimate goal was to teach the poor their “proper place” and train them in the virtues of domesticity and religion, rather than strive to eliminate social inequality (Hardesty 110).

Still, the discursive complexities at the root of evangelical social purity reforms cannot be reduced to this singular narrative. In addition to reinforcing racist and classist ideologies of moral and respectable femininity, nineteenth-century reformers appropriated evangelical purity precepts to advocate for women's bodily and reproductive autonomy. In combating issues such as male alcohol addiction and solicitation of “prostitutes,” these reformers aimed to transform male sexual norms in an effort to protect women from the very real threats of poverty, domestic abuse, and venereal disease (Jeffreys 629). As such, these reformers cannot be singularly viewed as perpetrators of a reactionary ideology or moral panic; rather, they shared a common experience in relation to the patriarchal sexual double standard, and argued in turn that men should uphold the same standards of “purity” as women (Jeffreys 631-632; Satter 11).

It is also pertinent to note that many women who were initially active in social purity

movements, therein gaining organizational and leadership experience, went on to participate in suffrage movements. Frances Willard is one such woman, who transformed the Women's Christian Temperance Union into a suffrage organization when she obtained leadership in 1879 (Hardesty 148). Like many suffragettes, she employed Biblical scriptures to demand sexual reform, thereby stating in the Temperance Declaration of Principles that “God created both man and woman in His own image, and therefore we believe in one standard of purity for both men and women, and in the equal right of all to hold opinions, and to express the same with equal freedom” (154). Furthermore, these reformers appropriated “purity” discourses to argue that women's superior morality qualified them to be social leaders whom men should aspire to imitate (Satter 21).

Of course, while such evidence of women's agency should be acknowledged and explored, it is critical to emphasize the racism that informed these ideologies. The oppressions that black women experienced during—and after—periods of slavery in Britain and North America were *very* different than those which white women of all social classes experienced. While dominant middle-class discourses demarcated white women to be sexually and spiritually pure “angels in the house” in accordance with the cult of true womanhood, enslaved black women were excluded from these ideals and were consequently conceptualized as biologically and morally “inferior.” Furthermore, slavery as an economic system has been legitimized and reproduced by ideologies of slaveholder superiority, and the white Christian families who kept slaves appropriated Biblical texts to affirm ideologies of white superiority and black racial inferiority (Thistlethwaite 29, 36). In this regard, rather than reduce slavery to a gendered narrative of white men controlling, violating, and brutalizing black women—although this is a tremendously significant chapter of this history—it is also critical to acknowledge the role that

white women played in oppressing black women, as well as the ways in which white women and girls benefited from exclusionary “purity” discourses that stigmatized all women who were racially “Othered.”

Indeed, reformers such as Willard and Stanton postulated that *white* middle-class women were innately pure and morally superior, and their advocacy was rooted in the imperative to preserve and expand the Anglo-Saxon “race” (Satter 10, 25). Furthermore, the presumed superiority of white middle-class women also marginalized poor and working-class white women, whose poverty was presumed to be the result of their moral inferiority (22). To that end, the exclusionary racist and classist nature of nineteenth-century evangelical purity discourses—and their evident legacy in contemporary evangelical purity discourses—should not be overlooked, regardless of the benefits they offered middle- and upper-class white women who personified evangelical tenets of respectability, femininity, and morality.

On the whole, nineteenth-century evangelical social purity reforms are effectively contextualized within a dialectic of fluid and contentious discourses. Victorian-era evangelicalism imparted a twofold message to girls and women: they were demarcated as pure and moral beings, yet this seemingly innate purity could also be easily compromised, thus justifying their exclusion from public and political life. At the same time, the evangelical call for social reform and religious revival provided “respectable” women with opportunities to engage in unpaid work outside the home—as long as these activities reflected the tenets of “true womanhood.” Indeed, when social purity advocates eventually appropriated evangelical purity discourses to justify their formation of women's suffrage movements, they were met with fierce resistance from religious leaders (Birney 182; Jeffreys 666-667).

It is thereby unsurprising that the evangelical imperative to foster “traditional” feminine

virtues of purity and piety throughout the Victorian period was particularly exacerbated in the case of girls. As Gallagher contends, the evangelical fundamentalist split which culminated at the turn of the nineteenth century left theologically conservative Protestants not only suspicious of women's leadership in social reform movements, but also of any other behaviour that might defy “traditional” and hence “moral” femininity (37). This paradigmatic shift saw evangelicalism become less concerned with issues of social justice or social transformation, and more concerned with preserving historical traditions in the interest of maintaining religious subcultural strength. This endeavour seemingly came to rest upon the shoulders of Victorian girls since they would eventually grow into women who could either uphold traditional moral beliefs in accordance the cult of true womanhood, or perpetuate the unsettling cultural shifts embodied by the new “girl of the period.” It is therefore critical to investigate how evangelical purity discourses were propagated to working- and middle-class adolescent girls, and this endeavour ultimately begins with Victorian notions of “the child,” wherein ideologies of female “purity” intersect with those of childhood “innocence.”

The Victorian Child

Discourses which frame cultural understandings of childhood have invariably manifested and shifted alongside those of “the family” (Ariès 365), and both of these are necessitated and reproduced by particular socioeconomic systems. “Childhood” should accordingly be understood as a set of fluid and contradictory discourses, particularly since cultural conceptions of childhood have been largely generated by adult beliefs about who children are and how they should be (Renold 18). In this regard, while anyone under the age of 21 was legally designated as a child in Britain throughout the Victorian period (Frost 4), understandings of childhood were perpetually re-constructed and contested in social, medical, educational, and political discourses (Hendrick

35). Similarly, Victorian discourses of “the child” are not solely a product of this period's material and ideological conditions; rather than discover or invent entirely new ideologies of childhood, Victorians appropriated, expanded, and transformed schools of thought from earlier periods (Frost 3).

Victorian understandings of childhood were thus largely shaped by a dialectical tension between the discursive legacies of “the evangelical child” and “the Romantic child.” In regard to the latter paradigm, Enlightenment philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau made critical contributions to modern notions of childhood in arguing that children have a special nature that should be protected and fostered by adults (Hendrick 37). His ideas would be taken up by Romantic poets such as William Blake, who similarly argued that childhood is steeped in “original innocence” that should be preserved for as long as possible. These discourses of childhood “innocence” stood in stark contrast to early nineteenth-century evangelical ideologies which constructed children as innately sinful creatures who require strict education and discipline. From a materialist standpoint it is significant to note how these evangelical ideologies of childhood depravity coincided with the expansion of industrial capitalism. Indeed, without an innate “innocence” in need of protection, the prevalence of cheap child labour was justified by evangelical discourses which contended that hard work allowed children to develop a sense of morality and personal responsibility (Hendrick 39).

In this sense, evangelical discourses were particularly influential in shaping early nineteenth-century discussions and reforms. However, these religious ideologies were largely transformed throughout the latter half of the century as they merged with Romantic discourses to produce a Victorian dialectic of the “innocent child.” Rather than view children as innately depraved, this paradigm contended that religious guidance and discipline were required to

preserve children's original innocence, and the privatized nuclear family structure was the ideal vehicle for administering these teachings (Hendrick 44). This ideological shift was at least partially influenced by middle-class fears that patriarchal authority within the home would be inverted by the family's reliance on children's income (41). In this respect, discourses of childhood innocence naturalized children's status as economic and socially dependent beings, just as they necessitated children's unconditional submission to adult authority.

The implementation of mandatory formal schooling is significant in this regard, as it was deeply rooted in middle-class anxieties about working-class life. State-mandated education was viewed as the only way to ensure that poor and working-class children remained economically and socially dependent upon parents in accordance with the privatized, middle-class family ideal (Hendrick 42-45). Such reforms also demonstrate the tensions between dominant Romantic and evangelical conceptions of childhood; while children were perceived as innocent and vulnerable, they ultimately required adult protection to ensure that they would grow into moral and responsible future citizens. Moreover, the imperative to isolate children in the domestic sphere and keep them subservient to adult authority reveals the embedded evangelical belief that children are inherently prone to sin and rebellion if they are not properly disciplined and shielded from immoral influences.

In this sense, it is pertinent to consider how discourses of childhood “innocence” intersect with and reproduce discourses of female “purity”; both necessitated women’s and children’s exclusion from the public sphere, as well as their dependence on and deference to adult men. Furthermore, childhood innocence functioned as an exclusionary discourse since those children who could not access an isolated and economically dependent domestic existence were deemed to be less child-like, and thereby less worthy of adult protection, just as those women who could

not access this middle-class lifestyle were deemed less feminine and respectable. In a similar vein, Victorian precepts of the “innocent child” conceptualized children as asexual, and it was believed that sexual knowledge would deprive children of “authentic childhood” (Piper 27). As such, just as “purity” was regarded as fundamental to girls’ and women's femininity and overall social value, so too was sexual “innocence” deemed to be a defining virtue of childhood.

To that end, Hendrick observes how Victorian ideals of “the child” were constructed in conjunction with the ideal wife and mother performing the role of angel in the house: both of them were to be loved, pampered, and supported by men, all while accepting their subservient role in the patriarchal family hierarchy (58-59). Furthermore, the ideal Victorian child was simultaneously sexually androgynous and culturally “feminine,” since it was believed that God's divinely ordained female and male “natures” would gradually manifest as children grew into adults (DeLuzio 43). Diana Gittins takes this connection between childhood “innocence” and feminine “purity” further by contextualizing children as the private property of their fathers, just as women were regarded as the property of their husbands (46). She explains how issues of inheritance frequently shaped legislation affecting children throughout this period, and children's value was established in relation to property ownership and discourses of familial “legitimacy.” Such concerns cannot be bifurcated from the regulation of female sexuality, which ensured the production of “legitimate” children within an economic system of patriarchal private property ownership.

The locus of concern over illegitimate children was thereby driven by ideological and material goals. The uncertain paternity of children posed a threat to the legitimacy of familial private property ownership in the same way that parentless and economically dependent children threatened the patriarchal family, whose very foundation was based on women and children

existing as the “natural” dependents of men (Gittins 62). Moreover, the construction of the privatized nuclear family as natural and good was so inexorably bound to discourses of evangelical morality that any social practice which defied this family structure was ultimately seen as a threat to the foundations of Christendom (193). In this sense, the status of “illegitimacy” stigmatized children as the embodiment of sin in accordance with evangelical discursive practices, just as women who engaged in extramarital sex were stigmatized as “impure.”

Furthermore, since the economic and personal “worth” of women and children has been historically predicated on their lack of sexual knowledge and experience, it is critical to consider how these discourses of “purity” and “innocence” are particularly exacerbated in the context of female adolescence—an overtly contentious and sexualized period of “becoming” wherein girls straddle the socially sanctioned norms of childhood and womanhood. These discursive intersections initially constructed female adolescence as a societal “problem” that required management and regulation, and this imperative is evident in a selection of girls' guidance literature from the Victorian period.

The “Problem” of Female Adolescence

While adolescence did not first emerge as a cultural category during the Victorian period, an awareness of an intermediary period between childhood and adulthood developed throughout this era and culminated into a discursive formation that is recognizable in contemporary Western systems of knowledge. Catherine Driscoll thereby contends that female adolescence is a construct specific to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and girlhood functions as a culturally specific social category that is shaped by intersections of race, economic class, as well as historic and geographic location, among others (15, 35). Importantly, however, adolescent girls are not

yet “fully female” in the biological sense, nor are they completely gendered in terms of performing the ideals of womanhood (87). Female adolescence is thus largely conceptualized as a time of “becoming” wherein girls are regarded as adult women-in-the-making, rather than as subjects in their own right, and this transitional period is regarded as a contentious time rife with change and conflict.

In this regard, the “problem” posed by female adolescence is rooted in a number of intersecting and contradictory discourses. To begin, adolescence was originally conceptualized as a masculine social category, wherein young men would achieve maturity, subjectivity, and independence in preparation for adulthood (Driscoll 57) in accordance with Rousseau's treatise *Emile* (1762). However, these masculine virtues contradicted middle-class ideals of true womanhood, which demanded “traditional” feminine virtues of dependence, servitude, and selflessness—essentially preparing girls to live their lives “for others” rather than achieve an individuated sense of self. In this sense, while adolescent boys were expected to outgrow their childhood “innocence” and embody middle-class masculinity by gaining knowledge of the “real” world outside the domestic sphere, girls and women were never to lose this “innocence.” Rather, their “purity”—the very essence of their femininity—depended on their continued ignorance of all things associated with the masculine public realm, including sexual knowledge and desire.

Furthermore, since female adolescence was not defined by the attainment of independence and worldly knowledge, this cultural category was conceptualized as an explicitly sexualized mode of development wherein girls' bodies became visibly marked for reproductive readiness—the only tangible indicators of “maturity” for “proper” women, since they signified their physical capacities to perform the roles of wife and mother. However, because she had not yet reached the socially sanctioned marrying age, these sexual and reproductive potentials could

be neither utilized nor acknowledged by the innocent and pure adolescent girl. In this capacity, since their sexual and reproductive potentials could not yet be channelled into legitimate reproduction, special provisions were required to ensure that girls' bodies and psyches were properly managed throughout adolescence (Dyhouse 132).

Indeed, changes to compulsory education and other legislation governing their development demonstrates just how central “the girl” was to nineteenth-century popular discourse (Driscoll 38). Female adolescence thus emerged as a way of understanding and communicating about girls who were not only developing sexually, but also facing new obligations and freedoms (56). Structural and material transformations were rampant in Victorian society as schools for girls and women emerged, and increasing numbers of middle-class women began to pursue careers as teachers and nurses; some even became suffragists and labour leaders (Frost 32). This all culminated into female adolescence being marked as a site of cultural anxiety and regulation; it seemed that adolescent girls could either “blossom” into pure, moral, and respectable women in accordance with the cult of true womanhood, or emulate the much-maligned “girl of the period.” Unsurprisingly, an array of nationalist and religious imperatives emerged to help girls from all social classes complete this transition successfully.

Regulating Victorian Girlhood

Time was when the phrase, “a fair young English girl,” meant the ideal of womanhood; to us, at least, of home birth and breeding. It meant a creature generous, capable, modest; something franker than a Frenchwoman, more to be trusted than an Italian, as brave as an American but more refined, as domestic as a German and more graceful. It meant a girl who could be trusted alone if need be, because of the innate purity and dignity of her nature, but who was neither bold in bearing nor masculine in mind. ... This was in the old time, and when English girls were content to be what God and nature had made them. (Linton 9-10)

The above passage from Eliza Lynn Linton's 1868 article “The Girl of the Period”

encapsulates the cultural anxiety surrounding the shifting landscapes of girlhood throughout the nineteenth century. Here the author notoriously laments that girls no longer embody the feminine ideals of virtue and modesty (12); that they have dispensed with “old morals” (11); and that they seek to only please themselves rather than men (15-16). As Driscoll contends, Linton's article reflects the English preoccupation with adolescent girls, whose regulation was equated with a nationalist struggle for self-definition (36). In this sense, the “girl of the period” occupied a central role in national press discussions about femininity, particularly in the latter half of the century (Moruzi 56). This discourse equated the changing nature of girlhood with broader evidence of moral decline in Victorian society as a whole. In this sense, the new girl of the period was contrasted with the innately “pure” and “virtuous” girls of the past, thus perpetuating a universal model of “traditional” girlhood that never actually existed.

Ultimately, cultural anxieties concerning the state of Victorian girlhood were rooted in concerns about the wives and mothers these girls would eventually become. Once again, here evangelical discursive practices play a vital role. The Victorian middle classes considered religious training to be a crucial aspect of children's development (Frost 98-100). For these families, religious instruction commonly began as soon as a child could talk; Victorian children's storybooks were often based on Biblical narratives, and children would participate in habitual family prayers and Bible readings (Gorham 19). Mothers were ascribed a central role in this religious training, and those with strong faiths had much anxiety about their children's spiritual lives (Frost 24). Furthermore, this religious enculturation was intrinsically gendered: masculine and feminine “virtues” were cultivated in different ways, and mothers were lauded as the primary model of feminine influence in their daughters' lives (Dyhouse 3). While family resources were invested in education for boys who would eventually become family breadwinners, mothers

taught their daughters to be self-sacrificing, submissive, and “pure” (Dyhouse 2; Frost 29). The socialization of girls was thereby predicated on the assumption that “traditional” female virtues would be modelled by current generations of women and instilled in the next, and mothers were held accountable for the character and conduct of their daughters (Cayton 74; Ladd-Taylor and Umansky 6). Even after the institutionalization of formal schooling, most girls continued to receive the bulk of their religious and social education at home (Dyhouse 3), thereby rendering “the family” to be a critical agent of religious enculturation.

In this sense, religious enculturation and gender socialization were inextricably linked throughout the Victorian period, at least among the elite classes, and these practices coincided with changing material conditions that transpired with industrial capitalism. Since female labour had become superfluous among “respectable” families, upper and middle-class girls and women were confronted with unprecedented leisure time (Dyhouse 32). In addition, the male breadwinner standard of class respectability resulted in delayed marriages among the middle- and upper-classes, since men often did not achieve the economic means required for such a feat until their early thirties (Gorham 15). Consequently, English middle-class women often did not marry until their late twenties, and many did not marry at all, as their potential suitors left in growing numbers to join the army or settle in the colonies (Burstyn 34-35, 119-120; Gorham 15, 27).

To that end, as Carol Dyhouse observes, female adolescence was first “discovered” in the nineteenth century, as the transition from childhood to adulthood became more drawn out and complex. The proliferation of writings about “youth” throughout this period testifies to the increasingly common assumption that adolescence was an inherently contentious time for children and parents (115). Managing how girls utilized this unprecedented time of

adolescence—both in terms of how they filled their leisure hours each day, as well as how they conducted themselves during this extended period of waiting for marriage and motherhood—thus became a crucial cultural imperative. Along this trajectory, it is pertinent to consider how central ideologies of “sexual purity” were to Victorian definitions of girlhood. As Anthony Fletcher contends, “The fundamental principle of patriarchal society was that a girl should prize and preserve her virginity until her father handed her over to her husband. Her chastity then symbolized her loyalty to him. This was the crux of living under obedience” (25-26). Victorian ideals of girlhood therefore cannot be bifurcated from broader discourses of female “purity” or childhood “innocence,” nor from the material conditions that enabled middle-class “true womanhood.” Rather, the very essence of girls' femininity, morality, and respectability hinged upon these ideologies, and it was essential that girls appear “innocent, virginal, and unsullied in every way” (Dyhouse 23). Since this purity imperative was ultimately rooted in middle-class ideals of “true womanhood,” it materialized in one respect as the surveillance and regulation of “morally inferior” working-class girls.

Throughout my childhood and adolescent years I did not have the language to articulate the class hierarchy which structured my hometown's Pentecostal church, nor to express the status symbol that “good” girls signified therein. However I did understand early on that certain families in the church were simply “better” than mine. As I now write this, I thoroughly believe that my mother understood this unspoken institutional arrangement as well, and this is why she always impressed upon her daughters the importance of emulating the church's pristine families—particularly the Walkers.³⁶ They were the ultimate model of white, middle-class,

³⁶ Name has been changed to guarantee anonymity.

evangelical respectability: Mr. Walker was a successful businessman who wore a suit to church every Sunday and served as an usher during the services. His wife, a soft-spoken woman with blonde hair, taught one of several Sunday School classes each week. Each Sunday morning they sat near the front of the congregation among the other church-renowned families, his arm draped around her shoulders. And then there were the two Walker daughters, whom everyone at the church seemingly knew by name. By the time I was six I knew their names as well, since my mother always pointed them out to my sisters and me.

“Look at how the Walker girls sit so nice and quiet during the service,” my mother would whisper to her own unruly daughters, as we chatted and chuckled during the “grown up” service after Sunday School had ended. Or, “See how the Walker girls always have their Bibles with them and read along with the sermon,” while my eight-year-old self scribbled incoherent doodles in the pages of the new “Precious Moments” Bible I had received for Christmas. The nature of these observations gradually evolved as I reached my teenaged years, at which point the Walker girls both began dating within the prestigious and exclusive pool of pastors' sons; the eldest daughter ended up marrying one of these boys, and legend has it that they shared their first kiss after they were pronounced husband and wife on their wedding day. Like their parents, the Walker girls would also sit near the front of the congregation each Sunday morning with their boyfriends' arms draped around their shoulders—the state of their purity never a matter of public speculation.

Of course my mother thought this was all wonderful, and I can now understand why she would beam and gleefully declare that her adolescent daughters were being “checked out” when any boy from the congregation paid us a passing glance. I can now also imagine how her hopes for her own daughters to achieve similar status within the church were gradually dashed as, one

by one, we began dating non-Christian boys whose “immoral influences” would seemingly effect the epic confrontations she had with each of us upon discovering the incriminating evidence of our premarital sexual activity: lacy thongs stuffed in the back of a sock drawer; a package of birth control pills strategically hidden in a desk cabinet; a condom wrapper carelessly discarded on a bedroom floor.

I can now understand how such events could potentially impact my mother’s reputation in the church community. For instance, she has recently shared with me how my father’s absence from church each week always made her feel insecure. Given the evangelical emphasis on “Godly” gender roles and “traditional” family structures, it is quite possible that his constant absence would arouse speculation among church members—whether it be about unwed motherhood, divorce, or the simple truth that she was married to a “non-Christian” man. My mother has also shared how the pristine church families like the Walkers never associated much with her, and how she often sat alone at weekly Bible studies and other church events, just as our family always sat near the back of the sanctuary during weekly services. I confess that such comments make me wish I would have been more perceptive to my mother's hopes and insecurities during my childhood and adolescent years. Had I been aware of the stakes and how much it would have meant to her, perhaps my six-year-old self could have managed to sit still in the pew with my hands folded in my lap each Sunday morning. Perhaps my sixteen-year-old self would have also asked Eric to come to church with me, and maybe even convince him to cut his hair for the occasion. While I know it was not my role or responsibility as a child and adolescent to appease the larger church community in this way, it still seems like the very least I could have done for my mother.

Purifying Working-Class Girls

As a feature of Victorian middle-class ideology, the idea of femininity had a life of its own, independent of the individual experience of particular women. As an idea, it reinforced the Victorian conception of masculinity, and helped to maintain the system of dividing the moral, intellectual and emotional universe into separate spheres, a system that was peculiarly well suited to the needs of an emerging industrial capitalist society. As an abstract idea, the image of feminine girlhood found expression in symbols and images that pervaded Victorian literature, art and social commentary. As an abstract idea, it shaped the beliefs of men and women alike. (Gorham 111)

As the above passage by Deborah Gorham expresses, the dominant Victorian ideology of “traditional” femininity provided a definitive standard that working- and middle-class girls alike were measured against, even though the material means that enabled this lifestyle were accessible only to the elite classes. As such, while “respectable” middle-class girls were isolated and protected in the domestic sphere, working-class girls as young as twelve were expected to work for wages (Dyhouse 9). Middle-class anxieties concerning the maintenance of traditional morality, as well as advancing the Anglo-Saxon “race,” ultimately targeted these girls since their visibility in the public sphere rendered them ripe for corruption (105). Interestingly, this imperative coincided with the evangelical movement's call to middle-class women to dedicate their leisure time to helping the needy and improving society (28). Reform initiatives were accordingly implemented by middle-class girls and women to teach working-class girls the precepts of domesticity and morality, such as thrifty budgeting and methods of “proper” infant care, even though many working-class girls already had experience caring for younger siblings at home (Frost 81, 99).

The evangelical Sunday School movement, first established in the eighteenth century, was also relevant in this regard. Classes were offered on the only day that working-class children had off each week, and they aimed to teach the Biblical morals that these children were unlikely

to learn at home (Frost 104). Moreover, Sunday Schools were immensely popular; in 1833 more than 1.5 million British children attended on any given Sunday, growing to 2.4 million in 1851, and 6 million in 1906. In accordance with broader Victorian values that necessitated separate male and female “spheres,” the religious teachings promulgated herein were also intrinsically gendered; they inspired the organization of boys’ and girls’ clubs, the latter of which aimed to fill working-class girls’ leisure time with “improving” activities such as cooking, needlework, and laundry, as well as teach them about the dangers of sexual immorality and “vice” (112-116). Accordingly, these classes were taught by middle-class girls and women of “virtuous character,” and chastity was required of working-class members and upper-class instructors (112-113).

Collectively, the middle classes sought to instill standards of respectability and morality in the working-class “mothers of tomorrow” with the goal of “purifying” the working classes as a whole (Dyhouse 106-109). To that end, it was central to eradicate “precocious self-dependence,” since the material foundations of the privatized nuclear family structure depended on economically dependent girls and women. As Frost contends, “It would seem that few things frightened Victorians more than independent women” (32): it was feared that working-class girls would encounter disreputable companions at work, purchase extravagant clothing with their wages, become addicted to the “worst taste in novel reading,” and lose their feminine modesty (Dyhouse 105). These concerns reached a critical juncture in discourses of working-class “prostitution,” which saw girls compromise their sexual “purity” and subvert precepts of domesticity, all while achieving economic independence.

In accordance with the cult of true womanhood's demands for “purity,” “prostitution” emerged as a discourse throughout the nineteenth century to describe any woman who was sexually active outside of marriage (Stansell 84)—a construct that broadly encapsulated

working-class women who were less likely to adhere to middle-class ideals of feminine respectability. At this time prostitution emerged as a trade of independent street workers, and “women on the town” became the subject of a sustained social commentary between 1830 and 1860 (80, 83). However, the “problem” of prostitution, as it was conceptualized by reformers, had much less to do with a desire to protect working-class girls and women than it did with protecting the middle-class family. Alarmist discourses of prostitution were thus largely constructed around middle-class family concerns, since sex between bourgeois men and working-class women had become a pervasive aspect of metropolitan life (84).

In this capacity, it is likely that men from the elite classes largely created the demand for working-class girls' sexual services. There was a prevalent eroticization of working-class life among the upper and middle classes, whose own women were believed to be asexual in accordance with the cult of true womanhood (Stansell 90). In this sense, middle-class discourses of traditional femininity, respectability, and morality had little relevance in the daily lives of working-class girls and women; work and family patterns often saw them affected by male desertion and single motherhood, and prostitution provided an alternative way to earn a living, especially given the unsafe conditions and comparatively lower wages available to them in factories and workhouses. To that end, Stansell emphasizes that prostitution was not a tragic fate as moralists viewed it, nor an act of defiance, but simply a way of getting by (85).

On the whole, prostitution was conceptualized as a reflection of the idleness and immorality associated with working-class life. These girls defied middle-class ideals of true womanhood, not only through their lack of sexual “purity,” but also through their lack of “modesty”; the “fancy dress” associated with prostitutes was seen as a marker of self-indulgence, and it was expected that virtuous girls would give their income to their parents, rather than spend

it on such frivolity (Stansell 98). As such, the potential for girls to achieve economic independence provoked much middle-class anxiety, and the urgency of discussing prostitution in the latter half of the nineteenth century indicates just how disturbing female independence could be (99).

Furthermore, while these working-class girl “prostitutes” were often portrayed as “victims” of male sexuality by evangelical reformers, they were simultaneously viewed as “tainted” since it was assumed that any sexual knowledge would “ruin” a girl (Frost 138), thus depriving her of her childhood “innocence” and her feminine “purity.” As such, working-class girls' inability to perform Victorian precepts of “true womanhood” further entrenched middle-class beliefs that such girls were innately inferior and in need of regulation. It thereby became a critical imperative for middle-class girls to be protected in the domestic sphere, lest they be influenced by the morally deficient working-class children who occupied public spaces (Frost 80). It is pertinent to note the contrast in how the “problem” of female adolescence was addressed in relation to Victorian girls from the working and elite classes. For both demographics it was imperative to regulate leisure hours with “improving” activities, many of which were focused on internalizing precepts of evangelical religious morality (Frost 7-8).

However, while regulation was largely imposed upon working-class girls from the middle-classes for fear that the former's excess energy would run amok in socially undesirable activities, middle-class girls were seemingly called to fashion *themselves* into respectable and moral women by developing intensive rituals of self-monitoring, self-governance, and self-improvement. In this regard, the guidance literature that was published for girls throughout the Victorian period reflects middle-class precepts of “true womanhood” and evangelical morality, wherein girlhood innocence and purity signify religious subcultural strength in a society that was

rife with contentious socioeconomic transformation.

My evangelical enculturation was intrinsically shaped by the ritualized consumption of guidance texts. From the earliest days that I can recall from my childhood, my mother would gather my sisters and me together to do our family “devotionals” in the evenings and pray by our bedsides at night. Many of my favourite books were illustrated versions of Bible stories which taught me not to lie, to ask God's forgiveness when I did something wrong, and to always obey my parents. Even some of my toys were religious pedagogical tools, such as the “Jesus” figurine that I received for my fourth birthday and the “Noah's Ark” boat set that was given to me for Christmas when I was six. From its onset this enculturation process was also steeped in discourses of self-monitoring, self-governance, and self-improvement, all of which percolated when I reached the early adolescent “age of accountability” when children are deemed mature enough to assume responsibility for procuring their own salvation.

During this time I learned about the importance of maintaining a sexually “pure” mind and body, as well as attaining the elusive perfection of “righteousness” that seemed to be necessary for salvation, yet also impossible to achieve. Luckily a multitude of evangelical authors had produced an abundance of advice literature to guide me through this process, and I understood the consumption of this literature to be a critical indicator of my commitment to God. I learned that I needed to constantly expand my knowledge and improve myself for fear of otherwise becoming the much-maligned “lukewarm” Christian (Revelation 3:16: So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to spit you out of my mouth). And so I followed my mother's lead and lined my bookshelves with titles such as the WWJD³⁷ Interactive

³⁷ “WWJD” is the in/famous acronym in evangelical culture for “What Would Jesus Do?” This catchphrase was in

Devotional (*Key et al. 1997*) and *Battlefield of the Mind: Winning the Battle in Your Mind* (*Meyer 1995*).

Of course these discourses of individualized self-monitoring, self-governance, and self-improvement stood in stark contrast to the other pervasive discourses in my evangelical subculture that touted the “free gift” of salvation. My mother in particular always told me how liberating her conversion to evangelicalism was in contrast to her strict Old Colony Mennonite upbringing. She taught me that evangelicalism—or “Christianity” as she always called it, since Catholicism and other Protestant denominations were not “truly” Christian—freed us to foster a personal relationship with Jesus, and we only had to “accept” his love and forgiveness in order to be saved. This resolution also contradicted the teachings that girls and women who engage in premarital sex would not “make it” to Heaven. It thus seemed that a personal relationship with Jesus was at once enough and not enough to procure my salvation; it also seemed that the individual perfection of “righteousness” was necessary to avoid an eternity in Hell, yet also unattainable by imperfect human sinners. These grand impossibilities now leave me with little wonder why the promulgation of evangelical guidance literature has been such a prevalent—and profitable—industry within North American evangelical subcultures, whether it be for the purpose of establishing tenets of “sexual purity” or everything that lies beyond.

Guiding Middle-Class Girls

While Victorian middle-class girls were believed to be innately “pure” in contrast to their working-class counterparts, they were also subject to more meticulous religious enculturation,

part popularized by Christian recording group Big Tent Revival (whose albums were always a staple in my mother's CD player) when they released a single of the same title from their 1998 album *Amplifier*.

familial control, and social surveillance (Frost 23). A significant aspect of this socio-religious enculturation was predicated on developing intensive rituals of self-monitoring, self-governance, and self-improvement—all of which were operationalized through the consumption of guidance literature. The growth of literacy throughout the nineteenth century was critical in this regard, since reading for pleasure had become a customary activity among working- and middle-class children for the first time (92). Books, serials, and magazines for girls became popular, and it was critical that these texts always convey moral lessons which catered specifically to the cultivation of “traditional” feminine virtues (93). In this sense, guidance literature as a textual genre promulgates discourses of “self-help” as an intrinsically middle-class paradigm, regardless of who actually reads the texts, because it is based on a premise of self-initiated and self-obtained social mobility (Driscoll 160).

To that end, Victorian middle-class girls were encouraged to spend their unprecedented leisure time engaging in individualized “improving” activities, such as utilizing letter and diary writing as a method of self-inspection and confession (Frost 28). Similarly, there was much social concern over the materials that girls spent their time reading (Moruzi 6). Guidance literature provided particularly suitable reading material to ease these apprehensions; many of these texts were written by evangelical women, and they construct a narrative framework wherein the older, wiser author passes her maternal knowledge to the young female reader (Vallone 46, 69). On the whole, these texts combine fictional morality tales with practical advice for engaging in “respectable” conduct, and they particularly focus on teaching the reader how to preserve her “purity” for God and the broader social good (Driscoll 71).

In constructing adolescence as a period of struggle wherein girls must strive to achieve proper femininity, as well as providing advice to assist the reader as she makes this transition,

Victorian guidance literature perpetuates what Catherine Driscoll calls a “pedagogic approach to femininity” (58, 78). She argues that “guidance manuals belong to a model of modern subjectivity defined by labour on, pleasure in, and responsibility for the self, a model that developed in late modernity with particular reference to the exemplary self-involvement of girls” (69). It is thereby unsurprising that advice columns in girls' magazines, hygiene manuals, and encyclopedia of “useful knowledge” proliferated during the nineteenth century; not only did the cult of true womanhood reach full fruition during the Victorian period (Gorham 6), but socioeconomic changes were simultaneously paving new possible life paths for girls to follow beyond this ideology's narrow stipulations. To that end, many of these texts discuss strategies for coping with the intergenerational conflict that was increasingly common in middle-class families, and they encourage girls' adherence to middle-class and evangelical precepts of “traditional” femininity (DeLuzio 23, 32). They also construct the rigid self-monitoring of one's body and mind as beneficial for personal and national well-being (Driscoll 71), just as they link physical and psychological health to individual moral virtue (DeLuzio 30). In this sense, Victorian guidance literature perpetuates the values of self-obtained social mobility that are central to evangelical *and* middle-class tenets of morality and respectability.

At its very core, then, Victorian guidance literature for girls necessitates the preservation of “traditional” femininity, which is contingent upon embodying ideals of “purity” and “innocence.” However, even though this guidance literature promulgated repressive discourses of self-monitoring, self-governance, and self-improvement, we should assume that Victorian girls actively negotiated such prescriptions, rather than passively accepting them as absolute truth (Fletcher 36). Just as patriarchal discourses of “true womanhood” were challenged by working-class girls' material and social lives, it is likely that middle-class girls engaged in multiple,

critical, and even subversive readings of Victorian guidance literature. However, this does *not* mean that discursive ideals of purity, innocence, and femininity are thereby insignificant; rather, these discourses continue to influence how girls perceive themselves and how they are perceived by others, just as they impact broader cultural ideologies and practices. This is particularly significant in the case of girls, whose legal “child” status constrains their capacities to subvert the cultural norms that are developed and enforced by adults. It is therefore critical to acknowledge girls' capacities to resist the dominant discourses that are promulgated by Victorian guidance literature, while remaining mindful that such resistance would likely bring social and economic consequences. As Valerie Walkerdine contends:

[W]e can say that texts do not simply distort or bias a reality that exists only outside the pages of books—in the 'real world'—but rather that those practices *are* real, and in their construction of meanings create places for identification, construct subject-positions in the text itself. So we need not point to some untainted reality outside the text, but to examine instead how those practices within the text itself have relational effects that define who and what we are. (164-165)

In this regard, Victorian guidance literature for girls can be understood as a primary agent of gender socialization and religious enculturation. Adolescence was regarded as a critical stage of “becoming” wherein the cultivation of gendered virtues was a paramount task, and girls' guidance literature reflects the pervasive belief that physical manifestations of puberty trigger cultural manifestations of gendered femininity (Walkerdine 86). To that end, these texts propagate an evangelical *and* middle-class ethos in encouraging the reader to assume primary responsibility for the condition of her “self” through cultivating intensive rituals of self-monitoring, self-governance, and self-improvement, as well as accepting individual responsibility for any “defects” that may disrupt her transition toward womanhood. As such, the key themes and values promulgated by Victorian guidance literature are predicated on middle-

class and evangelical discourses of purity, innocence, as well as “traditional” femininity and respectability—all of which are readily apparent in a selection of guidance literature from the era.

For instance, in Lydia Howard Sigourney's 1833 text *Letters to Young Ladies*, a collective state of feminine purity is linked to internalized self-control and self-governance. Here she constructs “modesty” as a virtue based in self-denial, and argues that girls should model this ideal by avoiding extravagant dress purchases and giving their extra income to those in need. She accordingly suggests to her readers:

By moderating your wants, and by economy in the preservation of your wardrobe, reserve to yourself the power and the pleasure, of occasional and simple presents to those whom you love. ... A well regulated mind will experience true satisfaction in avoiding the purchase of an expensive garment, that the sickly sufferer may be clothed and fed.
(45)

In addition to the middle-class values of self-regulation and self-restraint, Sigourney's commentary on achieving feminine “self-government” is explicitly religious. She suggests that the reader should seek God in all aspects of her life, as she cannot become a desirable woman or virtuous citizen without Christian wisdom and morality:

I cannot feel, my dear friends, that self-government is perfect without religion ... and since we have not the gift of prescience, and cannot always measure the future by the past, is it not safest to rely on the Former of our bodies, the Father of our spirits, who hath said, “if any lack wisdom, and ask of Him, he giveth liberally and upbraideth not.”
(104)

Here the author equates the virtue of self-governance with precepts of “true womanhood,” wherein learning to monitor one's thoughts and actions is central to accepting one's subordinate position as a woman in society. She further contends:

That self-regulating power, by which the affections and passions are rendered subservient to the dictates of reason, and the precepts of inspiration, should be earnestly sought after by a woman. ... As government is best administered by those who have themselves

learned subordination, so she should govern herself, that she may be better able to obey. (125)

Matilda Pullan's 1855 text *Maternal Counsels to a Daughter* echoes Sigourney's claims that feminine purity can be achieved through internalized rituals of self-monitoring and self-governance. Here the author addresses the reader as a surrogate daughter and offers her advice in a discursive framework of maternal knowledge. Like Sigourney's, Pullan's advice is predicated on middle-class assumptions that the reader will have access to funds that may be spent on extravagant dress; that she will spend time in "society"; and that she will have an abundance of leisure time that requires wise and productive utilization. Significantly, the reader is encouraged to dedicate her life to bringing pleasure to those around her—a commitment that, it is promised, will bring happiness to her own life in accordance with Victorian tenets of true womanhood:

To all of us a certain influence is given, great or small, according to our position: to use that influence for good; to increase the happiness of others; to lighten the burden of the sorrowful; to sympathise in the joy of the happy; to live, in fact, for others, is the surest means of acquiring happiness ourselves. (11)

Pullan also shrouds her advice in a discursive framework of religious morality. For instance, when addressing the need for girls to spend their time productively, she contends that "for if, in *all* instances it be true that 'Idleness is the root of all evil,' it is so most especially in the case of Woman. The love of ease, the want of the power and the habit of exerting herself, is the besetting sin which leads a woman into a thousand temptations. To her, it is, emphatically, the root of all evil" (16). She further argues that readers should engage in habitual prayer and Bible reading each day to tether these innate sinful tendencies (18-19). However, Pullan also employs a contradictory discourse which lauds girls and women as the morally superior sex. In this respect the reader is charged with influencing the men in her life through her piety, as well as with ensuring that male needs are always met before or instead of her own. For instance, when

addressing the relationship dynamics between girls and their brothers, Pullan advises that:

A sister's duties to a brother are of the most important character. Never should she lose sight of the fact that he has far more temptation to wander than herself, and that it is wisdom and happiness to render his home attractive that he will not seek pleasure elsewhere. Take an interest in his pursuits; listen to his tales of his companions; be ready to put away a favourite book or piece of work, if by playing a game at chess, or accompanying him on the piano, you can please and oblige him. (206-207)

To that end, Pullan also addresses the evils that will result from a girl developing a fixation on spending time in “society” at the expense of her domestic duties to “cultivate a love of innocent pleasure, of the happiness that can be enjoyed without the accessories of an evening dress and a crowd of strangers” (210). However, when a girl must leave the domestic sphere and spend time with her social peers, it is imperative that she engages in rigid self-monitoring behaviours. For instance, she must pay constant attention to how her subtle bodily movements may affect the comfort of others, and consider how such actions reflect upon her feminine respectability. Pullan postulates that:

All noisy habits, such as walking heavily, banging doors, letting lids of trunks fall, and similar acts of carelessness, are wholly inconsistent with the character of a *gentle-woman*,—a word far more significant than that of lady. Quietness and repose of manner, free from affectation and self-seeking, are the elements of true politeness. “*Love thyself last*,” says the poet, who knew more the beauties of the female character than any other human being; and a similar injunction is found in the Holy Writ: “in honour preferring one another.” (171-172)

Sarah Stickney Ellis constructs a comparable discursive framework in her 1843 text *The Daughters of England, Their Position in Society, Character and Responsibilities*. She begins by addressing the reader with a presupposition of holding Christian beliefs in common, and contends that accepting one's subordinate position in society is a fundamental aspect of female religious morality:

For my own purpose, it is not necessary to go further into your particular history or circumstances, than to regard you as women, and, as I hope, Christian women. As

Christian women, then, I address you. As women, then, the first thing of importance is to be content to be inferior to men—inferior in mental power, in the same proportion that you are inferior in bodily strength. (8)

Much like Pullan's text, Ellis continues by encouraging her reader to consider whether she will live her life for her own pleasure or for the benefit of others, and hails the noble decision of choosing the latter (10). In accordance with the guiding mantra of Victorian guidance literature, she also draws an inextricable discursive link between middle-class “traditional” feminine traits and precepts of evangelical religious morality:

[m]y desire is to assist [girls] to overcome the three great enemies to their temporal and eternal good—their selfishness, indolence, and vanity, and to establish in their stead feelings of benevolence and habits of industry, so blended with Christian meekness, and while affording pleasure to all who live within the sphere of their influence, they shall be unconscious of the charm by which they please. (14)

In this regard, the author further equates living “for others” with living “for eternity,” (11) wherein embodying the selflessness and servitude of “true womanhood” signifies female religious morality. She similarly suggests that it is best for girls to abstain from earthly pleasures, and instead focus on earning God’s favour.

Ellis further advises her young readers to moderate their tempers and always be “habitually cheerful,” since men desire these characteristics in their future wives (148). She similarly contends that “Ill-temper should always be regarded as a disease” that needs to be subdued (143), and this can usually be remedied by engaging in useful domestic duties (149). The Victorian domestic ideal is further entrenched when she states that a love of “society” can be a deleterious influence, and that girls should regard their social obligations as opportunities to bring enjoyment to others rather than pursue self-gratification (152, 158). Significantly, Ellis also expresses the core discursive juncture of female adolescence by situating feminine purity within

a discursive framework of childhood “innocence” that requires preservation. She postulates,

Nor can this, the greatest charm of female character, if totally neglected in youth, ever be acquired in later life. When the mind has been accustomed to what is vulgar, or gross, the fine edge of feeling is gone, and nothing can restore it. It is comparatively easy, on first entering upon life, to maintain the page of thought unsullied, by closing it against every improper image; but when once such images are allowed to mingle with the imagination, so as to be constantly revived by memory, and thus to give their tone to the habitual mode of thinking and conversing, the beauty of the female character may indeed be said to be gone, and its glory departed. (105)

Ellis similarly states that “[t]he bloom of modesty is soon rubbed off by vulgar contact; but what is thus lost to the young female can never be restored” (164). In this capacity, the author draws upon precepts of female moral superiority to hold girls individually responsible for allowing any outside influences to compromise their purity and innocence. She contends that “[w]oman, happily for her, is gifted by nature with a quickness of perception, by which she is able to detect the earliest approach of anything which might tend to destroy that high-toned purity of character, for which, even in the days of chivalry, she was more revered and adored, than for her beauty itself” (105).

Within this discursive framework, then, female adolescence represents the very pinnacle of femininity precisely because of girls’ unused *potentials* as women. During this transitional time, girls’ bodies are marked by their sexual and reproductive development; they are physically ready to perform the patriarchal roles of wife and mother, yet these potentials have, at least in theory, not yet been utilized. As this selection of Victorian guidance literature conveys, girls’ and women’s social value is defined by these yet unused sexual and reproductive potentials—and any girl who utilizes these capacities outside of “legitimate” marriage is at once deprived of her femininity, respectability, and morality. Girls are thus conceived as women-in-the-making, rather than as subjects in their own right. Furthermore, in addition to maintaining their purity and

innocence, a vital aspect of performing “true womanhood” requires girls to understand and accept their inferior status in the gender hierarchy, and to live resolutely “for men,” rather than for themselves. These ideals of femininity continue to shape Western systems of knowledge, and, as will be discussed in Chapter 3, they are particularly pervasive in the Complementarian theological paradigm which shapes the contemporary evangelical purity dialectic.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined a select discursive history of the purity dialectic. It has elucidated how female sexual regulation has *always* functioned as a key indicator of Judeo-Christian religious subcultural identity, as well as an essential component of patriarchal private property ownership. It has further suggested that the evangelical purity dialectic reached fruition in the nineteenth century in conjunction with Victorian discourses of “true womanhood” and “female adolescence.” Importantly, these developments were inextricably informed and reproduced by evangelical discursive practices: “pure” and “innocent” girls were expected to perform the specifically evangelical values of self-monitoring, self-governance, and self-improvement in achieving individual salvation *and* middle-class respectability.

On the whole, then, Victorian and contemporary North American ideals of girlhood are epitomized by white, middle-class girls, whose sexual and reproductive potentials have “bloomed,” but whose purity and innocence have not yet been compromised. This is key, as it is these yet unused *potentials* of girlhood—the possibilities wrought by this intermediary period of waiting for womanhood—that render the adolescent female to be both an object of desire as well as a site of cultural anxiety. Such sentiments are evident in the reviewed selection of Victorian guidance literature. While other authors have explored this textual genre in more exhaustive

detail,³⁸ this chapter has outlined the key discourses therein that inform contemporary North American evangelical understandings of female “purity.” With this discursive legacy in mind, I will now explore how the multifaceted and contentious purity dialectic is constructed in a selection of contemporary evangelical purity literature.

38 For further reading see Driscoll (2002), Dyhouse (1981), Fletcher (2008), Gorham (1982), Moruzi (2012), and Vallone (1995).

Chapter 3

Becoming the Princess: Unpacking the Evangelical Purity Dialectic

It is unlikely that I will ever forget the first time I made my mother cry. I was seventeen-on-the-brink-of-eighteen; it was summer, and my then-thirteen-year-old younger sister would be making the transition from primary school to high school in a matter of weeks—a momentous event that was being commemorated by a “Grade Eight Graduation” pool party. Unlike her two older sisters, Amanda’s adolescent self-confidence was not mitigated by the perceived imperfections of a short and stocky figure; instead she was seemingly “blessed” from her earliest days of puberty with long legs, a flat stomach, and naturally silky-straight hair. She therefore had no reservations about appearing in her athletic one-piece swimsuit in front of her friends during the evening’s event. There was just one problem, however—she had unexpectedly started her period (or, as Eric, my then-boyfriend for over a year would always say, “Aunt Martha had come to town”).

I was sitting with my older sister on the living room couch when Amanda emerged from her bedroom to inform us of her plight. Being well-versed in the mechanics of tampon usage by this time, we both knew immediately how to solve the issue. “I have some Tampax in my purse,” Ashley offered as she rose from her seat. As she went to retrieve the goods from her bedroom, Amanda quietly informed me that she had never used a tampon, and that she did not know how to carry out the mysterious procedure.

“It’s not a big deal,” I assured her as I also rose from my seat. “I’ll show you what to do.” At this point my mother emerged from the kitchen and joined our conversation.

“I don’t want Amanda to use a tampon,” my mother said, seemingly anxiously yet firmly. I looked at her blankly. “Why not?”

“Because it will break her hymen.”

At this point Ashley re-appeared with an innocuous pink package in her hand. In spite of the palpable tension that had just enveloped the room, I could not predict the epic confrontation that would follow. I have always preferred to avoid conflict, and would often act as an ally to my mother against the verbal aggressions of my more vociferous sisters. But not this time. Maybe it was the bitterness I had accrued over the past year with the knowledge that, even though I had approximated the “good girl” ideal in every conceivable way—that I was a straight-A student with scholarship money to begin university in the fall; that I had worked various part-time jobs since I was thirteen to save money for my future education so that I could “make something” of myself; that I had never taken a sip of alcohol or a drag from a cigarette, or sampled any of the other narcotic substances that were abundantly available to small town teens with few other options for passing the time; that I loved God, prayed and read my Bible daily, and purposefully modelled the “fruits of the Spirit” like kindness, patience and love in my life—I was still a failure in her eyes, all because I was no longer a virgin. And here, it seemed, was my mother's last chance to amend the situation for her own conscience's sake: her youngest daughter's “purity” was on the brink of being compromised, and she needed to seize this opportunity to keep one of her children from falling into the insidious realm of sexual impurity.

Suddenly I was choking back contempt with every word that I spoke. “Mom, that is ridiculous. A tampon is NOT going to break her hymen. And even if it did, WHO CARES? It doesn't mean she's not a virgin.” My mother responded by reminding us of the importance of the hymen breaking on a woman's wedding night, and the “blood covenant” that it forged with her husband and with God (Deuteronomy 22: 20-21: If, however, the charge is true and no proof of the young woman's virginity can be found, she shall be brought to the door of her father's house and there the men of her town shall stone her to death). It did not take long for Ashley, who was

equally resentful of the guilt she had internalized from her own failure to maintain her “purity,” to interject.

“Most girls' hymens don't even break when they have sex for the first time,” she said. “I didn't bleed my first time.”

“Neither did I” I exclaimed. I spoke these words with the malicious intent of inflicting wounds. Ashley and I never acknowledged our sexual activities in front of our mother—not since the initial confrontations she had with both of us upon discovering evidence of our transgressions—and we were fully aware that doing so now would add insult to injury.

“Come on, Amanda,” I continued, “we're going to show you how to use a tampon.”

“No,” my mother insisted. “I don't want her to!”

At this point my thinly veiled contempt boiled into irrepressible rage. “You are really going to make your daughter miss out on her graduation party because of your STUPID obsession with virginity?”

And then the tears came. My mother buried her face in her hands and ran into her bedroom. However, at the time this emotional display did not invoke my sympathy; I did not follow her into her room to comfort her or apologize. Instead Ashley and I took Amanda into the bathroom and showed her how to use a tampon. She managed to insert it all on her own, and whether or not this act somehow compromised her “purity” would ultimately prove irrelevant since, three years later, she would follow her sisters' footsteps down the treacherous road of sexual transgression.

However, after our initial rage subsided several hours later, Ashley and I did go to our mother with the hope of making amends—no matter how resentful we were, we could not reconcile the tears we had caused. We tried our best to reason with her and explain how unlikely

it was that a tampon would break Amanda's hymen if indeed it was still intact, but she was beyond consolation. "I feel like such a failure," was all she told us between sobs. Even then I knew she did not utter these words with the intention of insulting us; she was simply being honest. She had tried with such vigilance to guard her three daughters against the incontrovertible sin of female sexual transgression, and yet she had failed. But I also knew that her words implied that, by extension, Ashley and I were failures because we had "given in" to sexual transgression. And as much as I still believed in the evangelical God of my childhood and did my best to model the "Christian" life each day, I no longer wholly accepted the Biblical "truth" that I was fundamentally altered and deficient because I had engaged in premarital sex.

After some more fruitless negotiation Ashley and I left my mother's bedroom, and I remember feeling overwhelmed by an inexplicable combination of remorse and resentment. My mother's tears had just vividly revealed how important this sexual purity imperative was to her—even if it meant preserving a girl's "technical virginity" as symbolized by an intact hymen. What I could not determine was why this was the case. Why was an intact hymen somehow equally—if not more—important in determining a girl's morality and value than all the other things she might accomplish and all the other ways she might model God's righteousness? This question would continue to haunt me throughout adolescence and early adulthood, and only now as I return to confront the "demons" of my past—always epitomized in my mind by Dannah Gresh's immaculately manicured image—with my freshly buffered feminist theoretical weapons, do I finally feel equipped to address it.

This chapter continues to unpack the complex and often contradictory facets of the contemporary evangelical purity dialectic, not only by deconstructing the seemingly cohesive definitions of

“purity” that a purposive selection of evangelical literature constructs for its readers, but also critically situating these discourses within their broader socio-material and theological contexts. In this regard, evangelical “purity” discourses cannot be bifurcated from discourses of “righteous femininity” that are gleaned from Complementarian Biblical exegeses, Victorian-era discourses of “true womanhood,” and Christianity's patriarchal material roots.

This critical discourse analysis thereby begins by exploring the overarching “princess” narrative that is constructed throughout the selected evangelical literature, wherein girls are invited to envision themselves as the “princess-brides” of their Heavenly Prince, Jesus Christ, and to earn their “royal” privilege of salvation by striving to internalize and perform evangelical tenets of purity and femininity. In this sense, “purity” is conceptualized as an all-encompassing physical and spiritual state that is predicated on the preservation of a girl's sexual and reproductive potentials for her future husband’s sole ownership. Furthermore, she must embrace evangelical standards of “righteous femininity” which compel her to accept her inferior role in the divine gender hierarchy—thus existing “for men,” rather than as a subject in her own right. When taken together, these discourses amalgamate to establish evangelical standards of “authentic purity,” which a girl can realize only through intensive rituals of self-monitoring, self-governance, and self-improvement, at which point she may live “happily ever after” with her Heavenly Prince in eternity.

Collectively, these texts perpetuate a Complementarian theological paradigm wherein pure and righteous girls regard and honour men *in the same way and for the same reasons* that they regard and honour God—a discursive arrangement wherein men become girls’ and women’s “redeemer-grooms” by virtue of their shared “maleness” with the deity. As such, only by committing herself wholly to patriarchal male authority—a resolution that is fully realized when

she enters a heterosexual marriage covenant with an earthly “prince”—may a girl achieve her divinely-ordained life purpose and access intimacy with God Himself. However, before delving further into the contentious depths of this evangelical purity dialectic, it is first pertinent to explain the methodological processes that were employed in selecting this project's sample of evangelical literature.

Selecting the Purity “Experts”

The contemporary evangelical purity movement has promulgated an abundance of literature that is marketed to girls of various ages and theological predilections. Such literature can be divided loosely into two overarching genres, the first of which consists of fiction texts that construct morality tales about the importance of premarital sexual abstinence and other religious teachings. Such literature is frequently—although not exclusively—produced in a series format with recurring characters and narrative themes.³⁹ The second genre consists of non-fiction literature similar to the Victorian guidance literature discussed in Chapter 2. These texts employ a combination of Biblical “proof-texts,” testimonies from interviewees, fictional narratives, as well as the authors’ personal advice for how to achieve a lifestyle of “purity.” These guidance texts tend to be marketed specifically to adolescent girls, and, indeed, are often designated as inappropriate for younger readers because of their sexual content.⁴⁰

I selected the latter genre of evangelical purity literature for this project for several reasons. First, while both fiction and non-fiction narrative frameworks communicate various facets of the evangelical purity dialectic, the selected guidance literature seeks to provide

39 See Melody Carlson's *Diary of a Teenage Girl* and *Life at Kingston High* series; also see Nicole O'Dell's *Scenarios for Girls* series.

40 Such texts are approved for “teen” readers aged 13 and up in accordance with the age guidelines provided on the website Christianbook.com. Such age specifications are also often printed on the back covers of guidance literature texts.

comprehensive and *exhaustive* definitions of concepts such as “purity” and “femininity” for its young female readers. In this capacity, the selected literature invites readers to engage in intensive rituals of self-monitoring, self-governance, and self-improvement to achieve a lifestyle of purity, thus perpetuating the textual legacy of the Victorian-era guidance literature discussed in Chapter 2. Second, these texts’ shared instructional format constructs a critical power dynamic; while the former genre also functions as a pedagogical tool for enculturating adolescent girls, the fictional nature of its characters and narratives arguably leaves interpretive space for the reader to negotiate or reject its content. In contrast, non-fiction guidance literature is structured by a series of prescriptions for how a girl *must* live if she is to achieve a lifestyle of purity—and, by extension, if she is to achieve individual salvation in accordance with Complementarian evangelical theology. This incontrovertible power relationship between author and reader is inherently structured into the selected literature, wherein the adult “expert” addresses the young reader with an authoritarian voice and the presupposition of speaking on God’s behalf, therein maintaining that her knowledge and life experiences are more valid than the reader’s.⁴¹

With these issues in mind, I purposefully selected twelve texts⁴² from the website Christianbook.com⁴³ based on their popularity and evangelical predilection.⁴⁴ This sample size

41 That being said, it is pertinent to note that several of the selected authors have also produced popular works for the fictional purity genre, and it would thereby be counterproductive to deny the fluid discursive “boundaries” which supposedly distinguish “fiction” from “non-fiction” narrative frameworks in the promulgation of the evangelical purity dialectic. For examples, see texts from Dannah Gresh’s *Secret Keeper Girl* fiction series, Robin Jones Gunn’s *Christy Miller* series and her *Sierra Jensen* series; also see Trisha Goyer’s various fictional series for adults such as *Seven Brides for Seven Bachelors* and *Home to Heather Creek*.

42 See Appendix A for *And The Bride Wore White* cover images; see Appendix C for all other cover images.

43 See: <http://www.christianbook.com/>

44 The popularity of these texts was determined by a combination of selling ranks and reviews available on Christianbook.com and Amazon.com, recommendations from evangelical blogs and publications, as well as personal knowledge acquired throughout years of informal encounters with evangelical girls and women.

reflects the fact that, while evangelical purity literature is pervasive in its subcultural influence and economic profitability, it is ultimately perpetuated by a limited number of “experts” who publish multiple texts on overlapping and recurrent themes. In this way, this textual genre conveys a sense of permanence and authority, just as it invites readers to foster intimate relationships *both* with the authors and the texts themselves, as they are continually revisited and shared among girls and women, as well as updated and reprinted for new generations.

It is pertinent to note that, while the authors of the selected texts do not explicitly identify as “evangelical Protestant” therein, they all take for granted a “Christian” identity, as well as an assumption that their particular interpretations of Christian doctrines reflect Biblical “truths.” As such, the selected authors do not identify their beliefs as “evangelical,” nor do they acknowledge the theology of Catholic or other Protestant belief systems. However, these twelve texts are printed by five publishing companies, all of which state their evangelical doctrinal commitments on their company websites. It can thereby be assumed that all of the selected texts are written to accommodate an evangelical theological perspective,⁴⁵ and the authors’ operationalization of the evangelical discursive practices discussed in Chapter 1 are evident throughout this analysis.

To that end, while these authors do not interpret and apply evangelical theology in a monolithic way, there is an overarching discursive continuity between the selected texts. As such, while I engaged in close readings of the literature without pre-determined coding categories, I *did* contextualize and name the overarching themes in accordance with my own understandings of evangelical and fundamentalist discursive practices. It is thus my own contention that these authors collectively employ a Complementarian theological framework, and that they indirectly

45 For further reading, see the websites for Moody Publishers; Harvest House Publishers; Baker Publishing Group; Water Brook Press; and Brothers and Sisters.

propagate the evangelizing imperative and the prosperity gospel paradigm.

The first of these authors is Dannah Gresh,⁴⁶ a resident of Pennsylvania and a married mother of three teenaged and young-adult children. She has written over twenty books for girls and women, and I selected five of her nonfiction “purity” texts for this project. The first, *And the Bride Wore White: Seven Secrets to Sexual Purity* was originally published in 1999 and re-printed in 2004 and 2012. It is Gresh's first book on the topic and it remains a “classic” within evangelical purity culture. This analysis will also explore her texts *Secret Keeper: The Delicate Power of Modesty* (2002 [2011 reprint]), *What are You Waiting For? The One Thing No One Ever Tells You About Sex* (2011), and *Get Lost: Your Guide to Finding True Love* (2013). It also includes *Lies Young Women Believe and the Truth that Sets Them Free* (2008), which Gresh co-authored with Nancy Leigh DeMoss.⁴⁷ The second selected author is Leslie Ludy,⁴⁸ a resident of Colorado and a married mother of four children. She has published six titles on sex, dating, and relationships for women, and has co-authored another ten books with her husband, Eric. I selected her three books that are written specifically for adolescent girls: *Authentic Beauty: The Shaping of a Set-Apart Young Woman* (2003 [2007 reprint]), *Set-Apart Femininity: God's Sacred Intent for Every Young Woman* (2008), and *The Lost Art of True Beauty: The Set-Apart Girl's Guide to Feminine Grace* (2010).

The remaining four texts are each written by a different author or pair of co-authors. *Passion and Purity* (1984 [2002 reprint]), written by Elisabeth Elliot, is considered one of the pioneering texts on sexual purity within North American evangelicalism. Elliot gained particular

46 Gresh is the founder of Secret Keeper Girl ministry for girls and Pure Freedom ministry for teens. For further reading, see her ministry website.

47 DeMoss is the author of *Lies Women Believe and the Truth That Sets Them Free* (2001) which remains a self-help mainstay among adult evangelical women readers.

48 Ludy is the founder of Set Apart Girl ministry for girls. For further reading see her ministry website.

prominence among U.S. evangelicals when her first husband, Jim, the father of her only daughter, was killed in 1956 by an Auca tribe while working as a missionary in Ecuador. She was widowed once more before marrying her third and current husband with whom she resides in Massachusetts. She has written over a dozen religious books on various topics, but *Passion and Purity* remains her key text that is marketed to adolescent girls. The next text is *Every Young Woman's Battle: Guarding Your Mind, Heart, and Body in a Sex-Saturated World* (2004 [2009 reprint]) by Shannon Ethridge and Stephen Arterburn.⁴⁹ Ethridge, a married mother of two children who resides in Texas, is credited as the primary author, and this is her only text written specifically for adolescent girls. The next pair of co-authors consists of Robin Jones Gunn and Tricia Goyer. They are both popular Christian fiction writers who collaborated to write *Praying for Your Future Husband: Preparing Your Heart for His* (2013). Gunn is a married mother of two adult children who resides in Hawaii, and Goyer is a married mother of four children who resides in Arkansas. The final selected text is *Before You Meet Prince Charming: A Guide to Radiant Purity* (2006 [2012 reprint]) by Sarah Mally. Mally is an anomaly among the selected authors in that this is her only published work as sole author.⁵⁰ She was single when she wrote this text at age 26, and according to her ministry website she is still single and child-free. Nonetheless, this text remains popular among North American evangelicals, and Mally is a prominent public speaker for her family-run ministry *Bright Lights*.⁵¹

It is worth noting that, with the exception of the secondary male author of *Every Young*

49 Other titles in the series include *Every Woman's Battle: Discovering God's Plan for Sexual and Emotional Fulfilment* (Ethridge and Arterburn 2009), *Every Single Woman's Battle: Guarding Your Heart and Mind Against Sexual and Emotional Compromise* (Ethridge 2009), and *Preparing Your Daughter for Every Woman's Battle: Creative Conversations About Sexual and Emotional Integrity* (Ethridge 2010). Ethridge has also published a dozen other books for women which address sexuality and heterosexual relationships.

50 Mally is also co-author of *Making Brothers and Sisters Best Friends* (2002), which she wrote with her brother, Stephen, and her sister, Grace.

51 For further reading see her family's ministry website.

Woman's Battle, all of these authors are white, heterosexual, and cisgendered women—identities which likely provide them with their wide evangelical readership in Canada and the United States. Furthermore, all of these texts employ variations of a Complementarian theological paradigm that currently enjoys dominant status within North American evangelicalism. While not all evangelicals adhere to this paradigm, I was unable to locate any texts on the topic that offer an alternative theological approach. This gap suggests that “purity” as an evangelical discourse is intrinsically informed by Complementarian theology, which itself is highly reflective of Victorian precepts of “true womanhood” as discussed in Chapter 2. With this in mind, I will now delve into my critical discourse analysis of the selected literature and continue unpacking the evangelical purity dialectic.

Preparing for “Happily Ever After”

To begin, it is necessary to contextualize the evangelical purity dialectic in these texts’ shared “fairy tale” narrative framework, wherein the “princess-bride” symbolizes the culmination of “authentic purity” and “righteous femininity” that all girls must achieve in order to attain individual salvation and live “happily ever after” with their Heavenly “Prince” in eternity (2 *Corinthians 11:2: I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him*). Some authors utilize this narrative framework more extensively than others, and perhaps none so much as Sarah Mally. She supplements her advice with an ongoing fictional story—complete with illustrations⁵²—all throughout *Before You Meet Prince Charming*. This narrative introduces an unnamed “princess” as she rides her horse through a majestic meadow: “Her blonde hair, highlighted by the sun, flowed behind her, and the crystals on her thin golden headband sparkled brightly. Canteringly gracefully with his dark mane waving in the wind, the

⁵² See Appendix D for select illustrations from the text.

chestnut horse was nearly as beautiful as the girl” (15). True to pervasive Western fairy tale narrative tropes, this princess is conceptualized through a paradigm of white, economically privileged, and heteronormative femininity by virtue of her fair hair, valuable adornments, and most notably through her deep desire to “... fall in love with her Prince Charming and live with him forever” (20). Throughout the text this princess learns about the importance of embodying the many precepts of “true” purity, at which point her Prince Charming—who jointly symbolizes an earthly husband *and* Jesus Christ, the Heavenly Prince—arrives and proposes marriage (249-250).

In addition to this overarching fictional narrative, Mally constructs her purity prescriptions within the “princess-bride” discursive framework, as she encourages the reader to envision her own life as a fairy tale: “Think of your favourite storybook romance. You know, one where the couple lives happily ever after. Those fairytales [sic] are just a joke, right? I mean no one actually has a marriage like that, do they? That is what Satan wants you to think ... ” (23). In this capacity, she invites the reader to conceptualize herself as a “princess” whose royal status in Heaven is contingent upon embracing and performing evangelical purity precepts. After she fully understands and internalizes the complex facets of “authentic purity,” the reader will be better prepared to unite with an earthly male prince through heterosexual marriage, and by extension also access intimacy with her Heavenly Prince, Jesus Christ.

Dannah Gresh takes a similar discursive approach in *And the Bride Wore White*. Here she constructs a fairy tale narrative wherein she is the princess who achieves her own “happily ever after” with an earthly prince after preserving her sexual and reproductive potentials for his ownership, thus fulfilling her God-ordained role as a woman. She also utilizes discourses of white, economically privileged, heteronormative femininity as she recalls the extravagances of

her wedding day:

[Bob] was the man of my dreams, and this day was a fairy tale come true. And me? I wore a white hand-beaded dress with a nine-foot train and a sequined tiara veil. I marched across fresh rose petals as violinists, stretched along both sides of the sanctuary, played the wedding march. At the front of the sanctuary, we faced our guests so that they could see the joy on our faces At the reception, guests munched on hors d'oeuvres as an orchestra played in the background We were the prince and princess of the ball, and anything we did would charm the guests. (15-16)

Gresh proceeds to invite the reader to envision herself as Christ's princess-bride: "A princess enjoys the great benefits of being waited upon and being adorned with rich tapestry. . . . [S]he knows she is the princess and will someday be married to a marvellous prince" (78).

She further elucidates this framework in *Get Lost*, wherein she employs a Complementarian theological paradigm which conflates heterosexual marriage between men and women with the spiritual "covenant" between Christ and humanity. Within this discursive framework, girls are conceptualized as the brides of Christ, and the male deity is constructed as both their redeemer *and* their lover (*Ephesians 5: 22-23: Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Saviour*). She explains how

[i]n romantic terms, you get to illuminate God's proposal of marriage to a lost world. He is collecting the Bride of Christ What care should be taken with such a proposal! Is your life overflowing with the joy of being utterly in love with God? [A]sk God to give you a fresh excitement for the life He offers now—and the invitation to a wedding party in Heaven. (161)

As such, similar to Mally, Gresh constructs a discursive framework wherein the girl who is wholly dedicated to evangelical purity precepts will not only be blessed with the love of an earthly prince within a heterosexual marriage covenant, but she will also be granted access to "happily ever after" with her Heavenly Prince in eternity. Leslie Ludy constructs a comparable framework throughout her texts. For instance, in *The Lost Art of True Beauty* she suggests that all

girls and women have an innate and universal longing to embody the white, economically privileged, heteronormative “princess” fairy tale trope: “For some reason, the idea of becoming a princess seems to capture the intrinsic longing in every girl's heart to be fully feminine—to glow with grace, radiance, and loveliness In fact, I believe it's a God-given desire” (8). In this regard, the “princess” symbolizes the pinnacle of purity and femininity, and every girl's longing to embody this mystique is rooted in her divinely-ordained desire to spend eternity as Christ's princess-bride in Heaven.

To that end, Ludy employs Complementarian theology in *Set-Apart Femininity* to construct the relationship between earthly husbands and wives as symbolic of the romance between Christ and humanity. Similar to Gresh, she invites the reader to regard the male deity as both redeemer and lover: “We dream of capturing the heart of a noble prince with our stunning beauty,” she explains. “The entire Bible is a beautiful love story between Christ and His bride—drawing us, wooing us, and loving us the way we have always dreamed” (11). Once again, here the evangelical purity dialectic is contextualized within a fairy tale discursive framework wherein the “princess” has an innate, divinely-ordained desire to be loved, protected, and cherished by an earthly prince; however, this desire is merely a reflection of her *true* desire to be loved, protected, and cherished by Christ. Within this Complementarian paradigm, earthly men share the role of girls' “redeemer-grooms” with the deity by virtue of their shared “maleness” (*Ephesians 5:24: Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything*). Evangelical girls must thus situate their desires within this “princess-bride” discourse as they prepare for their life-long pursuit of evangelicalism's purity precepts. The selected authors accordingly go to great lengths to help the reader procure her individual salvation by comprehensively defining evangelicalism's stipulations for “authentic purity.”

Defining “Authentic” Purity

While the selected evangelical literature is primarily written to tout premarital sexual abstinence for its young female readers, it also painstakingly emphasizes how “technical virginity” does *not* guarantee that a girl is truly “pure.” Indeed, such lax standards are thoroughly problematized, and readers are instead instructed to strive toward evangelical tenets of “authentic purity” which demand intensive rituals of self-monitoring, self-governance, and self-improvement. As such, in order to determine how girls may embody the sinless perfection that is “authentic purity,” the authors first address whether girls are originally “innocent” or “sinful” when they are born, which in turn determines if purity is an innate condition that must be preserved or an ideal state that must be achieved.

In this capacity, the selected authors establish the discursive intricacies of “authentic purity” by first constructing girls as beings whose bodies, minds, and spirits are bifurcated from one another, and whose innately sinful spiritual natures must be suppressed and conquered in order to become Christ's princess-brides. As Shannon Ethridge and Stephen Arterburn concisely state it in *Every Young Woman's Battle*, “Inside every Christian two opposing forces fight each other. The Bible refers to these two forces as flesh and spirit” (115). Similarly, Elisabeth Elliot explains in *Passion and Purity* that “[t]he old English word denoting that part of us which constantly wars against the spirit is *flesh*” (92). She further contends that the reader's seemingly natural bodily desires must be “restrained, controlled, corrected, even crucified, that they might be reborn in power and purity for God” (69).

Ludy constructs a comparable discourse in *Set-Apart Femininity* wherein she contrasts the perfection that God originally designed for humanity—and particularly for women—before it was tainted by original sin: “We were created to shine with heavenly beauty, to radiate with

Christ-like feminine loveliness, and to sparkle with the lily-white purity of our Prince. We were created to be set apart for him” (29). However, she proceeds to explain how

the Bible makes it very clear that we were born into sin, not beauty. Yes, we were created in the image of God. But sin has warped and twisted all the goodness and loveliness we were originally designed to possess. As a result of sin's defilement, we no longer carry an essence of beauty from the moment of our creation—we carry an essence of sin and selfishness. (46)

When taken together, these texts stipulate that girls were originally envisioned by God to be pure and innocent beings; however, these qualities have been compromised by “sin's defilement.” Ludy addresses this issue further in *The Lost Art of True Beauty* as she considers how her two-year-old daughter's behaviour illustrates not only how children are innately impure and sinful, but also how this depravity manifests itself specifically in girls. She contends “[i]t wasn't until I had a daughter that I began to fully realize how much women are naturally wired to use their feminine wiles in clever and strategic ways” (61), and declares that “[n]o matter how cute or innocent it seems now, it's merely evidence of her flesh at work, using her femininity for selfish purposes” (62). However, while it would seem that the crux of the purity dialectic lies in the imperative for girls to suppress their innately depraved fleshly natures, such discourses are employed in convoluted ways. Much like the Victorian-era discourses discussed in Chapter 2, these evangelical authors construct contradictory discourses of the depraved “evangelical child” in conjunction with the Romantic “innocent child” as they flesh out their purity precepts.

For instance, as Gresh contends in *And the Bride Wore White*: “OK, you weren't born yesterday, so you can handle this...*you weren't born pure*. You were innocent when you were born, but Scripture says you were born sinful. So this notion that you have 'lost' your purity is nonsense. You never had it” ([original emphasis and ellipsis] 57). Here Gresh constructs a discourse wherein girls are inclined to sin due to their impure *spiritual* natures, yet they are

“innocent” since they have not yet been corrupted by insidious worldly influences. In this sense, “innocence” is an innate quality that must be preserved since it is nullified through “worldly” knowledge and experience, whereas “purity” is a state of spiritual perfection which the reader must strive to attain by suppressing the fleshly nature that predisposes her to sin. Gresh accordingly explains that “[i]nnocence is where you begin, it is possible that you have lost some of your innocence, but purity ... that's where you end up!” (original ellipsis)

Mally similarly contends that sexual knowledge in and of itself is enough to compromise a girl's innocence. She explains how many evangelical books on romance and purity “seem to be written specifically to reach young people who have already made mistakes,” and thus include details that “younger girls who are pure and protected” should not be thinking about (13). She accordingly aims to fill this gap with *Before You Meet Prince Charming*, wherein she distinguishes between two types of purity:

First, there is the *innocent*, or *clean* type. Imagine a white cloth which has never been dirty or contaminated—it is pure. This idea of 'innocence' might be the first thing that comes to our mind when we think of purity. But there is a second kind of purity—the washed kind. Something was dirty, but it's been washed, it's been cleaned. A white rag may have been used to clean up a filthy mess, but once it has been thoroughly cleaned, it is pure and spotless again. (25)

Even though this passage seemingly constructs purity as a quality that may be perpetually reclaimed through God's redemption, subsequent passages vividly argue that there is no way for a girl to *truly* return to her original, untainted state once her mind and body have been “polluted” by sexuality. For instance, Mally employs several metaphors throughout her text to emphasize how breaching the boundaries of “innocence” will leave a girl fundamentally altered and deficient. For example, she asks the reader to imagine a “beautifully detailed cake” that someone comes along and takes a piece from, and contends that “[t]he cake is ruined. It will never look

the same again” (184-185). She goes on to explain how

[o]ne of the best ways that you can do good to your future husband today, even if you don't know him yet, is by protecting your heart so that it will be completely his. Your heart is a priceless treasure that you are saving for one. How will your future husband feel if you have already given pieces of your heart to others and can offer him only a partly-eaten cake? He wants a cake baked just for him, not one with pieces missing that others have tasted first. (185)

Here Mally constructs a discourse wherein a girl's innate innocence is not only a tangible quality, but also her most valuable attribute that will leave her inexplicably lacking when it is lost. She further elucidates this discourse in the fairy tale narrative that supplements her advice; in one chapter, the unnamed princess asks her father for permission to leave the castle to go to the Spring Fair so that she may socialize with the kingdom's knights and ladies. She also voices concern that she is living an unusually sheltered life within the castle walls, at which point the king assures her that she is currently “pure and clean” and must therefore “[c]arefully ... guard thy heart and mind from evil” (30). While Mally uses “purity” in this particular instance to encapsulate the princess' original innocence that must be preserved, she goes on to forge an inextricable discursive link between this “innocence” and virginity. As such, the king warns the princess that “few treasures are so easily lost as purity—yet few so important to keep” (31), at which point he shows her a “pure white” rose bud which he asks her to open and look inside. The princess replies that “you will have to wait for it to open when it is ready. If I force it open, you will never see its beauty. ... The rose is very delicate The petals will tear, and it will never be the same.” It is confirmed that this imagery refers to the “pure” virgin being fundamentally altered with the tearing of her hymen as the king advises the princess that “[t]hou must purpose to be a white and pure rose—a bud that is still closed and one that will not give away the key to her heart until the time be right” (33).

Ludy constructs a similar discursive framework as she emphasizes the fundamental alteration and inexplicable deficiency that characterize a girl's body, mind, and spirit after her innocence has been nullified. For instance, in *Authentic Beauty* she shares what she considers to be her childhood sexual transgressions with the reader, which consisted of flirting with boys and wearing flattering clothing for the purpose of gaining male approval. Eventually she felt convicted by God to change her behaviour, and she recounts how “[s]omething deep in my heart longed to go back to being the innocent girl I had once been, yet I knew I had already crossed over the line. Even though I might still be holding on to my technical virginity, there was really no true purity in my life at all” (44). In this sense, there is a definitive “line” that separates innocence from the perpetual deficiency that taints a girl once this quality has been nullified. However, this “line” is not simply demarcated by “technical” virginity; rather it is compromised when a girl utilizes any facet of her sexual and reproductive potentials outside a heterosexual marriage covenant. To that end, Ludy employs scriptural imagery in *Set-Apart Femininity* to conceptualize a girl's sexual and reproductive potentials—which she identifies as the “Holy of Holies”—as the most valuable aspect of her being:

The Holy of Holies represents the most intimate and precious areas of the human soul and body. . . . The Holy of Holies includes such sacred things as sexual expression, sexual touch, sexual body parts, and the deepest, most personal dimensions of the heart and mind. And it is important to note that the Song of Solomon denotes *all* forms of sexual touch as part of sexual intimacy. Giving away your physical purity is not just a matter of 'crossing a line' but of sharing any part of your sexuality with someone outside of a marriage covenant. (111)

Along this trajectory, Ethridge and Arterburn also identify a girl's sexual and reproductive potentials as the “Holy of Holies,” which is “the private place within the temple reserved strictly for the most divine purposes” (177). They emphasize the importance of premarital sexual abstinence for girls because these potentials are the most valuable aspect of her being, and her

sexual activities within the marriage covenant are meant to provide a conduit for accessing the “divine.” As discussed in Chapter 2, the notion that a woman's value is determined by her sexual and reproductive potentials is fundamental to Christianity's ancient patriarchal systems of private property ownership, as well as its subcultural identity. Within this material and ideological framework, women are created by God for the explicit purpose of fulfilling men's sexual needs, and so preserving innocence and striving for purity not only mark the pinnacle of a girl's life purpose, but these actions are also necessary to earn a place among Christ's princess-brides in eternity.

This sentiment is most disconcertingly expressed by Gunn and Goyer in *Praying for Your Future Husband*. Here Gunn recounts receiving a letter from the father of one of her young fans, explaining how his daughter had very suddenly passed away. She eventually met with the girl's parents, who shared some of their daughter's journal entries with her. Inspired by the protagonist in Gunn's fictional *Christy Miller* series, this girl had developed a ritual of writing letters to her yet unknown future husband, one of which read: “Right now I feel so clean, pure, and innocent. I want to always be that way until we meet. . . . On my wedding day, I long to be in a white wedding gown, walking down the aisle to my beloved with my dad on my arm. I lift my eyes behind my veil to see my True Love” (96-97). In a rather unsettling postulation, Gunn proceeds to remark that:

In all the ways that matter, every one of [this girl's] wishes and requests for her future husband had come true—in heaven. . . . She was now face to face with her True Love. She was clothed in a pure white gown. She was able to present to her Prince of Peace her whole heart—clean, pure, and innocent. . . . Once again I saw the mystery of prayer and the bigger picture of God's unfathomable power. (97)

Here Gunn conflates the girl's longing for marriage to an earthly “prince” with an innate and divine desire to live “happily ever after” as Christ's princess-bride in eternity. This is a

precarious discursive leap, yet it is firmly rooted in Complementarian theology wherein heterosexual marriage is symbolic of Christ's relationship to humanity, and women regard, honour, and love men in the same way and for the same reasons that they regard, honour, and love the male deity. According to this logic, it is a divine blessing for this girl to have died while still “clean, pure, and innocent” and be guaranteed a place among Christ's princess-brides. In this regard, evangelical purity precepts are so fundamental to determining a girl's morality that it is preferable for her to die young than to live long enough to commit sexual transgressions that would nullify her innocence and compromise her purity.

Accordingly, authentic purity—and, by extension, individual salvation—can only be attained through the systematic suppression of a girl's innate fleshly nature, as well as the preservation of her “innocence.” It is thus unsurprising that these authors demarcate any sexual desire or experience that defies the covenant of heterosexual marriage to be the result of an insidious “spiritual attack.” In this sense, girls must fiercely guard their innocence and strive for purity through intensive rituals of self-monitoring, self-governance, and self-improvement; otherwise their individual salvation will be compromised, along with evangelical subcultural strength as a whole.

Maintaining Evangelical Subcultural Strength

Collectively, the selected authors dedicate substantial space to constructing girls' premarital sexual abstinence as a vital component of evangelical subcultural identity. This is unsurprising, given that Complementarian theology demarcates a girl's sexual and reproductive potentials to constitute the most valuable and divine aspects of her being. Moreover, this framework perpetuates Christianity's ancient patriarchal systems of private property ownership, wherein the regulation of female sexuality was a key marker of distinction from matrilineal Goddess-

worshipping nations. For example, in *Passion and Purity*, Elisabeth Elliot constructs a discourse wherein purity serves as the key defining symbol of evangelical femininity, and thus also of a girl's individual commitment to God. She accordingly reflects on her young adult years and recounts how

[t]he reason my [friends] and I believed that *singleness* was synonymous with *virginity* was not that we were college students a hundred years ago when everybody believed that. It was not that we didn't know any better. ... It was not that we were not yet liberated or even that we were just plain stupid. The reason is that we were Christians. We prized the sanctity of sex. ([original emphasis] 22-23)

In accordance with this discursive framework, a girl's commitment to the evangelical faith is principally demarcated by her commitment to sexual purity, and any influence that should tempt her to deviate from this standard is the result of a malevolent spiritual attack. Elliot contends that “[i]f there is an Enemy of Souls (and I have not the slightest doubt that there is), one thing he cannot abide is the desire for purity” (28). She further argues that humans are equipped with “two natures, lower and higher, flesh and spirit. The lower one has no claim on [Christians]. The nonbeliever denies this, listens to the promptings of the flesh. ... The Christian mortifies the flesh by submitting to the authority of Christ ... including this God-given but very dangerous sexuality” (96).

Here a strict dichotomy is constructed between “true” Christians who wholly abide by evangelical purity precepts, and “non-believers” who not only consciously subvert God's will for human sexuality, but also seek to persuade Christians to do the same. Along this trajectory, Gresh advises in *And The Bride Wore White* that “[sex] is such a good and wonderful thing that God has created *if we wait* for God's timing to enjoy it. Satan knows that one of the most beautiful things in our world is the sexual union between a husband and wife when they wait to enjoy it after their wedding. He wants to rob you of that, so he lies to you” ([original emphasis] 23). She

proceeds to warn her young readers that even well-meaning non-Christian adult authorities cannot be trusted in this regard because they have been appropriated by insidious spiritual forces: “Satan decided there were not enough teenagers sacrificing their innocence, so he came up with a grand scheme. He got their parents to think, *If everyone is doing it, and there is something awful like AIDS out there, I had better give my kids tools to do it safely.* Now he has parents and mentors saying, ‘Have safe sex!’” ([original emphasis] 24)

To that end, the authors spend considerable time addressing the deleterious influences of the secular outside world—frequently referred to as “the culture”—and prescribing how a girl may protect her innocence and strive for purity by engaging in daily rituals of self-monitoring, self-governance, and self-improvement. For instance, Gresh instructs her readers with painstaking detail how they should conduct themselves in male company in *And the Bride Wore White*. In regards to dating, she firmly stipulates that evangelical purity precepts can only be upheld if a couple refuses to spend time alone together: “If you are truly serious about guarding your innocence and living a lifestyle of purity, you won't go to an apartment, a house, or anywhere where you are truly alone...ever. So, how serious are you? Are you serious enough to stay public with your relationship?” ([original ellipsis] 85). Even while a girl and her date may be surrounded by a group of friends, it is necessary that she pay vigilant attention to her subtle bodily movements. As far as Gresh is concerned, anything “horizontal” is compromising: “Even if other friends are around and they're lounging on a beanbag together ... lying down is a bad line to cross. Lying down is very symbolic of letting your guard down. Don't do it. Stay vertical!” (86)

Gresh also goes to great pains to determine what degree of physical contact is acceptable for unmarried girls and their male companions, and even provides a full page chart of the

different “Steps to Physical Intimacy” and their implications for purity and innocence (1999: 90).⁵³ Here she advises the reader to “[b]e governed by your value. Like a priceless piece of china, the way you present yourself deserves great care. Take the time to carefully draw a firm, uncrossable line, using the suggestions on the next page.” The first “step” at the bottom of the chart involves “Looking at a guy and making eye contact,” which gradually leads to “Sexual intercourse” as the ninth and final step. Gresh encourages her reader to draw a line between the fifth step, which consists of “Kissing on the cheek or softly kissing on the lips,” and the sixth step, which is “Open-mouthed, passionate kissing” (91). However, she further cautions that any sort of physical contact that can “awaken” sexual desire should be strictly off limits, and asks her reader to consider: “What decisions do you need to make in your current dating behaviour that will protect you from going too far, too soon? Keep in mind that you must stop before you have any desire to be more physically intimate with someone. For many, this means holding hands is too far.”

This discursive framework stipulates that if a girl is *truly* serious about preserving her innocence and achieving purity, she will abstain from any behaviour that may eventually lead to the “awakening” of sexual desire—including having a boyfriend or actively pursuing male attention. In *Lies Young Women Believe*, Gresh and DeMoss identify being in a dating relationship with a guy six months or longer as “one of the top five factors that leads to early sexual activity in teenagers” (88). In the same way, Mally advises her readers in *Before You Meet Prince Charming* that they should avoid forming close friendships with boys or engaging in private correspondence with them (52-53). Furthermore, flirting with young men poses a particularly precarious moral breach:

53 See Appendix E.

Yes, of course we naturally enjoy [flirting]. . . . But think about it—it's purely selfish. It easily hinders and distracts young men in their spiritual lives and breeds desires that cannot be fulfilled right now. It is called defrauding—taking something that doesn't belong to us. As girls, we can defraud by . . . flirting with our eyes, or even just by the way we smile at a certain time or laugh at every joke. (54)

Here Mally enforces the need for girls to engage in intensive rituals of self-monitoring and self-governance while in male company by employing the materialist discourse of “defrauding.” This term incurs patriarchal connotations of property ownership, and she accordingly equates displaying an overtly friendly or playful candour towards young men with promising them a piece of property—which, in this case, consists of a girl's sexual and reproductive potentials—which they cannot have.

In the same way, she cautions the reader to vigilantly resist the “temptations” that will invariably arise as girls begin to harbour attractions toward young men. She suggests that having a crush on a guy is not necessarily problematic, but girls must diligently monitor how they respond to these feelings:

I have some suggestions of what *not* to do when you have a crush: Don't talk about him with your friends; Don't intentionally do anything that will stir up more thoughts about him; Don't tell him how you feel about him or give him any indications that you might be interested; Don't dwell on thoughts of him or let yourself get carried away with your dreamy imaginations. . . . Rather, when thoughts about young men arise (and they will), use these as a springboard to direct you to pray and delight in the Lord. (93)

Within this discursive framework it is not enough for a girl to monitor her thoughts and desires while in male company; rather, she must also exert rigorous self-control while she is alone. A small selection of the authors accordingly feel the need to clarify that self-gratification also qualifies as a moral transgression that nullifies innocence and thwarts purity. For example, in *What are You Waiting For?* Gresh admits that the Bible does not address masturbation directly (73); even so, she assures the reader that “If your eyes and mind are engaged in pornography or

mental fantasy involving a guy when you are masturbating, you are sinning.” Similarly, in *Every Young Woman's Battle* Ethridge and Arterburn instruct the reader that, in order to live a sexually pure life, she must not “entertain sexual fantasies” (29). In terms of sexual fantasies transfiguring into physical self-gratification, they postulate that, “When self-exploration becomes masturbation . . . it becomes an unhealthy habit that strips a young person of sexual innocence” (45).

However, in addition to nullifying “innocence” through fostering sexual desire, masturbation is ultimately sinful because it violates the patriarchal entitlements of a girl's future husband. Ethridge and Arterburn thus explain how:

To have an orgasm, the single woman typically entertains fantasies of people she is not married to when she masturbates. Most husbands find pleasure and satisfaction in bringing their wives to orgasm. If you regularly find sexual release through masturbation, you may rob your future husband of this pleasure by feeling the need to 'help him.' (48)

Here it is presumed that it is deleterious for a girl to acquire familiarity with her own body's sexual proclivities, as well as for her to vocalize her sexual needs to her husband if he is not meeting them of his own accord. In this sense, a girl who masturbates—or merely entertains fantasies about men to whom she is not married—fails to preserve every aspect of her sexual and reproductive potentials for her future husband's exclusive ownership and pleasure, and thereby fails to uphold evangelicalism's purity precepts.

Along this trajectory, girls must strive to purge all ungodly influences from their lives that may cause them to foster sexual desire. The authors collectively identify the products of “secular” popular culture such as films, television shows, and music as key culprits in this battle. For example, in *Set-Apart Femininity* Ludy warns her readers that authentic purity can only be achieved by abstaining from secular media such as films, since “Hollywood glorifies violence,

perversion, and evil” (72). Mally similarly stipulates in *Before You Meet Prince Charming* that “television is full of evil concepts, words, action, and pictures that can quickly pollute our minds with worldly thinking” (57). Likewise, Ethridge and Arterburn contend in *Every Young Woman's Battle* that consuming any sort of “sex-saturated” media impedes a girl's ability to preserve innocence and achieve purity. They advise readers to abstain from watching television programs such as MTV and soap operas that “make a mockery out of God's plan for sex,” and they similarly caution against reading “steamy romance novels” (119-120). The reader is further assured that engaging in such intensive rituals of self-monitoring and self-governance will inevitably lead to self-improvement and personal triumph over her depraved female nature, since “[w]hen you refuse to look at, read, or listen to these forms of sex-saturated media, you strengthen your ability to resist temptation. Allow only healthy messages to come into your mind—messages that are going to equip you to lead the kind of truly fulfilling, God-honouring life that you desire to live” (121).

It thus becomes evident that the evangelical purity dialectic is rooted in contentious and contradictory discourses. According to the selected texts, a girl's purity is contingent upon a state of original innocence that is principally defined by the absence of sexual knowledge and desire, and this “innocence” must be vigilantly protected since she is left fundamentally altered and inexplicably deficient once it is nullified. In this sense, while “technical” virginity is a non-negotiable necessity for a girl's innocence and purity, it does not in itself guarantee her individual salvation or “princess-bride” status. Rather, “authentic purity” is conceptualized as an all-encompassing state of sinless perfection that a girl can only realize through intensive rituals of self-monitoring, self-governance, and self-improvement that suppress her innately depraved “fleshly” spiritual nature, and this lofty standard must be achieved in order for a girl to access

“happily ever after” with her Heavenly Prince in eternity.

Within this discursive framework, then, “authentic purity” provides the cornerstone of a girl's individual salvation, in addition to functioning as a broader symbol of evangelical subcultural strength. In this respect, the authors construct a binary between “Christian” girls who uphold God's divine design for human sexuality, and “non-believers” who purposefully subvert it. As such, only through preserving every dimension of her sexual and reproductive potentials for the sole ownership and pleasure of her future husband may a girl realize God's divine will for her life. However, in order for girls to fully appreciate and embody evangelical precepts of “authentic purity,” they must understand how these standards are situated in God's comprehensive design for “righteous femininity”—a discourse that perpetuates Victorian notions of “true womanhood,” evangelical Complementarian theology, and Christianity's historic patriarchal systems of private property ownership.

Embracing Righteous Femininity

The selected authors collectively contend that it is necessary for girls to embrace God's divine design for “righteous femininity” in order to achieve authentic purity, and thus procure individual salvation. This model of righteous femininity is invariably contingent upon girls accepting that they must bear the consequences of Eve's Curse in accordance with a Complementarian theological paradigm. Indeed, the selected texts employ fundamentalist exegeses of the Biblical Book of Genesis, thus presuming that the events recorded therein are historically factual. Eve is thus not only regarded as the first woman on earth whose sinful transgression moulded the innately depraved nature of all womankind, but she was also created by God as an afterthought for the explicit purpose of serving Adam's needs.

Gresh establishes these core attributes of righteous femininity early on in *Secret Keeper*

as she explains how “God originally created woman to *complete...fulfil...finish* man” ([original emphasis and ellipses] 26). Furthermore, in *Lies Young Women Believe*, she and DeMoss postulate that

[i]n determining our purpose as Christian women, we must first ask: Why did God make women anyway? ... God created the woman to be a helper to the man—to complete him, to be suited to his needs. ... The woman was made from the man, made for the man, and given as God's gift to the man. Her relationship with her husband was the first and primary sphere in which she was made to live and serve. (162-163)

In accordance with this discursive framework, God created man as a subject in his own right for the sake of relating to the divine and implementing His will on earth. In contrast, woman was created for the primary purpose of serving male needs and desires, *and it is primarily through serving men that girls and women serve God and realize His divine will for their lives*. In this capacity, when girls obey and submit to men, they are by extension obeying and submitting to God. It is thus all the more treacherous that Eve was first deceived by the serpent—whom these authors presume to be Satan incarnate—and is responsible for bringing sin into the world. Gresh and DeMoss explain how

[f]or reasons we cannot fully understand, Satan chose to target a woman for his first deception in the Garden of Eden. ... It may seem like a bad rap, but facts are facts. Satan obviously targeted Eve, perhaps thinking that if he could get her to buy into his deception she would influence her husband to eat the forbidden fruit with her—which is exactly what happened. ... Some theologians believe there was something in the way Eve was created that made her more vulnerable to deception. Others suggest that Satan may have approached her first in an attempt to overthrow God's created order by getting her to take the leadership that belonged to her husband. (24)

As such, the extent of Eve's transgression cannot be reduced to her entertaining the serpent's musings and eating the forbidden fruit; rather, it is also rooted in her subversion of God's gender hierarchy by acting on her own desires without first consulting her divinely appointed, earthly male leader. Complementarian discourses of “righteous femininity”

accordingly stipulate that, because women were created primarily for male benefit, their lives must model submission and service to male authority *as humanity submits to Christ*. Gresh expresses this sentiment most concisely in *Get Lost* : “Let me be clear about this: The kingdom of God is a kingdom. It is not a democracy. There *is* a hierarchy of authority. In that kingdom, Jesus is in authority over the church. Over you and over me. In marriage, which is a picture of Christ and the church, the husband gets to lead” (184). This discursive framework accordingly attributes the qualities of lover, spouse, leader, and redeemer to God *and* earthly men by virtue of their shared “maleness,” and girls and women are thereby required to regard, serve, and submit to their husbands in the same way and for the same reasons that they regard, serve, and submit to God. Likewise, just as a girl who fails to preserve her sexual and reproductive potentials for her future husband’s exclusive ownership fails to realize God's ultimate purpose for her life, a girl who deviates from this Complementarian model of righteous femininity *de facto* rebels against God Himself.

It is unsurprising that Gresh's Complementarian discourses of righteous femininity are closely echoed by the other selected authors. Ludy argues in *Set-Apart Femininity* that enacting God's ideal model for femininity ultimately requires “letting go of all preoccupation with self: our comfort, our pleasure, our agenda, our popularity, our ability to gain the world's approval, even our own dreams and desires” (34). She further elucidates this discourse in *The Lost Art of True Beauty* as she argues that “[t]rue feminine beauty is the natural by-product of a young woman who has emptied herself, given up her own life, and allowed God's Spirit complete access to every dimension of her inner and outer life” (23). In this sense, righteously feminine girls strive to embody literal selflessness by abandoning any desires and any sense of identity apart from the divine and earthly male authorities in their lives.

These discourses of righteous femininity closely reflect Victorian ideologies of “true womanhood.” This relationship becomes vividly apparent as Ludy discusses the deleterious extent to which Christian girls have deviated from God's design for “traditional” femininity. In a particularly revealing passage wherein it is presumed that all young women of yesteryear conducted themselves and were treated with the same regard as members of the white gentry, she contends:

Once upon a time, nearly every woman was trained in the art of gracious living. She knew how to exemplify perfect etiquette in every situation. She knew how to dress and carry herself with dignity. She knew how to speak eloquently in conversation. She knew how to excel in hospitality, gift-giving, and community service. She knew how to sit up straight and listen intently when someone spoke to her. She knew how to smile and say hello to strangers. She knew how to stay focused on a task without becoming distracted by a thousand other things. (2010: 43)

Most tellingly, Ludy proceeds to recount how her husband gave her “a very old book on young women's etiquette” before they married, and confesses that “I found myself wishing I could return to a more old-fashioned way of living; a time when people actually treated each other with dignity and respect; a time when young women were refined and gracious in all aspects of their lives” (44).

Here Ludy employs a highly racialized and classist—not to mention mythical—Victorian metanarrative of “true womanhood” wherein all girls had access to the same status and privileges as those of the white upper and middle classes. It is telling that she waxes nostalgic for a time when women and girls were regarded as the legal property of their husbands and fathers, and even the most privileged women were subject to legal discrimination and abuse. These discourses of “righteous femininity” thereby naturalize a universal history of “true womanhood” that never really “was,” just as they delegitimize the various ways that girls and women of different ethnicities and class backgrounds embody, perform, and negotiate femininity.

Ludy, however, spares no critique of girls who do not approximate her mythical ideal of “true womanhood.” She laments how, while growing up in church, she had seen “very few examples of women who possessed the genuine grace, poise, elegance, and charm I had longed for in my childhood” (2010: 16). Not only does she express her dismay at girls' collective inability to adorn themselves in appropriately feminine—but not sexual—clothing, but she also laments their failure to model the “gentle, quiet, selfless spirit” (45) that righteous femininity necessitates. She recounts with particular distaste an experience she had in a coffee shop as she watched a young woman engage in conversation with a male acquaintance:

The girl is attractive and her personality is outgoing and funny, but there is something in the way she carries herself that is sadly unfeminine. On this particular day, she was speaking and laughing so loudly that everyone in the coffee shop could hear her entire conversation. She was sharing deeply personal things, such as her recent struggle with overeating and insecurities about her body image. It made me feel awkward listening to her go on and on about herself and her personal struggles with a casual male acquaintance. Nothing appeared to be sacred in her life She sat haphazardly in her chair, sloppily slurping her coffee, and dangling her legs off her stool in a very unladylike way. (19)

Luckily for the reader, and much like the Victorian guidance manuals discussed in Chapter 2, Ludy goes to great lengths to prescribe the self-monitoring, self-governing, and self-improving behaviours that girls must perform in order to achieve her standards of righteous femininity. These include chewing with one's mouth closed, because “[y]ou won't bring God glory if you display sloppy, disgusting habits while eating the food He has provided for you” (2010: 49-50), as well as “[practising] good posture by always keeping your back straight and crossing your legs at the ankle” (85). She concludes her discussion by emphasizing that “[s]ocial grace is not merely a bonus or optional quality for a set-apart young woman. It's an outflow of a thriving spiritual life.”

Within this discursive framework, then, a girl's commitment to Complementarian

precepts of “righteous femininity” is constructed as a non-negotiable cornerstone of her individual salvation, in addition to being a larger symbol of evangelical subcultural strength. To that end, girls must understand that these tenets of “true womanhood” are not only biologically innate and universally accessible, but also divine characteristics that *distinguish* women from men in God's complementary designs for compulsory heterosexuality and the gender binary.

Embodying Gender Differences

The selected texts collectively construct a Complementarian discursive framework wherein gender differences between men and women are biologically innate and divinely-ordained. In this sense, such universal differences serve as definitive proof that God purposefully created girls with the monolithic life purpose of “submitting” to men within the covenant of heterosexual marriage, and any deviation from this role is thus a sinful transgression. To that end, Elliot establishes a strict gender binary in *Passion and Purity* as she contends that “[m]ore and more biological evidence is turning up which indicates that many of the behavioural differences between the sexes are determined by hormones” (109). While she does not provide any sources to support this claim, Elliot proceeds to construct these innate sexual differences as not only universal, but also intrinsically righteous, since God designed heterosexual marriage to mirror His relationship with humanity. She thus explains how “[m]ales, as the physical design alone would show, are made to be initiators. Females are made to be receptors, responders. It was not arbitrarily that God called Himself Israel's bridegroom and Israel His bride, nor Christ the Head and the Church the Body and the Bride” (110). She goes on to lament women's collective unwillingness to accept their subservient role, which has resulted in numerous social ills such as “[h]omosexuality, teenage pregnancy, divorce, abortion, the new 'house-husband' role, new translations of the Bible to eliminate 'sexist' language. ... The glory of our sexuality, in short, is

tarnished” (110-111).

Similarly, Ethridge and Arterburn dedicate considerable space to constructing “righteous femininity” along a strict gender binary in *Every Young Woman's Battle*. They explain how

God gave men the incredible responsibility of being the progenitors of the human race. To equip man for such an enormous task, God placed in him exactly what he would need in order to fulfil his responsibility: the desire to be physically intimate and experience pleasure. ... [God] gave [Eve], and all females, the responsibility of being the nurturers of the human race, and He placed in her exactly what she would need to fulfil that responsibility: the desire to be emotionally intimate. A woman is made to cradle, caress, converse with, and care for the object of her affection. (18-19)

Not only does this passage narrowly define men as the progenitors of the human race when women literally conceive and give birth to children, but it employs tiresome gender stereotypes to instruct the reader how “normal” girls think, feel, and act, thereby invalidating any “masculine” traits they may have—including physical sexual urges that are not motivated by a desire to forge emotional intimacy. Within this discursive framework, men are endowed with intense physical desires for sex because it is conducive to their divine life purpose, and the authors accordingly prescribe the “healthy” sexual behaviours of young men and women in this capacity:

In addition, a male can enjoy the act of sex without committing his heart or bonding spiritually with the object of his physical desire. ... A healthy young female, on the other hand, usually gives her body only to someone she thinks of night and day and with whom her heart and spirit have connected (unless there is dysfunctional or addictive behaviour involved). (20)

The implications of this binary are essentially twofold. First, any girl who experiences sexual desire and acts upon these desires for the sole sake of experiencing physical pleasure is constructed as pathological because “healthy females” only pursue sex for the purpose of forging emotional connections. Second, girls are implicated as guardians of purity for both themselves *and* the young men in their lives because it is “normal” and thereby expected that “healthy

males” will pursue sex voraciously and indiscriminately in accordance with their divinely-ordained physical urges. To that end, Gresh dedicates considerable space throughout her texts to discussing these “divine” differences between men and women, and the responsibilities that girls consequently have to act as universal guardians of purity. In *And The Bride Wore White*, for instance, she discusses the importance of “respecting the great weakness God has created in guys. They are made to physically yearn for our bodies. That is not to say that you might not experience some of the same yearning for their bodies, but it is usually far more consuming for men” (83).

As such, any girl who concedes to the temptations of premarital sex is culpable for her own sin as well as for that of her male partner; she does not have the same potent physical desires to contend with, and thereby has no divinely-ordained “weakness” to blame for her transgression. In this capacity, a key cornerstone of “righteous femininity” requires girls to acknowledge their lack of sexual desire—or at the very least understand that any physical desire they may experience cannot compare with the struggle that men's robust sexual appetites pose—and to accept responsibility for guarding male purity in addition to their own. For this reason it is imperative for girls and women to internalize and perform evangelical standards of “modesty.”

Long before evangelical prescriptions for “modest” dress would become relevant in regulating my pubescent female body, I was taught to evaluate women's sexual morality—and by extension their commitment to Christianity—based on the amount of skin they revealed in their day-to-day clothing choices (1 Timothy 2:9: the women should dress themselves modestly and decently in suitable clothing). It thus became clear to my prepubescent self that “Christian” girls and women did not wear short skirts or tops that reveal cleavage and midriffs, and my mother did her

best to instil this modesty mandate in her young daughters by vigilantly monitoring the “secular” popular culture that we consumed. She would particularly draw our attention to women who were dressed “inappropriately” on the television shows we watched each day, at which point she would instruct my older sister to change the channel. This task would only become more cumbersome when Ashley and I discovered the illicit pleasure of “secular” music video channels as we entered adolescence.

My mother had successfully maintained a Christian-only music regimen in our home until I was eleven. Until this time, my sisters and I listened to whatever she happened to play on our family's CD player—Christian “rock” artists such as Newsboys, D.C. Talk, and Michael W. Smith—as well as to her habitual warnings about the dangers of secular music. This changed, however, when my father decided to expand our monthly cable package, at which point my older sister began frequenting the country music video channel that was suddenly available. It did not take long for Ashley to share her discovery with me, and soon enough I was crouched in front of our basement television, the volume on low, preparing to enter the mysterious realm of secular music.

It is likely coincidental that the music video for Love Gets Me Every Time,⁵⁴ the debut hit single from Shania Twain's 1997 album Come On Over, was the first to appear. I remember the dissonance that I felt as I drank in the visual and aural facets of the experience; I was transfixed by the catchy riffs of the music and the sultry crooning of her voice. But these elements were essentially secondary to the video's aesthetics—because of her breasts. Her breasts were everywhere. Not only was their impressive size accentuated by her numerous clothing ensembles throughout the three-minute video, but they seemed to be prominently featured in the centre of

54 Readers who are not familiar with the late-1990s country music scene can view this video on YouTube.

every shot. It was intoxicating and disorienting, and in the back of my mind I could only imagine what my mother would say if she saw me watching this overtly immodest display. However, I ignored the condemnation of my internalized moral compass and continued to drink it all in—and eventually a cassette tape copy of Come On Over would become my first secular music purchase.

It did not take long for my mother to catch wind of her daughters' descent into the realm of secular music, and to her credit she did not ban our music video viewing in its entirety. However, she did express her distaste for how a number of our beloved female country singers dressed, not to mention the sexually suggestive nature of their song lyrics. If she did not ban a particular song, she would at least ask us to consider how God would feel about us filling our minds with such deplorable content. These comments would often result in some brief moral introspection on our parts; however, they usually only motivated us to change the channel if we heard our mother coming downstairs rather than completely shun the artist in question. It never occurred to me that there was no similar impetus to change the channel as we watched our beloved male country artists perform, nor did I consider the lack of moral framework for evaluating the righteousness of their plaid shirt and blue jean-clad bodies.

Interestingly, while my prepubescent self had internalized evangelical modesty precepts in evaluating the morality of other girls and women, these tenets would ultimately have little relevance in my own clothing choices throughout my teenaged years. As an adolescent I usually hid my stocky figure behind baggy jeans and sweaters that were always two sizes too big due to a combination of factors, including our modest family income that saw me mostly live in my older sister's hand-me-downs; the fact that I had no “style sense” to speak of; and my insecurities about the seeming imperfections embodied in my short legs and protruding belly. Mostly,

however, I was too preoccupied with maintaining my honours grade average and working my part-time job to care much about my day-to-day appearance. I suppose I can find some consolation in knowing that, for all the grief that my teenaged “promiscuity” caused my mother, at least I did not advertise my sexual transgressions to the world by dressing the part.

The selected texts collectively perpetuate a “modesty” mandate that is essential for girls to achieve authentic purity and righteous femininity. Interestingly, this discursive framework stands in blatant contrast to the Victorian-era conduct manuals discussed in Chapter 2. While the reviewed nineteenth-century guidance literature advises its readers to model “modesty” by abstaining from extravagant purchases and giving their disposable income to those in need, contemporary evangelical purity literature conceptualizes feminine modesty as a meticulous fusion of Western fashion consumption with the imperative to conceal the sexualized female body. Rather than strive for “modesty” for the benefit society’s poor and downtrodden, the selected authors contend that this mandate is necessary to ensure that girls do not “defraud” their “brothers in Christ.”

Gresh accordingly dedicates considerable space throughout her texts to addressing the issue of modesty. In *And the Bride Wore White* she includes a brief contribution by Joshua Harris⁵⁵ which provides a “real” male perspective on the issue:

[G]irls have a responsibility to their brothers in Christ to help guard their purity. They have a responsibility to the guy. The way you dress makes a huge difference in how a guy views you and how he guards his heart. You have no idea how difficult it is for a guy to look at you with purity in his heart when you are dressed immodestly. ... [Y]ou run the risk of really defrauding your Christian brother if you reach for the immodest outfit.
(86)

⁵⁵ Joshua Harris is the infamous author of *I Kissed Dating Goodbye* (1997, 2003) and is largely known for popularizing the “courting” movement among contemporary evangelical teens.

Here the materialist discourse of “defrauding” once again connotes the patriarchal conceptualization of women's sexual and reproductive potentials as property, and a girl who exposes these “divine” parts of herself conveys false promises of ownership to the men around her. Inherent to this discourse is the assumption that the sight of any girl's body—by sheer virtue of being female—has the potential to send men into an unstoppable bout of lust. To that end, Gresh explains in *Secret Keeper* how:

If you're a young woman, you were born with the seed of this power planted firmly within you. Through the years God has tenderly watched that seed grow. Some call it sexuality, but even men possess that. This power is unique to girls. Some might call it beauty, but that would limit it to the visual. This power is multidimensional. The power is your allure. (10)

This presumption of universal female “allure” ultimately overlooks the patriarchal standards that privilege—and consequently devalue—particular female bodies based on race, economic class, size, dis/ability, gender conformity, and age. Furthermore, it takes for granted a universal heterosexual male gaze, and Gresh in particular provides painstaking prescriptions for navigating the evangelical modesty mandate with this gaze in mind. She establishes a list of “Truth or Bare Fashion Tests”⁵⁶ which she adamantly proclaims are not “a set of legalistic rules. Instead, we wanted to create something to help you start the thinking process and let your heart be moulded into modesty” (2002: 36). These include the “Raise and Praise,” wherein girls are instructed to raise their hands above their heads as if giving praise to God in order to see if their midriffs are visible (38), as well as “Mirror Image,” wherein they are advised to sit cross-legged in front of a mirror to see if their shorts or skirts are an inappropriate length. Gresh particularly

⁵⁶ See Appendix F.

enforces the imperative to internalize the male gaze in this example by explaining “If you really want to up the ante, imagine that mirror is your dear ol' grandpa!” (40) She then encourages her readers to conduct an exhaustive inventory of their wardrobe and divide every article of clothing into three piles—a “cheap thrills” pile to throw away, a “power” pile that “hides the secrets of your alluring body in a fashionable and comfortable manner,” and an ambiguous “fuzzy friend” pile that requires final approval from a trusted friend (67-68).

Ethridge and Arterburn similarly instruct girls to internalize the universal heterosexual male gaze and act as guardians of male purity in *Every Young Woman's Battle*. “When guys see something sexually stimulating, such as a young woman dressed immodestly, the natural tendency is to lust after her and entertain thoughts of becoming sexual with her,” they explain. “It doesn't matter whether the guy is Christian or not. . . . If you want to avoid causing your brothers to stumble and fall, you'll dress modestly” (34). They further advise that “As you are getting dressed each morning, try evaluating what you intend to wear. Ask yourself: Would wearing this outfit be a loving expression, not causing my brothers to stumble and fall?” (93)

Interestingly, Ludy takes a more demanding approach in *The Lost Art of True Beauty*, as she contends that feminine modesty must not only conceal the alluring female body, but also enhance a girl's beauty, since it is her God-ordained duty to provide aesthetic appeal to the world. She emphasizes how girls invariably communicate “a message” about their morality and values through their clothing choices, and explains how they must give critical consideration to their appearance each day:

The way we dress sends a message to those around us, whether we mean to or not. A girl who flaunts her body with short, tight outfits sends the message that she wants guys to notice her. A girl who dresses like a slob sends the message that she does not care enough about those around her to give any thought to her appearance. . . . And a girl who dresses with modest, feminine, dignified style sends the message that she truly values those around her and wants to reflect the beauty of Christ in her appearance. (73)

Ludy also employs a materialist discourse to express how dressing immodestly not only compromises the purity of a girl's brothers in Christ, but also violates the exclusive ownership rights that her future husband should have over her sexual and reproductive potentials. She accordingly posits that:

Upper chest, thighs, stomach—these might seem like harmless areas to show off, but if you were married and wanted to stay that way, you wouldn't allow another guy to touch you in any of those places. So why would you allow another guy to have the privilege of looking at what was meant for your husband's pleasure alone? (83)

On the whole, this evangelical modesty mandate is not only contentious because it instructs girls to act as universal guardians of purity by concealing their mythical-universal “allure” from the ubiquitous heterosexual male gaze, but also because it fails to acknowledge the sexual desires that girls themselves may possess for female bodies. To that end, while the majority of the selected texts wholly ignore the possibility of girls' same-sex desire, it is critical to explore the brief discussions about the “struggle” of lesbianism that are taken up by several authors.

It is difficult to discern when I became cognisant of how significant the issue of “homosexuality” was to my evangelical subculture; however, I do recall an early sense of guilt that I was not as disturbed by the prospect of same-sex relationships as I seemingly should have been. Perhaps my earliest realization came when my eleven-year-old self was reading one of my mother's issues of James Dobson's Focus on the Family magazine.⁵⁷ Ellen Degeneres had recently “come out” on

⁵⁷ I have tried to locate the date and authorial credit for this article, but to no avail. However, based on the subject matter and the fact that Degeneres “came out” in 1997 during the fourth season of her sitcom, it was likely published in the same year.

her popular television sitcom, and the particular article I was reading featured an interview with a young Christian woman who suddenly became caught in the crossfire of this issue while attending a taping of Oprah Winfrey's talk show. According to the article, Winfrey had explained before the episode began that she was going to appear as Degeneres' therapist on the latter's program, and the audience members were asked to offer their opinions about Winfrey's decision to support Degeneres.

While most of the audience members voiced their support for both women, this interviewee felt convicted by God to tell the “truth” about the Biblical view on “homosexuality.” The interviewee was asked if she would be willing to share her opinions on camera while the episode was recorded, and she agreed. As the article recounted, this young woman was criticized by Winfrey for her homophobic views; however, because she had allowed herself to be “persecuted” for the Body of Christ, the article honoured this young woman as a shining example of “true” Christianity in a world that was becoming increasingly depraved. Intent as ever to embody “true” Christianity and procure my salvation, I tried to internalize the evangelical persecution complex that this article endorsed (Matthew 5:10: Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven)—which essentially reasons that, the more “the secular world” disagrees with a Christian, the more she can be certain that she is doing what is “right” (Matthew 5:12: Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you). While I could not bring myself to share this article's virulent contempt for Degeneres' “homosexual” identity, I decided to follow its advice to boycott Winfrey's program—it seemed like the least I could do considering she had launched an all-out war against Christianity.

My guilt for not doing more in the evangelical battle to protect God-ordained

heterosexuality resurfaced later that year during one of my Sunday School classes. The teacher raised the issue of “homosexuality,” perhaps in light of the attention that it had garnered following Degeneres' historic “coming out.” Sharon,⁵⁸ the youngest daughter of one of the church's pastors, decided to contribute by telling the class about a “homosexual activist” who had come to her school to give an educational talk during an assembly.

“He was telling people that they shouldn't be ashamed if they are gay,” she explained, “and that it is okay for them to have sex as long as they use protection. I was disgusted.” Our Sunday School teacher nodded his approval and proceeded to discuss how we as Christians needed to defend Jesus by refusing to tolerate “worldly” and “perverted” distortions of human sexuality. I remember averting my eyes and feeling deeply convicted that I did not share this extreme distaste for the people who committed “homosexual” transgressions. The fact that I could not muster anything close to a theological commitment on this issue filled me with feelings of cowardice and inadequacy; after all, as evangelicals it was our duty to share the truths of the Bible with everyone we meet (Matthew 10:33: But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven).

I would continue to carry this dissonance toward the issue of “homosexuality” into early adulthood. I never actively opposed the existence of LGBTQT communities in conversations with evangelicals, but I never actively supported them, either—in much the same way that I continued to engage in premarital sex with my boyfriends, but never spoke out against evangelical purity doctrines in the company of those who advocated for them. In spite of the ambivalence I had accrued as the “truths” of the Bible increasingly contradicted the realities of my daily life—and what seemingly comprised “God's will” increasingly contradicted the “spiritual fruits” of

⁵⁸ Name has been changed to guarantee anonymity.

kindness, patience, and love—I still believed that these were my sins, and that I was wilfully defying iron-clad Biblical commands (1 Corinthians 6:9: Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality). Even now I wish I could proclaim that I am confident enough to boldly challenge fundamentalist doctrines in the presence of evangelical family members and friends—but that would be a lie, and liars do not inherit the kingdom of God, either.

The “Struggle” of Lesbianism

Since the cornerstone of Complementarian “righteous femininity” compels girls to accept their divinely ordained purpose of submitting to and pleasing men, it is unsurprising that all but two of the selected texts remain silent on the possibility of girls' same-sex desire. It is perhaps also unsurprising that the two texts in question address the “struggle” of lesbianism within a discursive framework of “pathological” femininity. For instance, in *What Are You Waiting For?* Gresh contextualizes the issue of same-sex desire through the anecdotal experiences of Rachel, a fellow evangelical whom the author met through her purity ministry. Gresh relays one of Rachel's experiences as a young girl when a group of boys would not allow her to join them as they played with building blocks, at which point Rachel decided that life would be better if she were a boy (59). Gresh further explains how Rachel was raised in a Christian home but still “felt like a boy trapped in a girl's body,” and as she entered her teenaged years she would “manipulate friendships with women who would become very emotionally dependent” on her (60). However, a few years ago Rachel shared her experiences with her evangelical subculture and was able to “find the help she needed in community,” and Gresh happily reports that Rachel is now “in

recovery.” She is also encouraged by Rachel’s “newfound comfort with fashion and makeup” and “the crush she has on a guy, who she’s not quite sure is crushing back.”

Here Gresh contextualizes Rachel’s same-sex desire through a paradigm of compulsory heterosexuality, wherein biological femaleness is conflated with feminine gender expression, which in turn necessitates sexual desire for men. Within this discursive framework a girl’s desire for other girls can only be fathomed through a paradigm of pathological femininity, wherein same-sex desire provides a means for achieving the superior status that accompanies gendered masculinity. It is readily apparent that this paradigm overlooks the experiences of femme lesbian, bisexual, and queer girls and women, as well as the experiences of transgendered and gender non-conforming individuals who identify as masculine *and* desire men. Furthermore, it narrowly stipulates that same-sex desire is a distortion of God-ordained femininity and must thereby be regarded as a “spiritual struggle.”

For her part, Gresh takes a seemingly compassionate approach to addressing this issue, as she confesses that “[t]he first thing I want to say to you if you are struggling with lesbianism is this: I’m so sorry for the way the church has made you feel. Your sin, if you are acting on your temptation, is not a ‘worse’ sin. It is a different sin. And it does not exclude you from your position as a member of the family of Christ” (2011: 62). However, she swiftly proceeds to establish a binary between queerness and Christianity, as she contends that “I have wonderful news. . . . You are not gay. You are a daughter of Christ. Struggling with same-sex attraction is a symptom of life lived in a fallen world. Stop labelling yourself” (64). To that end, while *struggling* with same-sex desire does not de facto exclude a girl from becoming Christ’s princess-bride, *affirming* her same-sex desire in any capacity unquestionably does. The ultimate “solution” that Gresh poses for the “problem” of lesbianism is to embrace God-ordained

righteous femininity. Referring again to Rachel's story, Gresh explains how her struggle with same-sex desire began with "the lie that her life would be better if she were a man. To uproot that lie, she began to feast on scriptures that revealed how good it is to be a girl" (65).

An inextricable discursive link is thereby forged between biological sex, gender identity, and sexual desire within this Complementarian paradigm of compulsory heterosexuality. Ethridge and Arterburn adhere to a similar framework in *Every Young Woman's Battle*. They first address the issue of same-sex desire through a discourse of "experimentation" wherein girls think it is "trendy" to "fool around" with other girls (174-175). Once again, there is no legitimation of same-sex desire in this text; there is only an acknowledgement that girls should not appease the "secular world" by engaging in behaviours from which they could just as easily abstain. However, they address the issue with more depth in the text's afterword. Here they contend that girls' "homosexual desires" are rooted in dysfunctional family relationships, such as experiences of sexual abuse or neglect by a father, which motivate them to turn to other girls or women for love because they do not trust men (219). Again, same-sex desire can only be conceptualized as a symptom of pathological femininity, as the authors purport that people are not "born gay," and that "hundreds of gay and lesbian individuals have left their homosexual lifestyles and found wholeness in their newfound heterosexuality" (220). The authors thereby encourage any reader who may "struggle" with lesbianism to "seek counselling."

While these conclusions about girls' same-sex desires are unsurprising given the Complementarian framework in which the selected authors operate, these discourses are no less problematic for readers who desire other girls and women, as well as for transgender and gender non-conforming readers. Such conclusions further perpetuate "righteous femininity" as a patriarchal discourse wherein girls' primary purpose in life is to appease and submit to men.

Accordingly, in order for girls to wholly internalize and perform evangelical precepts of authentic purity and righteous femininity for the purpose of living “happily ever after” as Christ’s princess-brides, they must consciously honour Christianity’s historical patriarchal values.

Honouring Patriarchy

The selected authors purport that Christ’s princess-brides must honour patriarchy by accepting that they have been created “for men,” rather than as subjects in their own right. Furthermore, only by preserving their sexual and reproductive potentials for their husbands’ exclusive ownership can they access intimacy with God Himself. This discursive framework perpetuates the historically patriarchal values which demarcate girls and women as the property of their fathers until they are “passed on” to become the property of their husbands—a socioeconomic arrangement that the authors seemingly cannot help but pine for as they guide readers in their quest for authentic purity and righteous femininity.

For instance, in *Before You Meet Prince Charming*, Mally clarifies that “God made us to be helpers to our husbands,” (159) and that “[w]hen you get married, your goal becomes to please your husband. He is your head, your leader, and your authority” (74). She further explains how these patriarchal standards have been corrupted by modern “secular” dating and marriage practices, and contends that dating “is actually a new thing—it is not the process that has been used throughout most of history. It is easy to allow ourselves to become comfortable with a system simply because we have grown up with it and are familiar with it. This is dangerous” (34). A number of the selected authors similarly wax nostalgic over “Biblical” courting and marriage rituals, and particularly over the standards of purity they demanded. Elliot explains in *Passion and Purity* how “[a] good portion of the human race has had arranged marriages, and the rate of success of that kind seems to have been far higher than our do-it-yourself kind” (128).

She further laments that “[t]here is not much likelihood that our society will ever consent to arranged marriages. We are stuck with our ill-defined system.”

Within this fundamentalist discursive framework the “new” dating system is constructed as de facto unrighteous because there is no “Biblical” precedent for it, even though there is very little “Biblical” precedent for many other contemporary socioeconomic structures and practices. Gresh similarly mourns the loss of ancient “Biblical” marriage rituals wherein women and girls were regarded as the property of their fathers and husbands. In *And the Bride Wore White* she explains how

[i]n Bible times, a bride and groom were presented with white linens for their wedding night. They were expected to sleep on them, and the bride was expected to bleed on them as proof of her virginity. You see, God created you and me with a protective membrane, the hymen, which *in most cases* is broken the first time we have intercourse. When it breaks, a woman's blood spills over her husband. Your sexual union is a blood covenant between you, your husband, and God. ... God asks us to prize our virginity and hold it up as our only blood covenant to Him. ([original emphasis] 129)

As such, by preserving her sexual and reproductive potentials for the sole ownership of her husband within a heterosexual marriage covenant, a girl achieves her divine life purpose. Furthermore, only in doing so can she by extension access true intimacy with God and become his “princess-bride”—thus, on her wedding night the virgin woman enters into a blood covenant not only with her husband, but also with God Himself. To that end, Gresh goes even further to describe the “Biblical” marriage ritual as a transfer of property from a girl's father to her husband, and explains how this “romantic” process directly reflects Christ's relationship to humanity:

When a young Jewish man had his eye on a bright-eyed Jewish girl, he went with his father to her father. At that meeting, the groom-to-be was expected to present some sort of payment for the bride. A cow or two, some currency of the day, or a promise of labour were some sort of the forms of payment. ... I know you must see how romantic this was, but do you see the portrait? Matthew 25:1-13 compares the way that the church waits for

Christ to the way a virgin faithfully waits for her husband. (130-131)

Once again, this Complementarian discursive framework contends that earthly men and the deity jointly function as women's spouses, authorities, and redeemers by virtue of their shared “maleness.” That it is natural and righteous for girls and women to regard and submit to men in the same way and for the same reasons they regard and submit to God is perhaps most poignantly expressed by Gresh in *Get Lost*, wherein she postulates that “[a] reluctant lover does not receive gifts well. But an enthusiastic lover is silly with excitement, seeing the gift as a sign of love. So why do we try to separate our worship of God from the hope of a husband?” (191). To elucidate this point, she proceeds to recount one of her friends' experiences while singing in church. This woman had shared with Gresh how, while singing particular worship songs, she felt like some of the words and concepts blurred between her feelings toward “the Lord” and her feelings toward her husband. The woman confessed that “I immediately tried to 'pull myself back,' but instead confessed to the Lord, 'I don't know if I'm singing about You or him.' I believe I heard [God] say, 'As it should be’”—a resolution that Gresh wholeheartedly condones (192).

However, such Complementarian imagery is ultimately disrupted by a vital discursive disconnect. Since girls are instructed to esteem God and earthly men with equal dedication and submission, these earthly “redeemer-grooms” should theoretically embody the same divine standards of perfection that Christ does. For their part, the authors contend that “true” Christian men will do just this, if only girls are willing to wait patiently for them and preserve their sexual and reproductive potentials in the meantime. “The guy who is 'the one' will protect your purity, not try to take it from you,” Gresh contends in *What Are You Waiting For?* (138). Similarly, Ludy explains in *Set Apart Femininity* that “[i]f you desire a beautiful, lasting, God-written love story, *hold out for a guy who values the things your heavenly Prince values*” ([original emphasis] 61).

Yet these claims stand in stark contrast to the previously established discursive framework of divine masculinity wherein men—even “Christian” men—are ordained with innate sexual “weaknesses” and a ubiquitous tendency to pursue extramarital sex indiscriminately. It is thereby contradictory to presume that “true” Christian men should be regarded as “redeemer-grooms” who will model Godly perfection by never seeking to access a girl's sexual and reproductive potentials before marriage. The crux of this discursive disconnect lies in the authors' collective contention that men's objectifying treatment of girls and women is a product of sinful secular society, rather than being symptomatic of deeply embedded patriarchal values that have paved Christianity's material and ideological foundations.

For as long as my mother had discussed the importance of sexual purity with her daughters, she had also emphasized the importance of dating only “Christian” young men. This was also the general consensus among the adult authorities who constituted my evangelical subculture; my church's pastors and Sunday School teachers frequently discussed how girls should “hold out” for “true” Christian guys, and that if we succeeded in doing so we would have a happy and fruitful marriage. How could I argue with this? The sexual purity literature I had read throughout the years provided numerous personal testimonies highlighting the deleterious direction that girls' lives would take when they became romantically involved with “non-believers.” It seemed inevitable that any girl who ventured down this treacherous path would not only end up compromising her purity, but would ultimately also “fall away” from the Christian faith. Furthermore, dating—let alone marrying—a non-believer was a sin (2 Corinthians 6:14: Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness?).

These accounts also stood in stark contrast to the wonderful experiences promised to girls who dated “Christian” guys. We were assured that these young men would valiantly guard the emotional, sexual, and religious integrity of the girls they dated. A girl of fourteen like myself who had never dated certainly had no evidence to contradict these claims—that is, except for two key observations I had made throughout the years that none of these adult authorities addressed. The first of these was the disparate ratio of “Christian” girls to “Christian” guys in my church, which was roughly 4:1; the second was that these sparsely available “Christian” guys were no more “Godly” or “pure” than the abundance of “non-believing” young men who populated my public high school.

It was quite the dilemma. Since my painfully awkward and introverted self was never embraced by my church youth group, I mostly accrued these observations from a distance, as well as from second-hand accounts that my older sister passed along. However, there was a handful of occasions when, against my will but at my mother's insistence, I accompanied Ashley to the church's weekly youth social events. During these occasions it became apparent to me that Brian⁵⁹—who played guitar in our church's worship band—and Cody⁶⁰—the only son of our church's lead pastor—were the most popular young men in the group. Admittedly, this may not have been a terribly impressive feat given that there were an additional two or so boys who frequented these events amid a sea of roughly fifteen girls. It also became clear that both of these young men had amassed an impressive slew of dating conquests from this pool of congregants throughout their teenaged years. This was something I could never quite rectify, since my brief interpersonal encounters with these crude and blemish-prone boys revealed them to be far from

⁵⁹ Name has been changed to guarantee anonymity.

⁶⁰ Name has been changed to guarantee anonymity.

“Christ-like.”

The issue of evangelical Christianity becoming increasingly “feminized” throughout the past few decades has been taken up by prominent subcultural leaders⁶¹ in recent years; however, I became aware of the disparate nature of evangelicalism's gender “supply and demand” in my early teens. It seemed that I was surrounded by a legion of girls who had been taught about the importance of dating only young men who were “believers”—so much so that any boy who claimed to be a Christian and attended church was such a novelty that they were de facto considered “a catch,” regardless of their physical appearance and the extent to which they actually modelled “Godly” values. By the time I had reached the mother-proclaimed legal dating age of sixteen, this disparity became increasingly evident; however, rather than resign myself to “holding out” for the mythical human male embodiment of Christ-like perfection, I opted to take my chances in the “secular” dating pool.

It is difficult to determine whether I would have clung tighter to my “purity”—perhaps even preserving it until marriage—had I resolved to follow the advice of adult authorities and set my sights on one of the few church-going boys available to me. Based on the number of dating conquests that Brian and Cody amassed in my home church, I would assume not—although part of me will also hedge a guess that each of these boys would manage to settle down with a “pure” Christian woman when they decided they were ready for marriage. More importantly, however, my sixteen-year-old self was always cognizant that I had not conceded to anyone's “sinful” influences when I “gave in” to sexual temptation. Rather, it was my own physical urges, desires, and curiosities that I had acted upon (Proverbs 25:28: Like a city whose walls are broken

⁶¹ Fundamentalist-reformed pastor Mark Driscoll (formerly of Mars Hill Church in Washington) has gained notoriety for his take on this issue and has made it an institutional mandate to recruit young male congregants. For further reading on this issue, see *Women and Revivalism in the West* (Franks 90-94).

through is a person who lacks self-control), *which unravelled yet another “fact” that I had learned from Dannah Gresh—that my innermost desires were merely for male affirmation and companionship, and that it was the man's sexual pursuits that I would have to guard myself against. I was never quite prepared for the challenge that my own impulses would pose. Of course, Gresh could certainly argue that it was my longing for acceptance and my fear of rejection that motivated my sixteen-year-old self to definitively “give” my virginity to Eric in an awkward bout of intercourse, but I am more inclined to believe that it was my longing for orgasms.*

Perhaps no author demonstrates this fundamental disconnect between Complementarian “redeemer-grooms” and the patriarchal nature of “divine” masculinity as vividly as Ludy. In all of her texts she recounts the sexist taunting that her male peers waged against her as an adolescent girl. For instance, in *The Lost Art of True Beauty* she explains how “by the time I was 14, I had come to the sad realization that modern guys couldn't care less about feminine grace or nobility. They measured your worth based on the size of your chest and the shape of your body. They measured your desirability based on how quickly they could get you into bed” (11-12). She goes on to confess how she traded her pursuit of “true feminine beauty” for “the cheap counterfeit presented by the culture” (12), thereby insinuating that contemporary secular society—rather than Christian patriarchy's material and ideological legacy—is responsible for men's objectifying treatment of girls and women. Ludy further explains how even “Christian guys” are influenced by these sexist standards; for example, in *Authentic Beauty* she recounts how, as a young teen, she overheard two young men from her church youth group talking about girls in very sexually debasing and objectifying ways (39). Similarly, in *Set-Apart Femininity* she

contends that “[m]ost of today's guys—even Christian ones—have bought into Hollywood's standards of beauty. ... And living among them, we become convinced that we must scrape and claw to be noticed by guys, to cheapen ourselves to become desirable to anything male that moves” (15).

It is ironic that Ludy would be so critical of this ubiquitous imperative for girls to pursue male approval, since it agrees with Complementarian theology's predication that women were created for the explicit purpose of serving and pleasing men. Rather than acknowledge and problematize these contemporary manifestations of Christian patriarchy, however, she proceeds to incriminate feminism as the cause: “Modern feminism has done its job well, reminding us that we shouldn't seek approval of the opposite sex, convincing us that everything we do should be only for ourselves and no one else,” she explains. “So, presumably, we wear slinky thongs and super-push-up bras not because they make us attractive to men, but because they make *us* feel good about *ourselves*” ([original emphasis] 2008: 12). She continues to employ post-feminist rhetoric by constructing the movement as a completed process that has ultimately failed girls and women, and argues that “[y]oung women today are supposed to be the most liberated, independent, confident, and fulfilled of any in history. But we are a desperate, lonely, insecure, and hopeless lot—plagued by eating disorders, abusive relationships, emotional breakdowns, and sexual chaos” (12).

As such, within this discursive framework it is the fault of modern secular society, and namely the feminist movement—rather than Christian patriarchy—that girls and women are largely regarded as sexual objects, and that they internalize and perform this ideology. However, this does not solve the disconnect between the standards of Christ-like perfection that authentically pure princess-brides should expect of their earthly redeemer-grooms, as well as the

reality that even “Christian guys” devalue women and pursue premarital sex. As Ludy contends in *Authentic Beauty*, “[y]oung women often ask me what they should look for in a man. I tell them to settle for nothing less than a man who reflects the very attitude and character of their Prince, Jesus Christ” (159). She engages in some discursive hoop-jumping to resolve this disconnect; for instance, in *Set-Apart Femininity* she constructs “true” evangelicals as a minority in accordance with subcultural identity theory: “Christian' young women are a dime a dozen in our country. But to find a young woman who is wholly devoted to Christ and separate in spirit from the world is rare indeed” (20).

Here Ludy draws a binary between the many “Christian-identified” girls and women who claim to love God and the *true* princess-brides of Christ who embody authentic purity and righteous femininity. Within this framework it is justifiable that most Christian-identified young men do not model Christ-like perfection because *true* “redeemer-grooms” are as few and far-between as the girls who model Ludy's standards for true womanhood. She explains how

[i]n every generation, there are a few young men who have chosen a different path. They have allowed Jesus Christ to capture their souls and transform their existence into reflections of His glorious strength, honour, and purity. A Christ-built man isn't after a sensuous bikini model who has been shaped and moulded by this world's system. Rather, he desires a lily among thorns, a young woman who has been shaped and moulded by the loveliness of her heavenly Prince. (2008: 60-61)

Luckily for the reader, the authors employ an evangelical prosperity gospel paradigm to solve the problem of Christ-like redeemer-grooms being in short supply. This paradigm stipulates that, if girls are truly devoted to honouring God's will for their lives, they will be rewarded with the Godly husbands they desire. To that end, Ludy joins a host of the other selected authors in inviting the reader to assume responsibility for fashioning the boys around them into their future redeemer-grooms. In this regard, she includes several contributions from her husband, Eric, in *Authentic Beauty* to advise the reader in how she may begin producing more redeemer-grooms

for her evangelical subculture. He accordingly encourages the reader to dedicate her time and energy to reforming the boys and men in her life:

If you make the study of masculinity a serious endeavour, you can literally help to change the course of nations. We, as men, will rise to the expectations of the young women in our lives. . . . Leslie and I hope that these chapters will inspire you as a young woman to motivate the men in your life to become far better men—men like Jesus Christ. (n.p.)

He proceeds to explain how “[a] dominant force behind the quality of modern masculinity in our culture is the expectations of modern women,” and that “[men] need someone to raise the expectations of their manhood. Believe it or not, we as men need *you*, a young woman, to help us find our way out of this spiritual gutter of cultural normalcy” (2007: n.p.). As such, rather than place the onus for changing the current state of evangelical masculinity on the shoulders of the men who perpetuate it, it is implied that *girls’ and women’s lax standards* are to blame for male sin, and the responsibility is thereby placed upon girls to reform the men in their lives and fashion them into Christ-like redeemer-grooms. Eric Ludy proceeds to offer pragmatic steps that the reader can take to “practice making princes out of the men in your life”:

Start with your dad and brother(s). . . . Go out of your way to mention that you notice the things that they have done well (for example, mowed the lawn, barbecued some burgers, painted the kitchen, or swished a free throw) Over time, as you gain even more of a vision for what a young man can become, you’ll develop your own ways to draw majestic man-ness out of the guys in your life. (n.p.)

However, it would seem that the keys to ensuring a girl’s success in fashioning these redeemer-grooms are subtlety and manipulation. This is because the reader must reform men *without* violating their God-ordained authority over her. As such, a girl must become intensively invested in the men around her so that she can meticulously fashion their desires, thoughts, and actions without their knowledge. To that end, Eric Ludy contends that girls must become masters at the art of “guy-nudging,” which he assures is “very different from pressuring and nagging; it’s

understanding how a man works and blending that knowledge with patience, gentleness, and some serious creativity. Oh, and a dash of sweetness also goes a long, long way. ... Guy nudging, at its best, is undetectable” (2007: n.p.). He further instructs girls that if they are to succeed in this life-long task of fashioning redeemer-grooms, they must “be willing to be unappreciated,” and explains how, “[t]o protect a man's dignity, allow him to feel that the [progress] was wholly his. ... Remember, you are supposed to be an undercover guy-nudger, not a front-and-centre guy-shover” (n.p.).

Ludy's texts are not the only ones to acknowledge the inconvenient reality that Christ-like redeemer-grooms are in short supply, nor are they the only ones to instruct readers to assume responsibility for remedying the situation. For instance, in *And the Bride Wore White* Gresh encourages her readers to “[t]ake a moment right now to start the habit of praying for your future husband. ... Pray that God would protect his mind, his body, and his soul until the day that you find him” (70). Similarly, Gunn and Goyer frame their entire text *Praying for Your Future Husband* around this issue. They begin by recounting a speaking engagement that Gunn attended at a school in Brazil. The discussion became complicated when one of the girls in attendance began explaining how she and her friends regularly read and abide by evangelical books on purity, but the boys they know do not. Gunn confesses that “I had heard this frustration voiced many times. ... But no one had ever asked me what could be done to change this dilemma of an unbalanced ratio between God-honouring young women and their male contemporaries who were slow to seek God. What could I tell her?” (2) Luckily Gunn was able to provide a pragmatic solution—that these adolescent girls needed to begin praying for their future husbands *now*. “The translator gave her my answer,” she recalls, “and a reverent hush fell over the room. Before me was a troop of willing but untrained young women ready to enter the war zone to fight for their

young men” (3).

Gunn and Goyer provide a series of pragmatic lists throughout their text to teach the reader how she should pray for her future husband, including asking that “the Lord will clear any of the obstacles in the path that are keeping him from coming to Christ” (18); that “he will be content in every state in which he finds himself” (46); and that “he will stand firm against the forces of evil in our culture” (110). In this way, these authors instruct the reader to regard herself as the property of a man whom she has not yet met, but to whose ownership and pleasure she must now begin dedicating her time and energy. Furthermore, by preparing herself for this future commitment, she is *de facto* drawing nearer to God as she works toward fulfilling His divine purpose for her life: “By praying for the man you will marry one day, you are drawing closer to the Lord. You, God, and your future husband—the three of you are already being braided together at the heart level through the invisible realm of prayer” (70). As such, the reader must not only honour her future husband by preserving her sexual and reproductive potentials for his exclusive ownership, but she must also dedicate her current spiritual pursuits to him. As Gunn and Goyer poignantly express, “Have you been faithful to your future husband, even if you haven't met him yet? And not just sexually faithful Being faithful involves more than our bodies; it involves every part of us, including our prayer lives” (93).

On the whole, these texts perpetuate a prosperity gospel paradigm which stipulates that *if* girls are devoted to the life-long task of fashioning Christ-like redeemer-grooms for their evangelical subculture, and if they preserve their sexual and reproductive potentials in the meantime, *then* God will provide them with the righteous husbands they desire—thereby insinuating that a girl who does not eventually meet an earthly “redeemer-groom” who embodies Christ-like perfection is at fault for shirking her duty to fashion her future spouse. Here the

evangelical discourses of self-monitoring, self-governance, and self-improvement are taken to new lengths as girls are instructed not only to assume individualized responsibility for procuring their own salvation through embodying authentic purity and righteous femininity, but also for ensuring that the men in their lives—including the ones they have not met—learn to embody divine masculinity.

Conclusion

While girls' premarital sexual abstinence ultimately provides a key cornerstone of the evangelical purity dialectic, the selected guidance literature reveals that “purity” consists of complex and occasionally contradictory discourses that are effectively contextualized within a Complementarian theological paradigm. In this sense, while “technical virginity” is a non-negotiable element of purity, girls must also maintain their “innocence” as they strive toward the all-encompassing state of sinless perfection that is “authentic purity” through individualized rituals of self-monitoring, self-governance, and self-improvement. Furthermore, authentic purity requires girls to embrace and perform evangelical precepts of “righteous femininity.” At its core, this paradigm requires girls to accept that they were created by God for the specific purpose of satisfying male needs and desires, rather than being subjects in their own right. This divine life purpose can only be realized through the preservation of a girl's sexual and reproductive potentials for her husband's exclusive ownership in a heterosexual marriage covenant, which in turn provides her with access to intimacy with God Himself.

In this capacity, Complementarian theology stipulates that heterosexual marriage was designed by God to symbolize Christ's relationship to humanity, wherein the deity and earthly men are designated as the “redeemer-grooms” of women by virtue of their shared “maleness,” and women are to honour, regard, and submit to men in the same ways and for the same reasons

they honour, regard, and submit to God. As such, only by entering the heterosexual marriage covenant in a state of “authentic purity” can girls procure individual salvation and live “happily ever after” as Christ's princes-brides in eternity.

While these evangelical discourses of authentic purity and righteous femininity are inspired in many ways by Victorian discourses of “true womanhood,” they are ultimately rooted in Christianity's patriarchal systems of private property ownership which designate girls' sexual and reproductive potentials as men's property. In this sense, girls' authentic purity and righteous femininity are constructed as non-negotiable symbols of their individual commitments to God *as well as* essential to the larger maintenance of evangelical subcultural strength, just as their submission to male authority was key to distinguishing ancient Judeo-Christian cultures from the Goddess-worshipping nations discussed in Chapter 2. However, one additionally vital component of girls' submission to patriarchal authority manifests as submission to “adult authority,” and particularly to fathers. This imperative is particularly contentious because, while fathers are regarded as the “heads” of their wives and daughters, mothers are regarded as the primary religious enculturators of their children, and are thereby held accountable for their daughters' successes and failures in upholding evangelical precepts. To that end, Chapter 4 will explore how the selected guidance literature instructs girls to submit to “adult authority” as a matter of universal and abstract principle, as well as how this imperative manifests in gendered terms in relation to mothers and fathers. Furthermore, it will discuss how the maternal imperative to simultaneously model and promulgate standards of authentic purity and righteous femininity intersects with evangelicalism's gendered precepts in the larger maintenance of religious subcultural strength.

Chapter 4

Guardians of Virtue: The Politics of Submission and the Evangelical Maternal Ethos

My twenty-seven-year-old self is nestled under a blanket as a portable heater blasts much-needed warmth around the basement apartment that has housed me for the past four years of my Ph.D. enrollment. Even though there are three hundred kilometres separating my mother and me, the bitter cold of this prolonged winter seems to have left no part of our provincial region untouched, and this is the first thing she mentions as she answers my telephone call. After commenting on the weather, she asks me how school is going. Neither of my parents finished high school as teens, and they are often mystified by the political and bureaucratic intricacies of the academic world I currently inhabit—not to mention the vague job prospects that await me when I graduate. She apologizes for losing track of the various projects I am working on, but tells me how proud she is of me in any case. I then ask her about work, and she tells me how the structural changes at the greenhouse office where she has worked for the past ten years have been quite stressful for her and her colleagues.

Our weekly chats do not often branch into subject matter more remarkable than this. We usually discuss these mundane goings-on for an hour or so until the awkward pauses compel one of us to remark how introverts like ourselves are terrible at the art of telephone conversation. But today my mother proves to be particularly loquacious, and she soon begins speaking about the current state of her “walk with the Lord.” I know she has few confidants with whom she can divulge the intimate details of her spiritual life, and it never surprises me to hear her voice seemingly burst with enthusiasm as she seizes my listening ear—one that she knows will not dismiss her love for God and all the wonderful work He has been doing in her life, as I have often seen my other family members do. I feel a twinge of discomfort in remembering how we

used to discuss such details more frequently and openly with each other. This was when our respective “walks with the Lord” followed the same straight-and-narrow evangelical path. Over the past two years, however, I feel I have strayed too far from this path to speak candidly about my spiritual life with her. Still, I take some comfort in knowing that my silences and non-committal promptings do not deter her from expressing her love for God with joyful abandon during these conversations, and I quietly sit and listen as she continues to speak.

During these occasions I wish I could reciprocate my mother's sentiments and tell her more about my own spiritual “walk,” but it is difficult for me to articulate what remains of my religious beliefs. I have all but abandoned the patriarchal “Biblical” God of my childhood, and I occasionally wonder if I only cling to any lingering belief in a supernatural deity out of fear or habit. Mostly, however, I am content to believe in a divine Creator who is the source of all things good, beautiful, and just in the world, and that I should aim to draw near to it and emulate its benevolence in my everyday life. Some days I even believe this conception of the divine is compatible with a Christian theological framework, and when prompted by evangelical family and friends I refer to myself as a “Christian” simply because it is the easiest answer. In conversation with anyone else, however, I shy away from this contentious identity and follow the discursive strategies employed by the many “post-evangelical”⁶² writers, artists, and activists who have come before me. I say that I am currently “living in the tension,” and that my daily engagement with faith's unanswered questions is a legitimate way of seeking the divine.

62 “Post-evangelical” is a fluid term that has been adopted to suit a range of meanings and purposes. It can be initially traced to U.K. Anglican priest Dave Tomlinson's 1995 text *The Post-Evangelical*. I have come to associate this term with those who once fully participated in evangelical subcultures, but now reject or at least critically evaluate the tradition's fundamentalist tendencies and conservative political ideologies. As a result, some who adopt this label continue to participate on the margins of evangelicalism by joining alternative churches; some convert to other established Protestant or Catholic traditions; and some dis-identify from Christianity while exploring alternative religious, spiritual, and secular belief systems.

Unfortunately, I am confident that my current commitment to spiritual dissonance would only be disconcerting to my mother, and when we speak I keep these things to myself.

After a while, my mother pauses and apologizes for “rambling.” She employs this expression in our talks far too often, and I believe it reflects the many instances throughout the years when her beliefs and ideas have been dismissed by others. I hope that my silence has not triggered this act of self-deprecation, and I quickly assure her that she is not “rambling.” I also tell her that the struggles and victories she is experiencing in her faith are important to me, as is her unwavering love for God. I do not say these things to be diplomatic or to minimize the many ways in which our current ideas about Christianity conflict. In fact, I often wish that I could wholeheartedly internalize the spiritual knowledge that she shares with me, as was often the case throughout my childhood years. As I consider this, I quietly rebuke myself for feeling that the “secular academic” education that has led me to this point somehow makes me a more legitimate authority on Christianity than the woman who taught me everything I knew about it as a child, and who has known God for far longer than I have.

Most poignantly, my mother shifts the topic of discussion to my “unbelieving” sisters. While neither Ashley nor Amanda have a particularly active spiritual life that I can attest to, I also do not think either of them would identify as “unbelievers.” Rather, like myself, they seem to have diverted from evangelicalism's straight-and-narrow path, and perhaps their extroverted personalities have simply made them less likely to accept my mother's beliefs without openly challenging her when they disagree. I am confident that my mother would also classify me as an “unbeliever” if I divulged the dissonance that currently frames my own “walk with the Lord,” although I also know she would not love me any less because of it. Perhaps I do not reveal these sentiments to her because I do not want her to worry about me in the same way that she worries

about the state of her other daughters' salvation. Or maybe I am simply afraid of losing her approval; perhaps it was merely the desire for her approval that motivated me to submit to these teachings as a child in the first place.

After she expresses her concern for my sisters' spiritual well-being, she proceeds to proclaim her adamant belief that God will hear her prayers on their behalf, and that she will see them in Heaven one day. "I pray for my girls every day," she says definitively. "I'm their mother. What else can I do?" I tell her how much I appreciate her prayers; this is true, after all, even though I resent the teachings that tell her it is not only her responsibility, but also within her capacity to shape the spiritual fates of her adult daughters if she believes and prays earnestly enough. I also know that I could very well be wrong in my pessimistic view of what her prayers might accomplish; all I know is that the evangelical subculture that "liberated" her from her Old Colony Mennonite upbringing has long thwarted my capacities to find empowerment in my own spiritual journey. Even so, I consider myself a fiercely spiritual feminist, and I credit my successes to the complex yet unyielding maternal love that has nourished and sustained me throughout my life. In this sense, "living in the tension" of my post-evangelical existence includes learning to accept that my mother and I must both function as authorities of our own spiritual lives. I just fear that my mother will not accept this resolution with the relief and hope that it gives me.

As our discussion begins to wind down, I continue to wonder if my mother has noticed my conspicuous silence throughout the duration of our conversation. Perhaps not, and she is simply happy for someone to listen as she divulges the intimate details of her spiritual life. Or perhaps she has, but has decided to respect my need to remain silent as much as I respect her need to share these parts of herself. I do not know because I do not ask. I hope to get the courage to do

so soon, but for now I have resolved to let the tension linger.

While the reviewed evangelical literature primarily instructs readers about the importance of preserving their sexual and reproductive potentials for their future husband's exclusive ownership and accepting their inferior place in the divine gender hierarchy, it also contextualizes the cultivation of "authentic purity" and "righteous femininity" within *adult-child* relationships. This chapter accordingly continues the critical discourse analysis from Chapter 3 by considering how the selected texts instruct their *young* female readers to submit to adult authority as a matter of universal and abstract principle. It unpacks the authors' collective argument that God has purposefully placed all formal and informal adult authorities in each girl's life, so that readers will honour God by obeying their parents, as well as the adults who populate their evangelical subcultures. However, while girls must universally and unconditionally concede to adult authority simply because "the Bible says so," readers are specifically called to honour their fathers by virtue of the latter's shared "maleness" with the deity. In accordance with the selected texts' Complementarian theological paradigm, the father-daughter relationship is conceived as a precursor to the heterosexual marriage covenant that girls will one day enter, and readers must regard their sexual and reproductive potentials as their fathers' property until they are "passed on" to become the property of their husbands.

In contrast, the authors do *not* instruct readers to honour their mothers in a similar capacity. Rather than address the importance of the mother-daughter relationship, these texts address girls as evangelicalism's "mothers of tomorrow," therein emphasizing how readers will be responsible for physically and pedagogically reproducing the next generation of "true" Christians for their religious subculture when they grow into adult women. In this sense, the

selected texts laud the importance of the maternal role for its capacity to reproduce “Biblical” patriarchal traditions, yet they devalue mothers themselves by reinforcing their inferiority within the Complementarian gender hierarchy. In the same way, they laud the potentials that readers have as future wives and mothers, while problematizing the possibilities for evangelical girls to exercise agency in their sexual and spiritual lives.

In light of this critical discourse analysis, the chapter then shifts to unpack how the evangelical discursive practices employed in these texts coalesce to create a maternal ethos wherein the fundamentalist imperative to reproduce religious subcultural strength intersects with a specifically evangelical prosperity gospel paradigm, the internalized demands of maternal thinking, and mother-blame as deeply entrenched social practices. Within this discursive framework, mothers are compelled to act as “guardians of virtue” in their relationships with their daughters by simultaneously modeling and reproducing patriarchal ideals of “authentic purity” and “righteous femininity.” Furthermore, this paradigm regards girls as passive recipients of religious enculturation, thus holding mothers responsible for their daughters' conduct and potentially subjecting them to blame when girls do not embody evangelicalism's tenets of ideal womanhood.

In this capacity, the selected evangelical literature values women principally as perpetuators of patriarchal traditions, just as they value girls as human “becomings” who must internalize the religious subculture's “traditional” beliefs and practices so they may reproduce them when they emerge as “complete” adult women. Furthermore, the authors remain conspicuously silent as to how these fundamentalist imperatives constrain the mother-daughter relationship. This chapter accordingly addresses this gap by considering how the empowering potentials of religious mother-work may be augmented when women and girls are afforded the

critical space to cultivate their spiritualities from a place of agency, authenticity, and mutual enrichment. To begin, however, I will unpack the fundamentally gendered ways in which the selected literature instructs girls to “submit” to adult authority as a matter of universal and abstract principle.

The Politics of Submission

The selected texts address “submission” within a Complementarian theological paradigm; however, such discourses ultimately reflect broader structures and ideologies that position children as a minority social group. Childhood as a cultural construct is intrinsically shaped by the socially and legally sanctioned authority that adults exercise over children (James and James 3; Mayall 3), and this power dynamic is further naturalized and necessitated through children's economic dependence on “the family” in which they are raised (James and James 103; Lee 24). In this sense, the lack of full “personhood” afforded to children under the law ultimately mitigates their capacities to exercise agency, as does the pervasive ideology that children should “obey” adults as a matter of universal and abstract principle. This ubiquitous demand for children's submission to adult authority takes for granted that all adults are competent, knowledgeable, and “complete” human beings who advocate for children's best interests. As Nick Lee contends,

[t]he images of journey's end, and of the standard adults who are taken to have arrived at journey's end, are crucial in maintaining the authority that adults often have over children, the right and duty to make decisions for them. Our convenient fictions about adulthood are of greatest use when we are exerting that authority or facing the responsibilities toward children that adulthood brings with it. (9)

In this regard, while many adults exercise authority over children with the intention of protecting them, it is problematic to assume that all adults—including all parents—are always committed to understanding and pursuing children's best interests (Lee 90). In many cases,

discourses concerning children's "best interests" simply serve adult desires to enforce generational conformity; as Allison James and Adrian James explain, "Doing as one's told' becomes in this sense a part of children's socialization experience, a simple and yet very clear reflection of the process by which social order is maintained across and between generations" (3-4). Childhood experiences are thereby largely constrained by adult beliefs about who children are and how they should be, and legal and social sanctions that determine what is "best" for children often conceptualize them as human "becomings" rather than social actors who experience the cultural category of childhood in complex and diverse ways (James and James 165; James 2013: 175; Lee 5; Mayall 1-2). Moreover, rather than critically evaluate the structures that constrain childhood experiences, children are scrutinized and devalued when they negotiate or reject the terms that adult authorities impose on them (Mayall 5). Such acts of resistance are often conceptualized through discourses of "disobedience" and "rebellion," in addition to identity labels which mark particular children as "bad," "deviant," and "willful."

These discourses which legitimize adult authority over children are especially pronounced in evangelical subcultures. In a contemporary North American context, evangelicals are particularly known for advocating "traditional family values" as the foundation for a "strong and moral nation" (Gerami 49; Ruether 2001: 83). In accordance with a Complementarian theological paradigm—as well as the mythical "Victorian family" construct explored in Chapter 2—this "traditional family" is a patriarchal institution wherein women "submit" to male authority and provide full-time, unwaged care for children within an isolated domestic sphere that is free from "secular" influence. Within this discursive framework, children's strict obedience is required in accordance with the evangelical belief that they are born with innately sinful spiritual natures that must be vanquished through intensive religious enculturation

(*Proverbs 22:6: Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it*) and discipline (*Proverbs 22:15: Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline will drive it far away*). Moreover, children's submission to adult authority as a matter of universal and abstract principle is conceptualized as “Biblical” and God-ordained⁶³ (*Colossians 3:20: Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord*) in accordance with fundamentalist Biblical exegeses.

Rather than regard children as social and spiritual agents who may actively contribute to processes of religious enculturation, evangelical discursive practices singularly construct “good” children as those who internalize and reproduce the teachings espoused by “Godly” adult authorities. In this way, children's capacities to exercise agency by negotiating or rejecting evangelical teachings are largely conceived as problematic acts of “disobedience” (*Proverbs 29:15: A rod and a reprimand impart wisdom, but a child left undisciplined disgraces its mother*). These ideologies are aptly communicated in the selected evangelical literature's overarching Complementarian theological paradigm. Here the authors conflate “traditional” patriarchal beliefs and practices with God's universal, timeless, and unquestionable “truth.”

Furthermore, readers are instructed to demonstrate their commitment to God by submitting to the adult authorities whom He has purposefully placed in their lives. In this respect, these texts employ “truth regimes” which reproduce the myth of adults' universal “completeness, competence and ability to make to made good judgments”—all of which are reinforced by the confident, authoritative voice of the adult “expert” (Lee 46, 122). This

63 For a contemporary evangelical perspective on children's innately depraved spiritual natures, see Michael and Debi Pearl's 1994 manual *To Train Up a Child*. It should be noted that this text and its corresponding ideologies do not encapsulate the beliefs of all evangelical Christians. However, it does reflect a prevalent child-rearing discourse within fundamentalist-evangelical circles, and it remains a popular text among evangelical parents.

discursive framework is further reinforced by fundamentalist exegeses, wherein Biblical “proof texts” are enough to affirm patriarchal precepts as God-ordained, timeless, and absolute.

The selected authors make this resolution exceedingly clear as they conflate their particular Complementarian teachings with God's eternal and universal truth. For instance, Ethridge and Arterburn stipulate in *Every Young Woman's Battle* that “[w]hen we reject God's teaching about avoiding sexual immorality, we reject God Himself. Casual sex flies in the face of God, creating a stench in His nostrils” (183). Mally similarly contends in *Before You Meet Prince Charming* that “[o]ur primary motivation must be to please God. Immorality is sin. We must have a resolute commitment to purity because God commands it” (193). Likewise, Gresh definitively states in *Secret Keeper* that “[i]f you are struggling to obey God in the area of modesty, maybe it's because you do not love God. ... [W]hen you do truly know Him, you can't help but love Him, because you realize everything in His plan for your life is for the purpose of blessing you” (81).

These authors accordingly construct a contentious power dynamic wherein the adult “expert” speaks on God's behalf, and any rejection of her teachings amounts to a rejection of God Himself. In this regard, children must submit to self-declared adult authorities, and children who “disobey” such authorities cannot be “true” believers. To that end, Mally contends that “God is the One who has set in place all human authority, and He works through it to accomplish his good purpose in each of our lives” (128). Similarly, Gresh and DeMoss purport in their co-authored text *Lies Young Women Believe* that “[s]ubmission places you under God's protection. Rebellion opens you up to the influence of Satan in ways you may not even realize” (113). They proceed to explain how girls are enticed to sin by Satan's “lie” that they only need to submit to adults if they agree with the particular authority's teachings. “That's not submission,” they

explain. “Ephesians 5:21 says we are to submit to God-ordained authority 'out of reverence for Christ.' Even when you do not agree with the authority God has placed over you, love and respect for Christ should motivate you to submit” (112). They further acknowledge that, “[s]ometimes your parents, teachers, pastor, or government leaders will be wrong. They are human, after all. You can expect that sometimes they will make bad decisions. . . . Even then your act of submission will be a form of protection” (113).

These discourses necessitate children's unconditional submission to adult authorities simply because they are adults, and simply because the Bible commands it. As such, it is maintained that God has *purposefully* placed all formal and informal adult authorities in children's lives, and children demonstrate obedience to the divine by always submitting to those adults He has selected to embody His righteousness on earth. As Gresh concisely states it in *And the Bride Wore White*, “[Your parents] deserve to be honoured just because God says they do” (117). She and DeMoss similarly argue in *Lies Young Women Believe* that readers should “[l]earn to trust in God and his sovereign plan; remember that He is able to override any mistake your parents could make” (112). Likewise, Mally acknowledges that parents will “make mistakes” (128), but she assures the reader that “God has put you in exactly the family in which He wants you to be [sic]. He knows your parents' shortcomings, and He will not neglect you even for a moment. If you are seeking the Lord, He will faithfully supply the help you need” (27).

This discursive framework ultimately takes for granted that all evangelical parents are stable and complete adults who understand and pursue their children's best interests, as none of the authors elaborate upon the potential “mistakes” parents will make. This paradigm at best minimizes—and at worst completely disregards—instances wherein parents exercise their socially and legally sanctioned authority over children in oppressive and abusive ways. Rather

than acknowledge how girls may be affected by parental maltreatment, the authors perpetuate a prosperity gospel paradigm by placing the onus on the reader to ensure that she is wholly committed to God's commands; as such, He has the capacity to “override” parental mistakes *if* she is fully submitted to His will. Within this theological framework, then, the “true” princess-brides of Christ may submit wholeheartedly to adult authority because God has purposefully placed them in familial situations that are meant to bless them, and He will protect them from harm if they are living pure and righteous lives.

In this sense, girls' universal submission to adult authority provides a key measure of their individual morality, just as it signifies and reproduces evangelical subcultural strength. The selected authors accordingly construct a discursive framework wherein the “secular world” encourages children to cultivate rebellious spirits, and submitting unconditionally to adult authority is a radical and righteous act. “The world is working *against* us. The world is telling us to do things the opposite of the Biblical way, to be independent from our parents, and to make our own decisions,” Mally explains. “Therefore, we must realize that this is just another area in which we as Christians need to be willing to stand alone by following God's way and honouring our parents” ([original emphasis] 138). Similarly, Gresh and DeMoss contend that a “spirit of rebellion and disrespect shouldn't take place in any Christian home” (111). They proceed to explain how rebellion is a sin that girls and women particularly struggle with because of their stake in Eve's curse: “Satan hates authority and has given you and me a special distaste for it as well. ... In fact, that was the essence of the issue Eve faced back in the garden of Eden. ... From that day to this, Satan has done a masterful job of convincing women that submission is a negative, confining concept.”

While many of these discussions tend to focus on submitting to parental authority, the

authors also emphasize how *all* evangelical adults should be paid similar respect and obedience. For instance, Gresh and DeMoss contend that “the failure of many Christian young women to place themselves under their parents', teachers', and pastors' authority accounts for the extent to which so many of you are suffering the Enemy's attack on your mind, will, and emotions” (113-114). To illustrate this point, they ask the reader to consider a hypothetical scenario wherein she wears a “cute and modest outfit” to church, and an “older Godly woman” instructs her to go home and change because she does not believe the ensemble is “modest” enough (124). “The issue isn't really so much who's right or who's wrong,” the authors explain. Rather, the reader is “called to honour and esteem others in the body of Christ,” and they suggest it would be “radical” to obey the woman by going home and changing (125).

It thus becomes clear that pure and righteous girls do not exercise spiritual or bodily agency, just as they do not function as authorities of their own sexual and reproductive potentials. In this respect, God-ordained adult authorities are entitled to intervene in girls' consensual sexual and romantic relationships for the purpose of procuring their “best interests” if they violate evangelical purity precepts. To illustrate this point, Gresh and DeMoss share the real-life account of a teen girl named Sadie who performed evangelical ideals of purity and righteousness in church each week, but was engaging in “sexual conversations” online with a boy from her youth group. Here it is taken for granted that parents have the right to monitor girls' private activities and interfere if it is deemed to be “for their own good”: “Her parents found some of her text messages and realized she was having sexual conversations They took away all her technology privileges and confronted the guy *and* his parents and his youth pastor. It was *messy!*” ([original emphasis] 106). They proceed to explain how “the Lord used the pain to soften [Sadie's] heart, and she went to her Christian high school chaplain to confess and get

spiritual help. ... God set her free from her hypocrisy and the destruction it could have wreaked in her life” (107).

This narrative vividly illustrates the property rights that adults have over girls' bodies and sexualities. Not only are parents entitled to monitor and discipline girls who defy cultural myths of childhood asexuality, but girls are also compelled to “confess” their sexual desires and actions to “Godly” adult authorities. This is not to dismiss how girls may benefit from adult guidance when they encounter adults or other children who exercise oppressive power dynamics in their sexual relationships; however, in this particular case it is implied that Sadie consented to these “sexual conversations,” especially since the authors place the onus on her to acknowledge and confess her sins. Within this Complementarian paradigm it is thereby absolute that girls who explore any aspect of their sexualities outside a heterosexual marriage covenant are subject to adult intervention and discipline, or else they will ultimately see physical and spiritual “destruction” overtake their lives.

On the whole, these texts stipulate that girls must wholly submit to the adult authorities whom God has purposefully placed in their lives, thus constructing a discursive framework wherein adults embody God's righteousness simply because they are adults, and simply because the Bible says so. As such, it is presumed that adult knowledge is always more valid than girls' own corporeal and spiritual ways of knowing, and children who “rebel” against adult authorities *de facto* sin against God Himself. As Gresh and DeMoss argue, “On the surface, submitting to your parents and other authorities is about your relationship with them, but in the unseen realm it is about a bigger battle for control—will you submit your will to God, or are you going to insist on being your own authority?” (114)

At its core, however, girls' rebellion against God-ordained adult authority is problematic

not only because it violates explicit “Biblical” commands, but also because it compromises girls' abilities to perform authentic purity and righteous femininity within a future heterosexual marriage covenant. Gresh and DeMoss accordingly explain how disobeying parental authority “establishes a pattern for you to disrespect and rebel against your husband's authority” (114). In this sense, while girls must submit to adult authority, these politics of submission are expressed in explicitly gendered terms. The selected texts thereby argue that girls must particularly submit to fatherly authority because childhood is a preparatory period for the adulthood years they will spend “submitting” to their husbands' patriarchal leadership within the divine gender hierarchy.

Keepers of Purity: The Father-Daughter Relationship

In accordance with the Complementarian theological paradigm discussed in Chapter 3 wherein girls are called to regard and submit to their future husbands in the same way and for the same reasons they regard and submit to God, girls are similarly instructed to honour their fathers because of the latter's shared “maleness” with the deity. As such, while readers are instructed to “submit” to all evangelical adult authorities, they must *specifically* esteem the father-daughter relationship because it provides a conduit for accessing the divine. Gresh and DeMoss in particular dedicate considerable space in their co-authored text to discussing the importance of submitting to fatherly authority. They address how Biblical imagery which constructs God as “father” may be difficult for some girls to embrace if their relationships with their earthly fathers have been volatile or nonexistent. “God is a father, but He is not like any man you have ever known,” they explain. “The God of the Bible is infinitely more wonderful and pure and loving than even the most wonderful father” (51-52). They proceed to clarify that girls may resolve this dissonance by learning to regard their earthly fathers in the same way they regard the male deity: “Learn to relate to your earthly father through God rather than relating to God through your

earthly father. We really have it backwards. . . . [God] doesn't say to honour [your father] if he's a good dad. He doesn't say to honour him until you are eighteen. He simply says to honour him. Period" (52).

As such, girls are instructed to submit unconditionally to their earthly fathers because the latter embody the deity's divine maleness. However, similar to the discourses discussed in Chapter 3 wherein girls are called to reform the fallible earthly male authorities in their lives, this imperative is fundamentally contradictory. As Gresh and DeMoss explain, "[Y]our dad may have wronged you in some pretty serious ways. If that is the case, we want to remind you that God requires us to forgive those who sin against us. If your father has wounded you—no matter how deeply—you must choose to forgive him" (52). The reader is thus encouraged to "[make] a deliberate attempt to overlook his human frailties and [choose] instead to admire any strengths he might have, such as his protection, strength, or provision. This could heal your relationship with your dad and enable you to begin to view God in a more truthful light" (53). In spite of the authors' collective admission that earthly men will fall short of Godly perfection, these precepts place the onus on girls to overlook any mistreatment they may experience at their fathers' hands, and to continue "submitting" to their fathers as a matter of universal and abstract principle. According to this Complementarian paradigm, then, a father deserves to be respected and obeyed simply because he is a man, regardless of any deleterious consequences that his actions may wreak in his daughter's life.

The problematic crux of this resolution becomes apparent in Gresh and DeMoss's unsettling account of a teenaged girl named Tracey. Even though her parents were both professing Christians who attended church each week, Tracey found her father using illegal drugs in their home's basement when she was 16. He offered some to her, and she accepted. After

this occasion, the authors explain how Tracey and her father interacted “more as boyfriend and girlfriend than father and daughter” (19). Although they do not elaborate upon the extent of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse she may have experienced, they hint at the manipulation and intimidation that her father exercised in their relationship. They explain how Tracey eventually wanted to stop seeing her father in this capacity, much to his protests. When she did see him, she would begin reading her Bible aloud, and “[t]his agitated her father, sending him into a passive fury He would leave the room angrily or give her the silent treatment until one day when he could not contain himself,” at which point he yelled “I am god!” (19). However, rather than acknowledge the oppressive power dynamic that is built into the Complementarian father-daughter relationship wherein “good” girls submit unconditionally to “Godly” male authorities, Gresh and DeMoss lay the burden of blame with Tracey. “She could have said no,” they explain. “She didn’t. After all, it was her own church-going father who was offering her the forbidden. Couldn’t she trust him? Shouldn’t she obey him?” Most disconcertingly, they do not answer these questions. However, they do explain how Tracey wishes she had not allowed this situation to unfold as it did: “Tracey aches to do things over. To have done things right the first time. To go back to the life she knew before the lies blazed through her life and left it charred and barren” (20).

The reader is thus instructed to submit wholly to fatherly authority, all the while being *more* righteous and discerning than adult men so that she may correct them when they do not embody God’s righteousness. It is particularly unsettling that none of the selected authors address the problematic power dynamic that is structured into this Complementarian paradigm, even though they collectively acknowledge the fallibility of human authorities, as well as the divinely-ordained “weaknesses” with which men are specifically endowed. Collectively, then, these

fundamentalist principles compel girls to “submit” to earthly male authority with the understanding that they themselves are fully responsible for the sins that men commit against them.

This resolution is further exacerbated by materialist discourses which construct girls' sexual and reproductive potentials as their fathers' property until they are “passed on” to become the property of their husbands. In accordance with the Judeo-Christian tradition's material roots discussed in Chapter 2, the selected literature regards fathers as the “keepers” of their unmarried daughters' sexual and reproductive potentials. These texts accordingly stipulate that, if girls specifically turn to their fathers to fulfill their innate, divinely-ordained desires for male affection and approval, they will be less likely to violate evangelicalism's purity precepts in their romantic relationships. As such, the authors collectively argue that parents—and particularly fathers—should be given an authoritative role in overseeing their daughters' dating relationships. For instance, in *What Are You Waiting For?* Gresh praises the arranged marriages that still occur in India among Christian families—not only because the women involved find them “romantic,” but also because they require formal approval from church and parental authorities (32-33).

Mally, the youngest and only single author of those selected, similarly explains how she has benefited from allowing her parents to take an active role in her dating life: “I am extremely grateful that I was blessed with parents who protected me, helped me to see the dangers of the dating system when I was still young, and gave me a vision for something better” (39). She further emphasizes how much she has relied on the male authorities in her home when navigating potential romantic relationships, and encourages readers to do the same. She shares how she will always consult her father and brother when she becomes interested in a young man:

When they notice an area of weakness [in the guy's spiritual life] ... it gives me a clearer perspective of the whole situation and makes it easier for me to stay focused on the Lord,

rather than dreaming about the possibility of 'so and so.' It frees me from any pressure or temptation I might be feeling to try to get to know him better, and keeps my emotions from getting involved unnecessarily. (94-95)

To that end, Mally instructs her readers to wait for their parents to enact God's will in their lives, rather than exercise agency in pursuing romantic relationships. For instance, she contends that “[i]n Biblical times parents were often involved in choosing their children's mates, and fathers were held responsible for their daughters' purity” (129). While this analysis of marriage rituals in “Biblical times” has historical merit, it neglects the larger socioeconomic context of private property ownership in which fathers were “responsible” for their daughters' purity, as well as the harsh consequences that girls faced if they violated their fathers' property rights by engaging in premarital sex. In this sense, Mally employs a fundamentalist exegesis wherein any belief or practice that is explicitly sanctioned in the Bible is timelessly and absolutely “good.” In regard to girls pursuing romantic relationships on their own terms she further stipulates,

Do not think that you must leave home in order to meet someone. I believe that the very best place for a single young lady to be is at home, under her father's authority and direction. The world's system that encourages a time of 'independence' for young ladies is a dangerous and unbiblical idea [A] young lady will receive rich blessings as she commits to staying under her father's protection until the day her father gives her away to her husband. As always, God's design is what works best! (235)

Gresh similarly addresses the importance of fatherly authority in girls' dating lives with particular rigour throughout her texts. In *And the Bride Wore White*, for example, she explains how

[e]mbracing your mother and father's involvement in your dating—or at least accepting it—is a vital secret in your pursuit of a lifestyle of purity. I did not realize this until I began to minister to young women and saw a very specific pattern. Girls who were close to their families and closely monitored by their families, especially their fathers, had a special strength to live a lifestyle of purity. (116)

She further contends that “[g]irls who lack a positive father/daughter relationship are very much at risk to be sexually active” (117). In this sense, Gresh suggests that all girls have innate and divinely-ordained desires for male affection and approval, and these desires can be just as effectively satisfied by fathers while daughters wait to enter a heterosexual marriage covenant. To illustrate this point, she recounts a conversation she had with “a wonderful man who has an exceptionally close relationship with his two daughters.” He told her that one day his teenage daughter was sitting on his lap when she suddenly asked him why she is not “totally boy-crazy” like her friends, at which point he replied “without hesitation”: “[R]ight now, I am doing everything I can to fill that guy-shaped hole in your heart. So you don't need a guy.” This passage illustrates the Complementarian belief that fathers are not only owners of their daughters' bodies, but also symbolic lovers whose affection is interchangeable with that of a boyfriend or husband. Such discourses naturalize the evangelical imperative for girls to guard male purity, since they have no sexual desires of their own to contend with. They also enable—if not directly promote—the potential for abuse within father-daughter relationships.

It is thus readily apparent that pure and righteous girls always regard their sexual and reproductive potentials as the property of “some man,” and that girls' “submission” within the father-daughter relationship prepares them for a future heterosexual marriage covenant. As Mally concisely states, “I have seen the Lord richly bless those young ladies I know who have chosen to honour their fathers. Ephesians 5 commands husbands to love their wives, and wives to respect their husbands. . . . In order to be prepared to respect and submit to a future husband, it is crucial that we learn now to honour our fathers” (135).

Gunn and Goyer similarly elucidate this imperative in *Praying for Your Future Husband*. They recount the story of a woman named Natalie whose parents gave her a “purity ring” to wear

as a teen (63-64). She wore this emblem on her wedding day as her father walked her down the aisle, and when they reached the front of the church, he asked her to declare if she had “saved herself” for her husband. “[H]e knew the answer was yes,” the authors explain, and when Natalie confirmed he removed the promise ring so that it could be replaced by her wedding ring. This narrative vividly illustrates the transfer of ownership of a woman’s sexual and reproductive potentials from one man to another, and that unmarried girls who “save themselves” for their future husbands are also honouring their fathers’ property rights.

Gresh similarly recalls the story of Heidi in *And the Bride Wore White* to illuminate the pain, fear, and isolation that girls will face if they do *not* honour their fathers by preserving their sexual and reproductive potentials. She explains how

Heidi, a pastor's daughter in her mid-twenties, told about how her vibrant, wonderful relationship with her dad—a rare treasure these days—is blocked by a deep secret. She became sexual with a guy she 'really loved' and then he dumped her. In a heart-breaking, tear-stained night she confessed it to the guy who is now her loving husband, but she cannot bring herself to tell her dad. It hurts that she has not told him because they are so close. But she knows that telling him one day, which she plans to do, will also bring incredible pain. (106-107)

That Heidi feels compelled to “confess” her premarital sexual activities to her father, and that she has internalized such intense remorse over her failure to do so, naturalizes the belief that girls and women are not merely accountable to God and their future husbands for any sexual transgressions they commit. Rather, until they are married, they should regard their sexual and reproductive potentials as their fathers' property, and any violation of evangelicalism's rigid purity precepts is as much a sin against their fathers as it is against their future husbands, as well as against God Himself.

It thus becomes clear that, in accordance with Complementarian theology, girls must demonstrate unconditional “Biblical” submission to their fathers by virtue of the latter's shared

maleness with the deity. In contrast, however, these texts remain notably silent on any particular honours that should be paid to mothers. As such, rather than instruct readers to specifically esteem the mother-daughter relationship, these texts address the importance of the patriarchal institution of motherhood that evangelical girls will one day occupy. In this respect, the authors address readers as evangelicalism's "mothers of tomorrow" and construct a narrative framework wherein they share their maternal wisdom for the purpose of enculturating the next generation of "true" Christian women. In this way, the selected guidance literature perpetuates an evangelical maternal ethos wherein current generations of women act as "guardians of virtue" by simultaneously modeling and reproducing tenets of "authentic purity" and "righteous femininity." I will subsequently address this ethos in further detail; first, however, it is necessary to unpack the selected guidance literature's teachings about the maternal role that their young readers will inhabit as adults.

Righteous Femininity and "Good" Motherhood

With the exception of Mally's passing encouragement for readers to consult their mothers for advice about marriage and motherhood in *Before You Meet Prince Charming* (238), the selected authors pay no mention to the importance of honouring the mother-daughter relationship. However, they do painstakingly unpack the importance of the maternal role in light of its capacity to physically and pedagogically reproduce the next generation of "true" evangelical Christians. In this respect, these texts perpetuate what Adrienne Rich terms the patriarchal institution of motherhood, which values women principally for their abilities to reproduce gender hierarchies in "appropriately" socialized children (37). The work of mothering is thereby lauded because it serves to reproduce the patriarchal social order, yet women's "traditional" work both in and outside the domestic sphere is simultaneously devalued because it is understood as "natural"

and unskilled (Gerami 6). In a fundamentalist religious context, women are conceptualized as children's “natural” primary caregivers in accordance with their divinely-ordained feminine qualities, and are thus designated as safeguards of morality and tradition within the domestic sphere (32, 41).

Unsurprisingly, the selected guidance literature reproduces these patriarchal standards of “good” motherhood by reinforcing the importance of the “traditional” maternal role, while remaining silent about the importance of esteeming mothers for the critical work they perform. As Gresh and DeMoss concisely state in *Lies Young Women Believe*, “God created woman to be a mother of children” (163), and it is the divine responsibility of righteous girls and women to utilize their sexual and reproductive potentials in this capacity:

Not only do you have the *freedom* to fully embrace God's design for women—not only is it an incredible *privilege*—but as a child of God, you have a *responsibility* to fulfill His calling and His purpose for your life as a woman. And for most women that means embracing marriage and motherhood as their primary, God-given mission and calling. ([original emphasis] 165)

Notably, however, the divine nature of the maternal role cannot be fully realized unless it is fulfilled within evangelicalism's narrow purity precepts. “Of course, you can make life whether or not you are in the covenant of marriage,” Gresh explains in *And the Bride Wore White*. “But creating a life is the most incredible thing you will ever do. It deserves to be unmarred and undistracted by bad timing. *If* you will wait, *then* when you make new life, it will be a great celebration!” ([original emphasis] 138) Within this discursive framework, then, the value of the maternal role—and by extension the value of the “new life” that it produces—is subject to mitigation based on whether or not children are conceived within a legitimate heterosexual marriage covenant.

Along this trajectory, the selected texts argue that girls must reject the many “secular”

influences that undermine the maternal role, and contend that it is “radical” for girls to embrace traditional constructs of wifedom and motherhood. As Gresh and DeMoss contend in *Lies Young Women Believe*, “the culture” encourages girls to abandon these roles for the sake of gender equality, and here “the feminists” are once again incriminated. They explain how, “[i]n their quest for equality, feminists have undermined the concepts of motherhood and homemaking. Our culture has been profoundly changed as a result, and countless lives and homes have been scarred and broken” (161). They encourage readers to “fuel their passion” for being a wife and mother by volunteering their time as a babysitter, baking a batch of cookies and anonymously delivering them to a family member, or dedicating an upcoming school assignment to defending “God's design for women” (163).

For Ludy in particular, honouring this divine “design” for the maternal role requires mothers to demonstrate righteous femininity by providing aesthetic appeal to the world: “I'm always disturbed when I observe homemakers who habitually look like slobs, using the justification, 'Why should I bother looking nice? I'm just hanging out with the kids all day long,'” she explains in *The Lost Art of True Beauty*. “This attitude disregards the *value* of guiding a home and caring for a family. I've observed that when a mother dresses with dignity, she takes her role far more seriously, and the work she is doing begins to actually feel valuable and important” (81).

Given the fundamentalist exegeses that guide these texts' discursive framework, it is unsurprising that the selected authors further support this vision of “good motherhood” by referring to Biblical passages that describe the notorious “Proverbs 31 Woman”⁶⁴ (*Proverbs*

64 The “Proverbs 31 Woman” is the “wife of noble character” described in the Biblical book of Proverbs, chapter 31: 10-31. Complementarian evangelical subcultures often interpret these passages as evidence that women are commanded by God to be full-time homemakers when they have children. When considered within their

31:10: A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies). As Gresh explains in *Get Lost*, “Turn to Proverbs 31 and you'll find a woman who loves to be home. She's busy there too. Making it beautiful and nourishing and fun. That's what God wants for you. Do you think you'll become a happy homemaker the moment you get married? Like everything else, we have to be trained for such things” (182). Ludy similarly expresses her disdain for mothers who do not internalize and perform these select Proverbs 31 passages in *Set-Apart Femininity*. She explains how one woman she knows denounced these expectations as “unrealistic,” and jokingly told her “I'll become the Proverbs 31 woman just as soon as I get all those Proverbs 31 maids!” (37) Ludy accordingly laments that “in recent years, Christian femininity has decided to boycott heroic womanhood—especially when it comes in the form of the 'stay-at-home supermom' portrayed in Proverbs 31.” She proceeds to explain how “[The Proverbs 31 woman] has superhuman strength. She has unmatched valour. She valiantly stomps out whatever stands in the way of God's purposes. . . . She lives a miraculous, superhuman, victorious, amazing, fulfilling, poured-out life. She is stunningly beautiful, dignified, and strong; stronger than every other woman around her” (38).

Importantly, Ludy concludes this section by stating that “the source of [the Proverbs 31 woman's] strength does not lie within herself. She relies on a power wholly not her own” (2008: 38). In this way, not only does Ludy's fundamentalist exegesis dismiss these passages' original historical and literary contexts, but her arguments also perpetuate an evangelical prosperity gospel paradigm wherein individual success is a direct reflection of one's righteousness and

historical and literary contexts, however, these passages comprise a poem praising the conduct of an upper class Jewish wife, rather than provide universal guidelines for women's conduct. For further reading on her significance in evangelical subcultures—as well as efforts launched by evangelical feminists to re-claim the meaning of these passages—see Rachel Held Evans' popular 2012 text *A Year of Biblical Womanhood*.

religious devotion. Because the Proverbs 31 woman accomplishes these tasks each day through strength that is “wholly not her own,” this paradigm implies that all women who are moral and dedicated to God will have similar experiences because it is the deity's divine will that they do so (*Psalm 84:11: For the LORD God is a sun and shield; the LORD bestows favour and honour; no good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless*). Within this discursive framework, all women are capable of accessing the material resources and “super human strength” that are required for performing evangelical ideals of “good motherhood”—*if* they are wholly righteous and pure. In contrast, this paradigm insinuates that mothers who do not have the time, energy, and economic means to realize these ideals are simply not devoted to God.

However, in spite of these intensive demands that are required of mothers—and in contrast to Gresh and DeMoss's claims about motherhood being the central purpose of girls' and women's lives—Ludy interestingly emphasizes that motherhood is *not* the most important role that readers are called to perform as adult women. Rather, she advises readers to

[b]eware of downplaying the sacred claim that God has upon your life under the banner of being 'called' to suburbia or to simply be a mom. There is nothing wrong with suburbia or with focusing a large amount of your time on raising children, especially while your children are young. But be sure you don't use those things as an excuse to ignore the greater call upon your life—pouring out with radical abandon for the lost, dying, needy, and oppressed. (2008: 205)

In one respect, it is constructive that Ludy does not deem motherhood to be the sole primary purpose of every woman's life, and that she encourages readers to utilize their skills and passions to effect social change. However, it *is* problematic that she instructs girls to dedicate their lives to performing selfless acts of care for others *in addition* to the intensive time, energy, and resources they must dedicate to performing evangelical ideals of “good motherhood.” Not only do these instructions perpetuate patriarchal demands for women's “natural” selflessness and servitude, but

the claim that women should not aim to “simply be a mom” ultimately devalues and dismisses the importance of social reproductive work.

In a similar vein, Mally contends in *Before You Meet Prince Charming* that “[a]s a young lady, you probably believe that God is calling you to be a wife and mother. This is a very noble calling. In fact, there is no assignment more important than raising a new generation to serve the Lord. Yet, marriage cannot be your ultimate goal in life. You must have a life purpose bigger than marriage” (158). Here the author conflates the roles of wife and mother, thus overlooking women who bear and raise children outside of heterosexual marriage, in addition to married women who do not desire or are not able to have children. Furthermore, while Mally's conception of what could comprise this “larger life purpose” beyond motherhood is vaguely defined, she does clarify that it should not violate tenets of “traditional” feminine roles: “Of course, I don't mean just any 'life purpose.' I am definitely not referring to seeking after a career,” she explains. “Our culture, driven by the modern feminist movement, is pressuring us girls to be successful in the world's eyes, get graduate degrees, be independent, move up in the business world, have small families, and do men's work” (158).

On the whole, then, the selected authors write extensively about the importance of the maternal role insofar that it will allow readers to physically and pedagogically reproduce the next generation of “true” Christians for their evangelical subculture. As Mally explains, “God made [girls] to ... bear and train little ones for the kingdom of God” (159). In this way, the selected texts conceptualize girls as evangelicalism's “mothers of tomorrow” who must internalize patriarchal beliefs and practices so they can perform and reproduce them as adult women. Similarly, “true” Christian girls are conceived as passive recipients of religious enculturation, and their abilities to exercise agency by negotiating or rejecting the teachings espoused by

evangelical adults are constructed as problematic acts of disobedience.

These texts thus laud the institution of motherhood for its capacity to reproduce patriarchal traditions and maintain religious subcultural strength, while mothers themselves are devalued within the Complementarian gender hierarchy. It is also problematic that these texts do not address the particular time, energy, and resources that are required of mothers who perform religious enculturation, just as they fail to address how these demands may constrain the mother-daughter relationship. I will now attempt to address these gaps, first by naming and unpacking the evangelical maternal ethos that guides these authors' efforts to pedagogically reproduce the next generation of "true" evangelical women. I will then proceed to consider how religious mother-work, as well as the mother-daughter relationship more generally, may be reconceptualized as mutual sites of empowerment for girls and women when they are extricated from these texts' fundamentalist discursive framework.

Even though it would be another ten years before I could conceptualize and name the evangelical maternal ethos that constrained maternal practice in my childhood evangelical subculture, I became acutely aware of the responsibility that mothers bore for their daughters' conduct—and the politics of blame that accompanied it—when I was sixteen. While regular church attendance had already taken a backseat to the fast food job I began a year earlier, I still accompanied my mother to the occasional Sunday morning service if I happened to have the day off. She also kept me updated on institutional goings-on whenever significant changes arose, and such updates had been more frequently warranted since our lead pastor decided to “follow God's call” to continue his ministry in a new city. In the meantime his replacement had been gradually establishing a new church administration—an undertaking that had very public

ramifications in an institution of several hundred attendees like this one.

On this particular day I recall sitting at the kitchen table with my mother and older sister as we discussed one of the more surprising “regime changes” that the new pastor had implemented. My mother was explaining how Mrs. Jennings,⁶⁵ a prominent church member who had worked as the Sunday School superintendent since I was at least eight years old, had been suddenly dismissed from her position, and her family was now planning to leave the church. While my increasingly cynical teenaged self had little investment in the majority of the church's attendees at this point, I was nevertheless taken aback by this news. Mrs. Jennings had been in charge of Sunday School for as long as I could remember, and she was also an exceptionally kind woman. I could not imagine why the new pastoral team would decide to replace her. As I expressed my surprise and dismay, Ashley offered her take on the matter.

“A lot of people think they fired her because of Angela,⁶⁶” she said in a matter-of-fact tone. “That's why they're leaving the church.” I raised my eyebrow as I quietly considered this possibility. Angela was the oldest of the three Jennings daughters, and her “reputation” had certainly preceded her throughout the past few years. I had never spoken to her in person, but I had learned through Ashley's first-hand accounts—as well as from the occasions when I served her at my place of work—about her notoriety in the church and wider community. The first shocking revelation had come a year earlier when the middle Jennings sister told Ashley that she could often hear Angela having sex with her boyfriend in her upstairs bedroom when their parents were gone. Furthermore, she did not seem concerned with hiding her “promiscuous” lifestyle; she could often be seen in our small town wearing “immodest” clothing and

⁶⁵ Name has been changed to guarantee anonymity.

⁶⁶ Name has been changed to guarantee anonymity.

associating with disreputable non-Christian peers.

After considering this, I finally said, “Even so, they can't punish Mrs. Jennings because they don't like Angela. That's not fair.”

My mother spoke next, and I still vividly recall her response to my proclamation, as well as the illuminating effect it would have on my relationship with her from then on. “The church needs leaders who reflect a Godly lifestyle. If Mrs. Jennings' daughters aren't demonstrating moral conduct in their lives, it says something about how their parents live and the type of parenting they've received. I think the pastor had to make the best decision for the church.”

I do not believe I argued the point with my mother after she said this. Perhaps I was too surprised to reply, and it was likely the certainty and casualness with which she spoke as much as the statement itself that rendered me speechless. How could she agree that it was acceptable to hold a mother responsible for her daughter's conduct when she had modeled nothing but Christian virtue—at least as far as I was concerned—for her own daughters every day of our lives, and yet neither Ashley nor I had upheld our evangelical subculture's purity precepts? While some time would pass before my mother discovered the smoking gun of my “promiscuity” in the form of birth control pills hidden in my bedroom desk drawer, and even though I had only gone to “second base” with my current boyfriend, I knew I was no longer “pure” by Dannah Gresh's standards. I also knew that my decision to begin acting on my sexual desires was not a reflection of my mother's personal morality or competence as a parent.

However, I was finally beginning to understand that my mother did not conceptualize her daughters' purity breaches in the same way, and that she did indeed believe that her own inadequacies as a Christian woman and mother were at least partially to blame for our sexual transgressions. And as her now-adult daughters continue to push and negotiate the discursive

boundaries of evangelical Christianity of our own volition, I wish I could say that my mother has learned to let go of this ethos. But just as my prolonged internalization of evangelical purity precepts throughout the years has left my twenty-eight-year-old self still susceptible to their influence, I can empathize with the fact that such old habits die hard.

The Evangelical Maternal Ethos

The selected texts perpetuate an evangelical maternal ethos which is informed by fundamentalist discursive practices, the internalized demands of maternal thinking, and mother-blame as a deeply entrenched social practice. To begin, this ethos is rooted in an evangelical prosperity gospel paradigm wherein salvation is understood to be an individualized, purposeful commitment (Castells 22), and it is believed that God rewards the personal morality and devotion of individual believers with visible prosperity (Reeves-Ellington et al. 3). It is also rooted in an evangelizing imperative wherein “true” believers are obligated to expand the “body of Christ” by spreading religious “truths” throughout the world (Gallagher 4). Finally, this ethos is informed by the dominant evangelical belief that children are born with sinful natures, so their childhoods must be shaped by intensive religious enculturation (Castells 23; Colaner and Giles 526).

Since evangelical subcultures designate women as “natural” caregivers within the domestic sphere (Colaner and Giles 526; Hardacre 132; Mayall 1), mothers also function as children's primary religious enculturators (Franks 6; Gerami 32; Levitt 531). In this capacity, religious enculturation should be aptly contextualized as a key aspect of evangelical women's daily mother-work.⁶⁷ Here Sara Ruddick's three demands that govern maternal thinking are

⁶⁷ This project employs “mother-work” in accordance with Molly Ladd-Taylor's coinage of the term in *Mother-*

pertinent to consider. Preservation, the first demand, refers to children's physical care and nurturance (21). The second and third demands of growth and acceptability, however, are more intricately tied to the mother's peer group and its corresponding values. Given that religious enculturation is a central aspect of childrearing within fundamentalist religious subcultures, it can be argued that the latter demand of “acceptability” is exacerbated for evangelical mothers. This is because they must not only teach their children about broader societal norms and roles, but also ensure that their children internalize and perform evangelical doctrines—which, frequently, are believed to directly oppose the larger “secular” society. Furthermore, the evangelical prosperity gospel paradigm stipulates that God rewards faithful believers with visible success. Within this discursive framework, then, mothers who are “truly” moral and devout will be “blessed” with children who grow into “acceptable” members of their evangelical subculture. Likewise, mothers whose children do not internalize and perform these precepts may be subject to blame and judgment—both as mothers and as women of faith.

As Paula Caplan contends, the practice of blaming mothers for all that goes “wrong” in their children's growth process is “interwoven into our daily lives” (44). She further explains how the politics of blame are exacerbated for mothers of daughters; since patriarchal society demands that girls and women guard and perpetuate man-made regulations and values, mothers are charged with training their daughters to embody these ideals (68-71). In this sense, mothers are compelled to model patriarchal ideals of femininity while simultaneously reproducing them in their daughters, thus perpetuating the myth that a girl who does not grow into an “acceptable”

Work: Women, Child-Welfare, and the State, 1890-1930 (1994), wherein it refers to women's unpaid work of reproduction and caregiving. Similarly, I use “religious mother-work” to refer to the unpaid yet vital intellectual and emotional reproductive work that women perform with their children through processes of religious enculturation.

woman by patriarchal standards is the product of a “bad mother” (70).

Arguably, this imperative is further compounded for mothers who operate in fundamentalist religious subcultures. Since “[f]undamentalists' notion of the ideal society is inseparably linked to the notion of the ideal woman” (Gerami 154), there is a critical imperative to reproduce “traditional” gender roles which, in the case of North American evangelicalism, are conceptualized as “Biblical” and God-ordained. This theological framework propagates discourses of “righteous femininity” wherein the extent to which girls and women adhere to patriarchal values provides a primary measure of their individual morality *and* their dedication to the religious subculture as a whole. As the selected evangelical literature illustrates, such values require girls and women to “submit” to male authority within and outside the private domestic sphere, as well as perform standards of “authentic purity” by preserving their sexual and reproductive potentials for their future husbands' ownership.

To that end, in addition to acting as primary caregivers and overseeing children's religious enculturation, these texts propagate an evangelical maternal ethos which charges women to act as “guardians of virtue” in their relationships with their daughters—both by performing patriarchal standards of “righteous femininity” for them to emulate, as well as monitoring girls' sexual conduct in accordance with tenets of “authentic purity.”⁶⁸ Furthermore, in perpetuating the evangelical prosperity gospel paradigm, these texts construct a discursive framework wherein ideals of “good motherhood” are accessible to all moral and dedicated mothers, and the fruits of their labour will ultimately materialize in pure and righteous daughters *because God wills it*. I

68 For further reading on the imperative for evangelical mothers to model standards of “righteous femininity” and monitor their daughters' sexual conduct, see Vicky Courtney's 2008 text *Five Conversations You Must Have with Your Daughter* and Dannah Gresh's 2010 text *Six Ways to Keep the “Little” In Your Girl: Guiding Your Daughter from Her Tweens to Her Teens*. For a historical context, see Horace Bushnell's 1861 text *Christian Nurture*.

further argue that the very propagation of these texts reflects and perpetuates this ethos, as the selected authors attempt to pedagogically reproduce the next generation of “true” Christian women for their evangelical subculture. This is apparent in the texts' collective narrative framework wherein the adult “expert” shares her maternal wisdom with the young reader, who is addressed as one of evangelicalism's “mothers of tomorrow.”

Indeed, the selected authors repeatedly emphasize the future precariousness of evangelicalism's subcultural strength, and they regard this pedagogical reproduction as a vital and urgent political process. For instance, as Gresh and DeMoss declare in *Lies Young Women Believe*: “We're here to tell you that you're in a 'burning house.' You're in the midst of a vast generational crisis, and lies are blazing through your world. The spiritual attack on your generation is intense. And we're going to do our best to wake you up” (17). They tellingly contend that a key threat to evangelical Christianity lies with teens who negotiate or reject “traditional” evangelical doctrines, and instead draw from alternative belief systems in cultivating their spiritualities: “A recent article in the *New York Times* observed the trend among today's teens to mix elements from many different faiths into their own concoction of belief,” they explain. “One Christian leader quoted in the article expressed his concern that there will soon be a mass exodus from the Christian faith as teens who have grown up in Bible-believing homes and churches become adults” (25). Here the authors express evangelicalism's subcultural anxiety that “this generation of teens” is rejecting fundamentalist teachings espoused by adult authorities, and is “voicing a desire to hear from God directly rather than refer to the Bible” (32).

In this regard, the selected authors address the young reader as part of a generational cohort that is in danger of abandoning evangelicalism's long-held traditions and compromising its subcultural strength. Such claims poignantly reveal how this textual genre's overarching

fundamentalist discursive framework values girls for their potentials as future adults, just as it views their capacities to exercise spiritual agency as unequivocally problematic. It is thereby unsurprising that these authors offer a number of intensive guidelines that girls should apply in their daily lives to ensure they are adhering to the subculture's beliefs and working to strengthen the collective body of “true” believers. Among them is the need for girls to learn “traditional” feminine roles, and Gresh particularly expresses in *Get Lost* how satisfying it is to watch her own teenaged daughters “flourish in the kitchen and home” (182). Equally if not more important is the need for girls to date and marry “strong Christian” young men, since they are not to be “unequally yoked” with unbelievers (Mally 73).

These texts also propagate the evangelizing imperative to spread “the good news” of God's righteousness throughout the world. As Gresh and DeMoss explain in *Lies Young Women Believe*: “We need you to join us in putting out the lies that are blazing through your generation. The Bible says we have a responsibility to try to restore those who wander off from the Truth. God wants to use *you* to reveal Truth to those who are trapped in deception” (16). Here the authors employ fundamentalist subcultural identity codes which stipulate that the more “the secular world” disagrees with Christians as they share the “truth” of God's righteousness, the more they can be assured that they are in the right. The authors accordingly explain how “[t]he path of least resistance is to go with the flow and follow the crowd, without stopping to ask, 'Is this really true?' Those who love Christ and stand for Truth will always be a small minority. We are called to stand firm for that truth, regardless of how few people may agree with us” (36).

In this regard, it is also necessary that children remain committed to “the body” of Christ by attending an institutional church wherein they may be instructed and held accountable by Godly adult authorities: “No matter how many bad experiences you may have in church—and

we know you will have them because Satan hates the church and is always attacking it—the best place for you to grow, serve, and be disciplined is in a local church body,” Gresh and DeMoss explain (122). Within this discursive framework, then, any “bad” experiences that girls may have in institutional church—including instances of abuse and unjust treatment by adult authorities—should be attributed to the malevolent forces that seek to destroy Christianity, and girls should thereby remain committed to evangelicalism in spite of these experiences as a purposeful act of subcultural solidarity.⁶⁹

On the whole, the selected guidance literature emphasizes the need for girls to internalize and reproduce the fundamentalist teachings espoused by adult authorities, just as it problematizes their capacities to exercise agency by challenging and rejecting evangelical beliefs. This discursive framework has particularly contentious implications for the mother-daughter relationship, wherein “good mothers” are obliged to reproduce patriarchal traditions in the next generation of “true” Christians, and “good daughters” must passively internalize and perform these ideals. The evangelical prosperity gospel paradigm further exacerbates this imperative since women who are wholly dedicated to the intensive work of religious enculturation—such as praying regularly for God's protection and guidance over every aspect of their children's physical and spiritual welfare (Gunn and Goyer 182-184)—should see their daughters grow to reproduce these ideals in accordance with the divine's righteous will.

69 This sentiment is especially relevant in light of the recent sexual abuse allegations that have been waged by girls and young women against a number of prominent leaders within U.S. evangelical institutions—such as the infamous Bob Jones University in South Carolina, Patrick Henry College in Virginia, the Florida-based New Tribes Mission, as well as a number of churches affiliated with Sovereign Grace Ministries. In most of these cases the allegations were not reported to legal authorities in part because of leaders' fears that such publicity would harm their institutions' reputations and compromise Christian subcultural solidarity. To that end, a number of the victims were forced to publicly “forgive” their abusers and promise that they would not pursue legal action beyond institutional authorities. Kathryn Joyce addresses a number of these cases in a 2014 investigative report published in the *American Prospect* that can be accessed online.

In this sense, rather than regard religious enculturation as an empowering and participatory process wherein mothers and daughters may actively cultivate their spiritualities from a place of agency, authenticity, and mutual enrichment, fundamentalist discourses compel girls and women to singularly internalize and reproduce “traditional” gender hierarchies. However, while these discourses operate as rigid “truth regimes” that are constructed by self-declared “experts” within the selected texts, it is imperative to acknowledge how girls and women who operate within evangelical subcultures may exercise agency—constrained as it may be—by questioning, challenging, and subverting fundamentalist teachings in their spiritual lives. To that end, I will now decisively shift from my analysis of the selected evangelical literature, and consider how religious enculturation may be re-imagined and re-constituted beyond the ideological confines of fundamentalism. I will also consider how mothers and daughters may benefit from employing such transformative discursive strategies in their relationships with each other, as well as in their daily religious and spiritual practices.

I was not surprised by my mother's reaction when my nineteen-year-old self informed her that I had enrolled in several women's studies classes as elective credits for my undergraduate communication studies degree. “Be careful,” was all she said. Based on the many impassioned monologues that I had witnessed Pat Robertson deliver during episodes of the 700 Club throughout my childhood, I knew perfectly well what she meant by this. I had learned early on that “the feminists” were among the most deleterious influences in “the secular world's” malevolent effort to quash Christianity's subcultural strength. As such, I also anticipated her concern several months later when I decided to share some of the knowledge I had garnered in my undergraduate “Women and the Bible” course. This ultimately began with my proclamation

at the dinner table that I believed Adam and Eve from the Biblical book of Genesis to be literary characters, rather than the first human beings on earth, and that their story had been misappropriated throughout history to justify women's oppression.

I was surprised, however, that my mother did not immediately attempt to “correct” me when I made this claim. Instead, she opted to take a seat next to me in our home's living room after dinner and casually ask me to share what I was learning. At this invitation—for the first time—I began to express some of my critical views about the evangelical subculture that had shaped my experiences since infancy. While I do not recall many details of this initial discussion, I do remember that we asked each other a number of questions and gently challenged each other's beliefs. I also remember that, in the end, we did not agree on everything. Even so, the conversation ended with my mother saying that she respected my courage to ask difficult questions about the faith tradition in which she had raised me, and in many ways this brief affirmation served as a valuable milestone in my still-ongoing spiritual journey. With my mother's unexpected encouragement, I began to explore an alternative way of living out the Christian faith—as a feminist.

*My mother remained a central influence in this journey throughout my young adult years. Following the completion of my undergraduate degree, I moved further away from my hometown to begin graduate school, at which point our discussions about religion and spirituality began occurring on a weekly basis over the telephone. During this time I worked through what I now consider to be gateway feminist texts such as Naomi Wolf's *The Beauty Myth* (1990), and I soon became bolder about integrating my Christian and feminist worldviews in our conversations. Not only did my mother join me in critiquing the deleterious effects that narrow beauty standards have on women's self-esteem, but we also discussed the sexist division of domestic labour that*

frames how “good” wives and mothers should think and behave—cultural myths that were prevalent in both our lives. To my enthusiasm, we also began addressing some of the sexist beliefs that pervade evangelical Christianity. I distinctly remember her take on a sermon that was given in our home church one Sunday morning, which I happened to attend with her while I was home for a visit. The pastor spoke about the particular God-ordained duties of wives and husbands within the marriage covenant, and he suggested that women should maintain peace within the home by not complaining about their husbands doing such things as leaving their dirty clothes on the floor. “Well, maybe men should just clean up their own dirty clothes, and then women would have no reason to complain,” my mother said during the car ride back from the service. I smiled and wholeheartedly agreed.

I now purposefully reflect on these moments as my twenty-eight-year-old self becomes discouraged by the changing beliefs that have ruptured the intimate spiritual bond I once shared with my mother. As I feel this tension weigh heavily on my shoulders, I also strive to consider what we still share in common, in spite of our differing views. I recognize my mother's ceaseless quest for knowledge about the God whom she follows, as it seems that every few weeks she is reading a new text by a different Christian author—some of which she deems valuable for her own spiritual journey, while also questioning others with a critical voice. I also consider how she remains ever steadfast in her faith even though she rarely attends my hometown's Pentecostal church anymore—a decision that does not seem to be definitive or permanent, although she has expressed with increasing candidness her disagreement with a number of the institution's doctrines and structural practices. Nonetheless, she still spends numerous hours praying, reading, and reflecting in order to understand the truths that her God wishes to reveal. She still regards me as a confidant to whom she can express her beliefs and her doubts, and even though

we do not agree on everything—or on most things, it would seem as of late—I cannot help but place my joyful hope in a future when we can engage in authentic dialogue about what I once considered to be dissonant Christian and feminist values, as well as build a relationship on mutual trust and respect wherein these ideas can be seamlessly woven together and shared. I also cannot help but smile as I imagine what Pat Robertson would say about that.

Re-Imagining the Empowering Potentials of Religious Mother-Work

While the empowering potentials of religious mother-work are constrained by fundamentalist imperatives to reproduce patriarchal “traditions” and maintain evangelical subcultural strength, it should not be assumed that the religious enculturation that mothers perform in their relationships with their daughters—as well as their sons—is singularly oppressive. Rather, as discussed in Chapter 2, the potential for resistance lies at the core of every power relationship (Foucault 82-83). In this sense, it is critical to consider girls’ and women’s varying capacities to appropriate, negotiate, and reject fundamentalist paradigms through daily processes of religious enculturation. To that end, I will now draw from feminist and childhood studies scholarship to problematize the fundamentalist “truth regimes” that are propagated by the selected authors, as well as envision alternative possibilities for religious mother-work and mother-daughter relationships.

In this way, the analysis which follows is *not* meant to prescribe how evangelical mothers and daughters “should” operate in their relationships; rather, I aim to consider and affirm the discursive spaces that religious women and girls may strive to cultivate when they find their spiritual growth and empowerment thwarted by fundamentalist doctrines. It is thereby pertinent to note that, in many ways and for many reasons, these spaces may be inaccessible to women and girls who operate within geographically, socioeconomically, and theologically diverse

evangelical subcultures. The capacities for evangelical girls and women to exercise agency in this regard are always subject to constraint by institutional and relational structures; this is particularly the case for girls who are legally and socially subject to adult authority. In this respect, this analysis is neither meant to be authoritative nor exhaustive; rather, it draws from existing scholarship—as well as my own lived experience—to imagine alternative pedagogical, theological, and epistemological strategies that may empower evangelical mothers and daughters.

To begin, the particular challenges posed by religious enculturation are effectively addressed by Andrea O'Reilly's conceptual framework for empowered mothering. She argues that women and their children both stand to benefit when maternal practice is duly understood and affirmed as work and mothers operate from a place of agency, authority, and authenticity (45). In a similar vein, it is critical for the specific demands presented by religious mother-work to be recognized and named as “work,” and that the particular time, energy, skills, and resources that are required of the many mothers who perform religious enculturation are included in broader discussions about mother-work. Too often women's religious and spiritual knowledges are marginalized in minority world feminist research, when in actuality such epistemologies fundamentally shape many women's maternal practice. As feminist theologian Valerie Saiving famously argues, women experience religion in diverse yet particular ways (23), and their experiences as mothers further shape the religious “ways of knowing” they cultivate throughout their lives. In this sense, the empowering potentials of religious mother-work may be augmented when women are affirmed as producers of religious knowledge in accordance with the wisdom they have garnered through their own lived experiences.

This crucial imperative has promising beginnings within the mother-daughter

relationship. To be sure, establishing such affirmations will be a contentious and ongoing process. As Caplan argues, the mother-daughter relationship is constrained by the patriarchal forces that shape motherhood, in addition to the gendered expectations that mothers and daughters will have a very particular kind of relationship that is absent of anger, alienation, and emotional ambiguity (9-11, 22-23). This dynamic is further exacerbated when religious daughters negotiate or reject the patriarchal traditions that their mothers are invested in, as daughters' "rebellion" against their mothers' teachings is likely to be seen as a personal rejection and betrayal—more so than with sons (33). In such cases, working to affirm women's religious authority is largely contingent upon daughters' willingness to cultivate a critical and empathetic understanding of the expectations that define the maternal role within fundamentalist religious subcultures. Admittedly, this is a lofty discursive strategy, especially since the ability to foster such a perspective is also contingent upon girls' access to "alternative" knowledge systems that are frequently incompatible with fundamentalist "truth regimes." Such knowledge is also less likely to be accessible to girls whose agency is further constrained by their legal "child" status. Nevertheless, girls and women who can access such knowledge may navigate mother-daughter conflict with heightened sensitivity and conscientiousness as they politicize their mothers' experiences, rather than resent them for reproducing patriarchal ideologies of female inferiority.

Still, it is unlikely that this political and empathetic consciousness alone will entirely mitigate the feelings of rejection and failure that a mother may internalize—in addition to the blame she may be subject to in her religious subculture—because of her daughter's perceived "transgressions." In this regard, it is equally necessary for mothers—and adults more generally—to conceptualize and address girls as agents who actively cultivate their own religious epistemologies. As Robert Coles illustrates in his landmark study on children's religious lives,

girls—as well as boys—are capable of articulating thoughtful and unique modes of spiritual and religious thought when they are afforded the discursive space to do so (22, 108). As such, girls may be affirmed as active contributors to processes of religious enculturation when they are more broadly recognized as social actors who experience the cultural category of childhood in complex and diverse ways (James and James 17, 119-120). It is helpful in this regard to consider alternative conceptual frameworks of childhood *and* adulthood: so long as adults are presumed to be universally competent and complete beings who always understand and pursue children's best interests, the knowledge that children garner from their own corporealities and lived experiences will continue to be marginalized and devalued. Lee accordingly explains how it is more accurate and advantageous to conceptualize children *and* adults as fundamentally dependent and incomplete beings whose ways of knowing are contextual and perpetually in flux (103).

Importantly, developing such transformative conceptual frameworks requires adults to confront their anxieties concerning the ambiguities that accompany children's growth. In one capacity, adults must recognize children as sexual beings who are capable of understanding, articulating, and responding to their own needs and desires. As Berry Mayall contends, children are often valued for their potentials as future adults, and their current bodily experiences are largely ignored in turn (4). Similarly, Brendan Hyde emphasizes the need to recognize corporeality as a primary and legitimate way of knowing (165). This resolution is particularly critical in the context of evangelical purity discourses which delegitimize girls' corporeal knowledges by denying their sexual desires and pathologizing their sexual expression. These narrow understandings of girlhood sexuality—and female sexuality more generally—ultimately disregard the healthy ways that girls may develop and express sexuality, particularly when constructive guidance and education are provided by trusted adults.

In this sense, rather than assume that “good” children passively accept the religious “truths” that adults teach, the mother-daughter relationship stands to benefit when girls and mothers are both encouraged to cultivate critical and empowered spiritualities wherein they may doubt, negotiate, and contest religious values that do not contribute to their personal growth or reflect their lived realities. In many ways, this resolution is antithetical to fundamentalist paradigms wherein subcultural solidarity is contingent upon shared beliefs in timeless and eternal “truths,” and ambiguity and doubt are viewed as threats to religious subcultural strength. It may thus be helpful for mothers and daughters who seek to negotiate such rigid doctrines in their daily lives to conceptualize spirituality as a fundamental search for meaning that may be expressed within or outside the ideological boundaries of formal religious belief systems and institutions (Hyde 15; Myers 62); that is fostered and sustained through interpersonal relationships (Haight 110); that is experienced in diverse ways by each individual child and adult (Hyde 59); and is cultivated through everyday social practice (43), including mystical experiences (Haight 114).

As such, similar to Allison James' recommendations for larger processes of socialization, religious enculturation is effectively approached from a child-centred perspective that takes into account children's minority group status and recognizes them as active participants in their social worlds (173-174). Just as affirming women's authority over their own religiosities and spiritualities is aided by daughters fostering an empathetic and political consciousness, this child-centred approach to religious enculturation also relies on adults' cultivation of empathy and imagination. As Barbara Kines Myers suggests, empathizing with children requires adults to imagine what their experiences are like and what kinds of meaning they assign to the environments that are often constructed for them without their consent (18). This also encourages

adults to develop a spirituality of caring which recognizes each child's need to cultivate her own spirituality by forging meaningful connections with others. In this sense, individual spiritualities cannot flourish without interrelatedness; however, they also cannot be subsumed by community expectations (Myers 98-99), as is often the case within fundamentalist religious subcultures.

Similarly, Hyde recommends a number of ways in which parents and adults more generally can nurture children's spiritualities. Principal among them is creating physical and emotional spaces wherein children are free to actively engage in meaning-making and negotiate their worldviews on their own terms (161). Such spaces are also largely antithetical to fundamentalist paradigms which stipulate that children must wholly submit to adult teachings and perform “traditional” beliefs and practices. In this regard, mothers and daughters both stand to benefit from an enculturation dynamic that is based in mutual trust, respect, and honesty. The empowering potentials of religious mother-work may thus be augmented when mothers provide spiritual guidance and share their religious knowledges while allowing their daughters to cultivate their own spiritualities—which may or may not include various aspects of their mothers' own belief systems.

In working to create these physical and emotional “safe spaces,” a major issue for mothers to confront is the balance of care and control that governs their work with children, as well as the extent to which children can express and enact their own needs in tension with the authority that their mothers are socially and legally sanctioned to exercise (Mayall 33). To be sure, discourses concerning the primacy of children's needs, autonomy, and agency have had contentious implications for mother-work *when they are interpreted through a patriarchal lens*. Such discourses have the potential to naturalize oppressive standards of intensive and sacrificial motherhood wherein women's needs are always secondary to their children's. However, this

tension may be alleviated by an empowered mothering framework which not only affirms the energy, skills, and resources that constitute maternal practice, but also conceptualizes socialization and enculturation as collaborative endeavours in which children actively participate. As Mayall contends,

Women's work both in the home and the school has low social status because it is ... defined as natural and therefore easy. But if children are regarded as active, participating in the acquisition of knowledge and social relationships, emphasis is thrown on the present as well as the future of children's lives. In turn women's work with children may be understood not as easy preparatory activity, but as collaborative, interactive work with people to make something worth while of their lives both now and for the future. (6)

As such, women's authority and the importance of their mother-work need not be diminished by affirming children's individual needs as they actively cultivate their spiritualities and shape their social worlds. Rather, women and girls both stand to benefit when children are understood to work in alliances with their mothers as they learn to engage in physical, emotional, and spiritual self-care, as well as contribute to other aspects of social reproduction (Mayall 6, 83). In this regard, it is helpful to conceptualize children's spiritual development and religious enculturation as a fluid and participatory journey that does not end when they emerge as “stable” and “complete” adult Christians. Rather, if adults are also conceptualized as fundamentally incomplete and dependent beings, mothers may access critical space to voice their own doubts and uncertainties from a place of authenticity, as well as genuinely consider their daughters' perspectives when the latter challenge religious subcultural traditions that mothers adhere to.

On the whole, the empowering potentials of religious mother-work may be augmented for mothers and daughters when both resolve to affirm and respect each other's spiritual and corporeal ways of knowing. Furthermore, when children are viewed as spiritual agents, rather than blank canvases whose morality is determined by their mothers' own conduct, mothers may be emancipated from the evangelical maternal ethos which holds them responsible when their

daughters do not conform to religious subcultural standards of acceptability. Indeed, when religious mother-work is extricated from the fundamentalist imperative to model and perpetuate patriarchal “traditions,” women and girls may work in collaboration to actively shape religious enculturation and re-claim this process as a conduit for mutual growth and enrichment.

Conclusion

The selected evangelical guidance literature warrants critique not only because of the patriarchal discourses of “authentic purity” and “righteous femininity” that it promulgates, but also because of the problematic power dynamic that is embedded in its guiding narrative framework. These authors naturalize “truth regimes” which demand children's universal submission to adult authority. The absoluteness of this command is derived from this textual genre's overarching fundamentalist exegeses of Biblical “proof texts”; according to this theological framework, because the deity has purposefully placed particular adult authorities in children's lives, girls obey God by submitting to adults—in the same way that women obey God by submitting to men. Such discourses take for granted that all adults understand and actively pursue children's best interests, just as they overlook instances wherein adults exercise their authority over children in oppressive ways.

Furthermore, children's ubiquitous submission to adult authority is communicated in gendered terms. Girls are instructed to honour their fathers and regard them as keepers of their sexual and reproductive potentials by virtue of the latter's shared “maleness” with the deity. In this sense, the father-daughter relationship serves as a precursor to the heterosexual marriage covenant, wherein women must submit to their husbands in the same way and for the same reasons they submit to God. In contrast, rather than instruct girls to similarly honour their mothers because of the important work they perform, girls are addressed as evangelicalism's

“mothers of tomorrow” who must learn to internalize patriarchal standards of purity and femininity so they can reproduce these subcultural values in the next generation of “true” Christians. Evangelical precepts of “good motherhood” are thereby rooted in the simultaneous modeling and reproducing of patriarchal traditions, as well as in the belief that mothers who wholly submit to these God-ordained standards will see the fruits of their labour materialize in authentically pure and righteously feminine daughters.

While this evangelical maternal ethos constrains the mother-daughter relationship and the empowering potentials of religious mother-work more generally, it is crucial to consider how women and girls may exercise agency by negotiating and subverting fundamentalist “truth regimes” that do not contribute to their spiritual growth or reflect their lived realities. In this way, mothers and daughters may re-envision religious enculturation as an active, fluid, and participatory process by affirming one another as authorities of their own religious knowledges, rather than as mere transmitters and recipients of patriarchal traditions. Such transformative discursive strategies provide augmented opportunities for mothers and daughters to cultivate critical spiritualities from a place of empowerment, authenticity, and mutual enrichment. The discourses at the core of the evangelical purity dialectic may be similarly negotiated and transformed, thus carving critical space for girls and women to operate as authorities over their corporeal and spiritual ways of knowing. I will now conclude by considering how girls and women may negotiate the selected texts’ precepts of “authentic purity” and “righteous femininity” in accordance with a feminist theological framework.

Chapter 5

Conclusion: Renouncing Purity and Re-Claiming Righteous Femininity

By the time the winter break had commenced during the first year of my master's degree, it had become commonplace for my mother and me to critically discuss various aspects of patriarchal sex and gender roles during our weekly telephone chats. Yet in spite of this ongoing dialogue, I had not mustered the courage to openly challenge the purity discourses which defined her religious worldview and shaped her mother-work. This finally changed in December when I returned home to celebrate the holidays with my family.

*It was Christmas morning; my father and sisters had dispersed throughout the house now that the presents had all been opened, and I sat on the living room floor amid heaps of colourful paper and ribbon. My mother was sitting adjacent to me at our family's computer, likely playing a game of Solitaire, when I suddenly noticed a conspicuous-looking book on the floor near the gift pile belonging to my younger sister. My eyes were immediately drawn to its cover image, which featured a light-skinned, fair-haired adolescent girl staring dreamily into the foreground.⁷⁰ Upon further inspection, I saw that the text was titled *Every Young Woman's Battle: Guarding Your Mind, Heart, and Body in a Sex-Saturated World*, at which point it occurred to me that Amanda had reached my mother's legally sanctioned dating age of sixteen. She was evidently less than enthralled about the gift, however, as it had been abandoned on the floor among empty boxes and festive treat wrappers.*

My initial instinct was to ignore the text's vexatious presence. It was Christmas, after all, and I did not want to initiate any conflict with my mother that could potentially spoil the day. Silence was an especially viable option since Amanda's lax reading habits and general

⁷⁰ See Appendix A for cover image

indifference toward evangelical teachings likely meant that the book would only collect dust in her bedroom, rather than shape her worldview in a meaningful way. Yet I also felt that a potentially pivotal moment had arrived in my relationship with my mother, so instead I opted to retrieve the book and casually peruse its pages. Unlike the covert beginnings of my evangelical sex education, I did not retreat into my older sister's bedroom as I did so. Instead I resumed my place on the living room floor and read the book while my mother quietly kept her seat next to me.

It did not take long for my newly acquired feminist consciousness to fume at the content I found inside. Indeed, this book was just as problematic as the text by Dannah Gresh which had appeared under the Christmas tree for Ashley nearly ten years earlier. As I continued to scan its pages, it became clear that I could not simply remain silent. And so, drawing a deep breath and doing my best to feign a casual tone, I cautiously began to vocalize the book's arguments as my mother sat and listened. I proceeded to comment on how this text, along with the rest of the evangelical sexual purity literature that she had purchased for us throughout the years, placed an unfair responsibility on girls in heterosexual relationships to ensure that both they and their boyfriends remain "pure." I addressed the deleterious myths concerning men's and women's sexual natures which these texts masquerade as Biblical "truth." And above all, I criticized how these texts locate an unmarried girl's morality and personal value principally in her status as a virgin.

My mother listened in silence while I delivered my tirade, and I was surprised that she did not interject to defend the authors or justify her decision to purchase the text. This silence lingered for several moments after I had finished, during which time I imagined a myriad of ways in which she would receive my critiques—from expressions of profound sadness and betrayal to

something akin to rage. I was therefore surprised when she turned to me and said in a matter-of-fact tone, "Maybe you should write your own book about this." Of all the rebuttals I had anticipated, the possibility that she would encourage me to challenge these evangelical purity doctrines in my academic work had never occurred to me. I eventually submitted my PhD program applications with this suggestion in mind, and my doctoral education thus far has equipped me with the theoretical tools I have long needed to articulate and problematize the evangelical sexual purity dialectic that has haunted me throughout adolescence and adulthood. Importantly, it has also introduced me to alternative theological frameworks wherein such fundamentalist ideologies might be negotiated and renounced. It is my hope that these transformative discursive practices may inspire other evangelical girls and women to engage critically with evangelicalism's "purity culture," as well as to forge their own paths toward "happily ever after" by utilizing their abilities, skills, and passions to continue Christ's restorative social justice work.

While this study concludes that the "truth regimes" at the core of the evangelical purity dialectic are deleterious to girls' and women's spiritual growth and empowerment, I further contend that such discourses may be appropriated, re-imagined, and transformed when they are extricated from a fundamentalist paradigm. This final chapter accordingly develops a feminist theological framework which renounces evangelical "purity" discourses as sinful and re-claims the processes by which girls and women may demonstrate "righteous femininity." It begins by drawing from the principles of metaphorical theology to contextualize fundamentalism as a set of fluid discursive practices that may be dismantled and re-configured, rather than regard it as a fixed entity that is singularly oppressive to girls and women. Within this framework, the patriarchal

models which structure evangelical thought and language may be negotiated as sinful in their idolatry of human maleness as well as in their rejection of alternative modes for conceptualizing and relating to the divine.

With these principles in mind, I then move on to problematize the selected evangelical literature's patriarchal purity discourses by further negotiating the meaning of “sin” in accordance with a feminist theology of liberation. While these texts invariably argue that girls who utilize any aspect of their sexual and reproductive potentials outside of a heterosexual marriage covenant commit the ultimate sin against divine and human male authorities, I contend that fundamentalist purity discourses are intrinsically sinful in their perpetuation of oppressive gender, class, and racial hierarchies. As such, rather than attempt to construct alternative and empowering “purity” discourses, I argue that such sinful discursive practices are fundamentally incompatible with a feminist theology of liberation that seeks to augment girls' and women's spiritual growth and empowerment.

However, in contrast to my assertion that evangelical purity discourses lack any redeeming qualities worthy of re-claiming, I further contend that conceptions of “righteous femininity” may be re-imagined and re-constituted when they are extricated from a fundamentalist paradigm. While the selected guidance literature locates girls' and women's “righteousness” primarily in their dedication to patriarchal traditions, a feminist theology of liberation contextualizes sin as any act which deprives girls and women of their full humanity and alienates them from their Creator. Such a theology seeks to construct a woman-centred and woman-defined conception of righteous femininity wherein evangelical girls and women utilize their God-given abilities, skills, and passions to continue Christ's restorative social justice work. This chapter accordingly concludes by discussing potential future directions for feminist research

on evangelical girls' and women's religious knowledges and experiences; in particular, it recommends that such research should address girls and women as spiritual agents who “do” theology and support each other in communities of liberation. First, however, it is necessary to dismantle the fundamentalist discursive practices at the core of the evangelical purity dialectic.

Dismantling Fundamentalism through Metaphorical Theology

As discussed in Chapter 1, this project's feminist postmodern epistemological lens regards fundamentalism as a series of fluid discursive practices, rather than a fixed belief system, doctrine, or religious identity. In this regard, language plays a critical role in the cultivation of religious thought and ritual (Carr 14). The theoretical parameters of this study further contextualize fundamentalist discursive practices within subcultural identity theory, wherein “true believers” conceptualize themselves as a minority religious subculture that functions separately from, and in opposition to, an insidious “secular world.” Subsequent chapters have demonstrated how the selected evangelical guidance literature necessitates the maintenance of religious subcultural strength through reproducing patriarchal “traditions” that are mandated by Biblical “proof-texts,” in addition to adopting other strict behavioural and linguistic codes. This imperative is contingent upon literalist readings of the Biblical texts, which invariably minimize or disregard their original historical and literary contexts. Within this fundamentalist discursive framework, then, any precept that is explicitly sanctioned in the Bible is timelessly and universally “true” and “good,” and any belief or practice that lacks Biblical precedent is de facto immoral.

The selected evangelical literature's fundamentalist exegeses accordingly value girls and women as physical and pedagogical reproducers of patriarchal traditions—not only in their obligation to preserve evangelical standards of “authentic purity,” but also in their mythical-

universal ability to conceive and enculturate the next generation of “true” Christians for their religious subculture. Because the Bible is a cultural text which reflects the patriarchal material and ideological conditions in which it was produced, the standards of girls' and women's purity and righteousness espoused therein are ultimately established to maintain patriarchal gender, class, and racial hierarchies. However, contemporary readings of Biblical texts need not validate these “traditional” doctrines; rather, girls and women who find their spiritual growth and empowerment thwarted by patriarchal doctrines may contest and dismantle fundamentalist truth regimes. In doing so, they may also cultivate discursive space which allows them to imagine alternative, empowering epistemological and linguistic frameworks for conceptualizing and relating to the divine. Here the principles of metaphorical theology are pertinent to consider.

As explained by feminist theologian Sallie McFague, metaphorical theology recognizes the central organizing role that language plays in generating religious thought and practice (3), just as it addresses how those who create and propagate religious knowledge are influenced by intersecting identities and privileges, as well as by particular socioeconomic and historical locations (8). It further maintains that metaphorical thinking constitutes the basis of human thought and language, and that religious language in particular is intrinsically metaphorical because it seeks to conceptualize the unfamiliar—that is, a supernatural, immaterial deity or deities—through the familiar—that is, by referring to human corporealities and relationships (15). This is particularly pertinent when considering the role of “Biblical authority” in fundamentalist religious thought. As McFague argues, the initial writers and interpreters of the Bible did not engage in literalist thinking, nor did they seek to establish the universal “facts” of history (4). Rather than conceptualize Biblical precepts as timelessly and universally “good” simply because of their “Biblical” precedence, metaphorical theology thus understands the Bible

as a “classic” Christian text that provides a fluid starting point for understanding the divine's relationship to humanity (9). In this sense, the Bible is best understood as a metaphor—as one of many ways of accessing, interpreting, and relating to the divine—rather than the absolute and direct word of God.

Within this theological framework, then, it is not surprising that “Biblical” metaphors taken up in fundamentalist religious discourse utilize the “familiar” historical symbols of patriarchal power—such as husband, father and king—to construct the divine as inherently and unquestionably male. And while these metaphors in and of themselves are not necessarily problematic, since diverse believers may derive meaning from conceptualizing God as a male parent, teacher, or ruler, the hegemonic discursive framework which governs fundamentalist thought and language has deleterious implications for girls' and women's religious participation. To that end, McFague explains how metaphors that achieve dominant status in a particular belief system are likely to function as “models,” which in turn inhibit alternative modes of religious thought and expression (23). In this sense, “God the Father” is one metaphor which utilizes a familiar human relationship to conceptualize an unfamiliar one, and over time it has achieved dominant status within Christianity so that it now functions as a model. While models provide a helpful way of organizing thought and communication, they are prone to fostering literalism and idolatry within religious traditions (24, 38).

To that end, because God's imagined status as father has become the primary way of understanding the divine's relationship to humanity within fundamentalist-patriarchal religious subcultures, this metaphor functions as a singular and comprehensive model at the exclusion of alternative theological visions. McFague accordingly explains how “the model of 'God the father' has become an idol. When a model becomes an idol, the hypothetical character of the model is

forgotten and what ought to be seen as *one* way to understand our relationship with God has become identified as *the way*” (9). She similarly contends that the Bible becomes an idol when it is understood as the sole authoritative source for understanding humanity's relationship to the divine, and that there are a myriad of ways to conceptualize God beyond the particular metaphors and experiences that have been recorded therein.

On the whole, then, metaphorical theology provides a useful framework for problematizing fundamentalist discursive practices. In this capacity, rather than laud evangelical patriarchal traditions as universally “true” and “good,” they can be re-conceptualized as sinful due to their idolatry of human maleness as well as their marginalization of those who do not reflect dominant patriarchal metaphors. It is thereby prudent for religious belief systems to develop discursive strategies which ensure that numerous and varied metaphors are affirmed in their attempts to familiarize immaterial deities.

In a specifically Christian context, metaphorical theology thereby necessitates a Christology that rejects and transcends idolatrous patriarchal models. As Rosemary Radford Ruether contends, doctrines which insist on the inherent and unquestionable “maleness” of Jesus invariably monopolize human understandings of the divine (1983: 70). Such practices ultimately disregard the other characteristics of Christ's person, such as his Jewishness and his profession as a carpenter. McFague argues that it is thus helpful to conceptualize Jesus as *a* parable of God, rather than *the* singular human manifestation of the divine. She notes how Jesus predominantly taught through parables—which are themselves intrinsically metaphorical—and utilized familiar symbols to communicate new and transformative ideas. In this sense, it is wholly appropriate to envision Christ as a parable of God, whose humanity, maleness, and Jewishness all provide several of numerous ways to conceptualize and relate to the divine. As McFague contends, “A

parabolic Christology relativizes Jesus' particularity while universalizing the God of whom Jesus is a metaphor. Hence, openness to other manifestations and expressions of divine reality is not only encouraged but mandated" (52).

Metaphorical theology thus provides useful theoretical tools for problematizing and dismantling the fundamentalist thought and language which enjoys dominant status in North American evangelical subcultures. Fundamentalist discursive practices necessitate literalist readings of the Bible, just as they construct this text as the sole source for conceptualizing and relating to the divine. They also necessitate the maintenance of "traditional" patriarchal gender, class, and racial hierarchies by virtue of their "Biblical" precedents and ultimately exclude the perceptions and lived experiences of diverse believers who are marginalized within such hierarchies. Since these practices deny girls and women their full humanity and alienate them from their Creator, fundamentalist paradigms—and the purity dialectic they inspire—can be further negotiated as sinful within a feminist liberation theological framework.

Toward a Feminist Theology of Liberation

Feminist theologians from various Christian and non-Christian traditions have long problematized "traditional" patriarchal doctrines and practices by negotiating them as sinful. This strategy is particularly relevant among feminist scholars who engage with the principles of liberation theology; as Jacquelyn Grant contends, a theology of liberation emerges out of the experiences of oppressed groups, and feminist theology draws from this foundation in its focus on gender oppression (10, 14). Mary Hunt similarly notes that "[t]heologizing, as understood by liberationists, is the organic and communal process of sharing insights, stories, and reflections on questions of ultimate meaning and value. The answers that a community gives to such questions are then evaluated in light of the tradition . . . and pondered in relation to the ineffable mystery we

call the divine” (61).

In this sense, feminist liberation theologies emerge from the experiences of women and other marginalized groups who are excluded from “traditional” processes of religious knowledge production. Importantly, they also seek to generate alternative, empowering religious thought and language that reflects and affirms the perspectives and lived experiences of diverse believers (Grant 45-46). At the same time, it is necessary to be mindful that there is no singularly definitive feminist liberation theology, just as there is no monolithic or universal experience of “women's oppression.” This is especially the case among racialized, working-class, and poor women, given that the majority of feminist theologies have been produced by educated, economically privileged white women in the minority world (145-146, 209). In this capacity, it is also critical to consider how feminist theology has neglected the perspectives and experiences of girls and young women (Baker 12), as well as those believers who are queer and non-gender conforming (Douglas 1; Sheperd 7-8). As such, while a feminist theology of liberation emerges from girls' and women's experiences as a marginalized social class, it also seeks to uncover and reject the numerous interlocking systems of oppression that accompany intersecting identities and socioeconomic conditions, just as it challenges believers to contextualize their theological commitments in the larger struggle of liberation for the oppressed (Fiorenza 1998: 137).

This project accordingly proposes a feminist liberation theology that is based in woman-centred and woman-defined understandings of the divine. To begin, such a theology must afford girls and women the privilege of being created in God's own image. Since femaleness has been historically associated with earthly “flesh,” while maleness is lauded with the higher “spirit” within Western Christian traditions, it is critical that such a theology recognizes the mysterious presence of the divine within diverse yet distinctly female corporealities. This process may begin

with the Bible itself; indeed, even though they have been largely suppressed or ignored within patriarchal Christian traditions, Biblical passages which conceptualize God as a woman (*Luke 15:8: Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Doesn't she light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it?*) and as a mother (*Luke 13:34: I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings; Isaiah 66: 13: As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you; and you will be comforted over Jerusalem*) may be used as evidence of God's "femininity."

It is also necessary to investigate the role of "Biblical authority" in liberation theologizing. Rather than address the Bible as the primary authoritative source for understanding the divine's relationship to humanity, liberation feminists suggest that the Bible should be read out of and in light of women's experiences (Fiorenza 1984: 13-14; Grant 115). Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza contends that a shift from exegesis to hermeneutics is helpful in this regard. While the former is concerned with gleaning the "original" meaning of scripture, the latter addresses the complex and fluid dialectic between the historical, political, and literary contexts in which Biblical texts were produced, just as it considers how shifting material and ideological conditions influence contemporary readings of the Christian canon (1985: 131). It is thereby necessary to problematize theological assumptions that the Bible principally consists of liberating content that simply needs to be uncovered and re-claimed.⁷¹ Fiorenza argues instead for a hermeneutics of suspicion which always considers the Bible's patriarchal origins, rather than regarding it as the primary source for Christian women's liberation (1984: 15).

71 This theological approach stands in contrast to the work of Evangelical or "Biblical" feminist scholars such as Letha Scanzoni and Nancy Hardesty. Generally speaking, these theologians contend that the Bible is primarily comprised of liberating content which, when read correctly, advocates for gender equality and denounces systems of oppression. For further reading, see *All We're Meant to Be: Biblical Feminism for Today* (1974), which is considered to be the pioneering text of the Evangelical Feminist Movement.

As such, whereas fundamentalist discursive practices insist on the innate and unquestionable “maleness” of the divine, a feminist theology of liberation recognizes “the feminine” as a parable of God, and thus provides critical discursive space to forge an understanding of the divine that reflects and affirms girls' and women's corporealities and experiences. The ancient Goddess traditions discussed in Chapter 2 provide another promising avenue for this empowering process. Here I argued that the Judeo-Christian tradition's ancient roots were founded in the rejection of any association between “the feminine” and the divine in an effort to maintain religious subcultural strength. This resolution established a deleterious precedent in Western Christianity, wherein patriarchy has been singularly equated with righteousness and female independence and leadership are deemed sinful. Arguably, this imperative has been further exacerbated within Western Protestantism, since a crucial aspect of breaking away from the Catholic Church included rejecting any “idols” which diverted glory from the male deity—the Holy Virgin Mary chief among them—and closing the convents which had provided many religious women with alternative occupations beyond marriage and motherhood (Ruether 2000: 37-45). Consequently, early Christian traditions such as Gnosticism, which identified the Holy Spirit as female⁷² and lauded God's other “feminine” attributes, have been all but erased from Western evangelicalism's collective memory.

As such, evangelical girls and women who strive to cultivate a feminist theology of liberation stand to benefit from re-claiming “the feminine” as a parable of God. Importantly, however, I concur with Ruether that it is fruitful to avoid completely displacing the patriarchal “male” God of Christian fundamentalism with a singularly “female” deity. Rather, a feminist

⁷² April DeConick meticulously traces the historical erasure of “the feminine” from Western Protestant traditions in her 2011 text *Holy Misogyny: Why the Sex and Gender Conflicts in the Early Church Still Matter*.

theology of liberation should seek to transcend such binary oppositions and hierarchical thinking (1984: 15-17). In this regard, the often-posed question of whether a male Jesus can “save” girls and women may be tentatively resolved by envisioning both “the masculine” and “the feminine” as two potential modes for conceptualizing and relating to the divine. As Angela West contends, a human male saviour cannot save women, but neither can a female saviour by virtue of being female (184). In this sense, rather than adopt a totalizing discourse which conceptualizes God as a “woman,” it may be helpful for evangelical girls and women to envision Jesus as a parable of God, who is at once masculine and feminine.

In a similar vein, it is also prudent for a Christian feminist liberation theology to critically contextualize the meaning of “sin” in girls' and women's lives. This is a particularly contentious point since some scholars argue that feminist theology benefits from rejecting conceptions of “sin” altogether, given how they have been used to oppress women throughout history. However, this approach has been refuted by womanist⁷³ theologians who argue that black women and other marginalized groups experience the palpable consequences of other people's sins in their daily lives (Thistlethwaite 61-62). Alternatively, some feminist theologians advocate for the existence of sin but seek to negotiate its meaning in women's lives; for instance, Valerie Saiving argues that sin should be regarded as a gendered concept, and that “women's sins” are rooted in culturally constructed ideals of femininity which necessitate their self-denial and subjugation (37). She contends that sins such as pride and willfulness have different meanings in men's and women's lives, and that “women's sins” should be conceptualized as acts which undermine their abilities to achieve personal fulfillment and self-definition. However, womanist theologians have

73 The term “womanist” was initially coined by Alice Walker to describe the praxis that emerges specifically from the knowledge and experiences of African-American women. For further reading, see her text *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* (1983).

also problematized this approach. As West argues, while women are less likely to perpetuate particular types of sin—such as physical violence and economic exploitation—due to their subjugated social position, this does not mean that women are incapable of committing traditionally “masculine” sins when given the opportunity (35-36). To emphasize this point, she cites white women's abuse of black women during slavery and subsequent periods of racial segregation (42). In this sense, womanist theologians duly problematize the tendency within feminist theology to counter the dominant Christian myth of women's “original guilt” by minimizing their capacities to participate in sinful systems of oppression (65).

Along this trajectory, womanist theologians also critique liberal theologies which dismiss teachings about God's divine judgement and minimize the consequences that accompany sinful behaviour (West 142). They argue in turn that theologies which allow space for sin and judgement also allow oppressed groups to find meaning and hope in their struggles, just as they encourage privileged groups to reflect on how the marginalized “pay” for their sins through systems of exploitation and inequality. Additionally, I suggest that it is problematic for a Christian feminist theology of liberation to minimize girls' and women's capacities to participate in sinful systems of oppression, principally because doing so inadvertently supports patriarchal myths about their innate “purity” and “innocence,” which in turn subject them to disproportionate judgement within fundamentalist subcultures. Rather, such a theology should encourage girls and women to negotiate the meaning of “sin” by stressing its social character, so that it includes any act which deprives individuals of their full and complex humanity and alienates them from their Creator (Douglas 126).

In this sense, feminist liberation theologies which emphasize girls' and women's roles in perpetuating sinful systems of oppression ultimately regard them as social actors with the

capacities to reflect on their own privileges and actively contribute to restorative social justice work. This resolution is particularly pertinent for this project since the selected guidance literature is almost exclusively authored by evangelical women. As such, while I argue in Chapter 4 that the propagation of these texts may constitute a component of religious mother-work as the authors attempt to enculturate the next generation of “true” Christians for their evangelical subculture, these women should not be reduced to cultural dupes or victims of false consciousness. Rather, these authors arguably have a stake in maintaining fundamentalist ideologies of female purity—not only because they reap economic benefits from producing these texts, but also because their shared whiteness, class status, heterosexuality, and bodily abilities afford them a privileged position within a minority world, patriarchal evangelical subculture. It is thereby critical to emphasize evangelical girls' and women's capacities to interrogate the privileges afforded to them within patriarchal hierarchies; to negotiate and reject doctrines which marginalize and exclude diverse girls and women; as well as to envision alternative ways of understanding and relating to the divine beyond fundamentalist truth regimes. I will now explore some of these alternatives by renouncing evangelical purity discourses as sinful, as well as by reclaiming the meaning of “righteous femininity” in accordance with a feminist theology of liberation.

Renouncing Purity

Since a feminist theology of liberation renounces those aspects of religious thought and language which deprive girls and women of their full humanity and alienate them from their Creator, it accordingly allows no discursive space to “re-claim” patriarchal purity discourses. Indeed, while the selected guidance literature constructs sexual purity as the pinnacle of feminine righteousness and extramarital sexual activity as the ultimate “female” sin, a feminist theology of liberation

demarcates the fundamentalist discursive practices at the core of the evangelical purity dialectic as intrinsically sinful. Metaphorically, these discourses idolize human “maleness” and deny alternative modes for conceptualizing and relating to the divine. In this sense, they alienate girls and women from their Creator by maintaining that they can access God only by serving male needs. Such doctrines also deprive girls and women of their full humanity by constructing female bodies as the exclusive property of human male authorities, as well as by demarcating their sexual and reproductive potentials as the central locus of their personal value and righteousness—so much so that those who violate the patriarchal property rights of their fathers and husbands will be excluded from living “happily ever after” with God in eternity.

Importantly, in perpetuating patriarchal hierarchies of gender, race, and class oppression, evangelical purity discourses are also sinful in their idolatry of white, economically privileged, and heteronormative ideals of “true womanhood.” In a historical context, patriarchal purity doctrines held by White-Anglo colonialists have served to marginalize and exploit non-white women and their children. Black feminist writers in particular have deconstructed and problematized Christian ideologies of sexual purity; Grant, for example, explains how black women have been deprived of the “pure” and “respectable” status afforded to their white, economically privileged counterparts in North America and elsewhere (190). Kelly Brown Douglas similarly explores how the cultural and socioeconomic differences between African and White-Anglo populations naturalized and justified the white colonial imperative to control black sexualities during periods of slavery and racial segregation (24). To that end, she recounts how black enslaved women were excluded from the institution of “respectable” marriage and were forced to bear children out of wedlock for their slaveholders' economic benefit (38).

In addition to those who are marginalized because of their race and class status, the

selected guidance literature's purity doctrines also pathologize girls and women who do not participate in the patriarchal institutions of marriage and motherhood in a contemporary context. As mentioned in Chapter 4, the reviewed authors maintain that it is the reader's God-ordained duty to utilize her sexual and reproductive potentials to bear and train the next generation of “true” Christians for her evangelical subculture. These doctrines imply that girls and women who choose to live child-free lives sin against the patriarchal God by refusing the primary purpose for which He created their bodies. Such prescriptions also marginalize those girls and women who lack the health, bodily ability, and economic means to bear and raise children.

Similarly, the selected authors contend that pregnancy and childbirth are worthy of celebration only when they occur within the bounds of a heterosexual marriage covenant. These doctrines deny the potential joys of mothering to heterosexual women who wish to have children but who remain single by no choice of their own—perhaps because they are not deemed desirable for marriage within the patriarchal framework for which these texts advocate. Such precepts also stigmatize mothers—as well as the children they conceive and raise—who choose not to marry men for various cultural and economic reasons or personal desires. This includes lesbian, bisexual, queer, and transgender girls and women, whom the selected authors either ignore completely or address within a discursive framework of “pathological femininity.”

On the whole, then, evangelical purity discourses can be re-conceptualized as intrinsically sinful in their idolatry of patriarchal values. As such, a feminist theology of liberation is best served by renouncing “purity” as a sinful discourse which deprives girls and women of their full humanity and alienates them from their Creator. Additionally, the very term “purity” is constructed along a discursive binary, wherein girls and women de facto become “impure” when they violate patriarchal doctrines. I argue in turn that employing this term in any

capacity only serves to perpetuate myths of childhood “innocence” and female asexuality, which themselves subject girls and women to disproportionate blame and judgement when they engage in any sort of extramarital sexual expression. In contrast, a feminist theology of liberation emphasizes girls' and women's capacities to participate in sinful systems of oppression as a testament to their complex humanity, just as it emphasizes their capacities to exercise agency in dismantling systems of sinful oppression. In this regard, while I argue that a feminist theology of liberation cannot accommodate sinful “purity” discourses, it *does* provide space to re-imagine how evangelical girls and women may demonstrate righteous femininity.

Re-Claiming Righteous Femininity

As discussed in Chapter 3, the selected evangelical guidance literature locates girls' and women's righteousness principally in their willingness to internalize and reproduce patriarchal “traditions.” While such notions of feminine righteousness are sinful in their idolatry of patriarchal religious thought and language, I contend that discourses of “righteous femininity” may be re-claimed within a woman-defined and woman-centred spirituality that recognizes “the feminine” as a parable of God. Perhaps surprisingly, the crux of this alternative vision for righteous femininity does not begin with established feminist theological principles, but with Adrienne Rich's ground breaking essay “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence” (1980). Here she argues that compulsory heterosexuality as a political institution presumes that women are innately and universally sexually oriented toward men, and that it is natural for women to organize all aspects of their lives around accommodating male needs and desires. While this piece primarily seeks to legitimize sexual relationships between women, Rich importantly constructs the term “lesbian” along a discursive continuum which includes a range of woman-identified experiences, such as sharing a rich inner life with other women, bonding

together against oppression and injustice, and mutually supporting one another in personal relationships and political efforts (20). In this sense, the notion of lesbian existence can pertain to any type of woman-defined and woman-centred epistemology that rejects patriarchal institutions and their assumptions about male entitlement to women's sexual, spiritual, emotional and physical capacities.

Mary Hunt's work on the spiritual, political, and social significance of women's relationships with each other is further helpful to consider here. Similar to Rich, she problematizes the dominant patriarchal assumption that heterosexual marriage is an inevitable and central organizing force in girls' and women's lives, and instead positions it as one of many relational options that girls and women may participate in, but also reject if they so choose (28, 54). Similarly, she emphasizes the deep satisfaction that women derive from their friendships, and critiques cultural tendencies which devalue friendships by presuming that patriarchal blood ties always demarcate women's most important relational connections (145). In this capacity, Hunt uses the term "fierce tenderness" to express the level of attention and commitment that comes with authentically knowing and caring for someone, and she suggests that this framework of friendship can be employed by women in relating to the divine, as well as to the rest of Creation.

In addition to honouring girls' and women's relationships with one another, a woman-centred and woman-defined theology of "righteous femininity" also purposefully celebrates girls' and women's diverse yet distinctly female bodies and sexualities, and it strives to envision alternative, empowering visions of holistic and healthy female sexuality. Whereas the selected evangelical guidance literature demonizes and pathologizes any expression of female sexuality that does not serve male needs within a heterosexual marriage covenant, a feminist theology of

liberation invites girls and women to explore and engage with the many aspects of their God-breathed sexualities. It also encourages them to educate and support one another as they strive to express their sexualities in authentic, consensual, and life-affirming ways—potentially but not necessarily within institutional marriage or other types of monogamous relationships.

Similarly, a feminist theology of liberation which strives to promote healthy and holistic expressions of female sexuality must consider the biological capacity to conceive and give birth to children. While the selected evangelical guidance literature stipulates that “righteous” readers will dedicate their bodies to reproducing the next generation of “true” Christians, a feminist theology of liberation recognizes that not all girls and women choose to utilize their sexualities in this capacity, and it thus seeks to validate how they may dedicate their time, energy, and abilities to performing Christ's restorative social justice work in their child-free lives. It also recognizes that other girls and women may live child-free lives through no choice of their own, and it is equally vital to problematize those aspects of religious thought and language which universalize and essentialize women's “God-ordained” life-creating abilities.

Accordingly, while the selected guidance literature explicitly states that new life is only worthy of celebration when it is conceived within a heterosexual marriage covenant, a feminist theology of liberation rejoices in the births of all children. Importantly, it affirms the mother-work performed by girls and women who bear and raise children in circumstances that do not emulate the patriarchal, middle-class, nuclear family structure, while simultaneously acknowledging the challenges that may accompany pregnancies that are unplanned or experienced by marginalized mothers. This is especially the case for mothers who are socioeconomically vulnerable because of their age, since young mothers are particularly stigmatized in minority world cultures and may face a host of structural barriers that accompany

their legal “child” status. Such a woman-centred and woman-defined theology should accordingly emphasize the importance of comprehensive sex education, as well as accessible, affordable, and reliable contraception, so that girls and women may exercise agency in their reproductive choices. At the same time, it should remain cognizant of how such measures are often used to control the sexual and reproductive potentials of “undesirable” mothers within neoliberal industrial capitalism.⁷⁴ On the whole, a feminist theology of liberation should emphasize reproductive agency as a vital aspect of healthy and holistic female sexuality, wherein girls and women are entitled to the necessary resources, education, and support they need to bear and raise children on their own terms.

In a similar vein, it is also necessary for a feminist theology of liberation to affirm girls and women who exercise sexual agency by abstaining from sexual expression for given periods of time, including those who commit to lifelong celibacy. While I contend that such a theology does not accommodate deleterious “purity” discourses which necessitate girls' and women's extramarital chastity lest they be excluded from Christ's “princess-brides,” it is crucial to consider how sexual abstinence may fit within a woman-centred and woman-defined vision of righteous femininity. West argues in this regard that beliefs about the inherent “naturalness” of sexual relations and their intrinsic role in human fulfillment should be critically re-evaluated (101). Indeed, many religious women throughout history have led meaningful celibate lives, and in doing so were able to escape the risks accompanying patriarchal marriage, including the very real dangers of child birth complications and spousal abuse. Other women have led celibate lives not by choice—perhaps because their bodies were excluded from a patriarchal framework of

⁷⁴ I discuss the stigmatization of “undesirable” mothers in neoliberal risk culture in my scholarly book chapter “Because You Had Me as a Teen: Neoliberalism and the ‘Problem’ of Teen Pregnancy” (2015).

desirable femininity, or because their agency to engage in non-heteronormative relationships was constrained by patriarchal socioeconomic structures. Either way, many girls and women abstain from sexual relations for various periods throughout their lives, and a feminist theology of liberation should recognize celibacy as one potentially healthy and holistic way in which they may express sexuality—while also recognizing how patriarchal theologies and institutions may constrain their agency in doing so.

On the whole, then, a feminist theology of liberation affirms the many authentic, consensual, and life-affirming ways in which girls and women express sexuality. In this regard, it is helpful to consider the liturgical practices and prayers that feminist theologians have developed to honour female sexuality. Liturgies have played a particularly prominent role in maintaining and perpetuating religious thought and language within Christian traditions, as evidenced by the fierce resistance that often accompanies their critique or alteration (DeConick 23). In this sense, the fixed nature of liturgical practices renders the metaphors that are adopted and employed therein vulnerable to becoming stagnant over time as they cease to reflect participants' perceptions and lived experiences. The potential to create new, alternative liturgies which celebrate girls' and women's sexualities thereby holds much promise for a feminist liberation theology that seeks to challenge patriarchal purity discourses.

To that end, Ruether proposes liturgies that may be celebrated when girls and women gather together to commemorate a particular girl's transition to adolescence and puberty (1986: 111). While these rites celebrate female sexuality in a refreshing contrast to patriarchal purity doctrines, Ruether's liturgy arguably perpetuates a paradigm of childhood “development” wherein girls' sexualities become worthy of acknowledgment and celebration when they are made visible at puberty. As such, this approach has the potential to devalue the many ways that

girls experience and express their sexualities prior to reaching the culturally sanctioned age of sexual “maturity,” including masturbation and other forms of self-pleasure. Furthermore, she ties these rites specifically to menstruation and the “positive mystery of life-creating potential,” thus equating girls' sexual maturity with their essentialized and universalized abilities to bear children in adulthood. I accordingly argue that, while liturgies which affirm girls' expressions of healthy and holistic sexuality have revolutionary potential within patriarchal religious subcultural contexts, such practices should resist discursive frameworks which focus on sexual “development” and “maturity,” as well as those which primarily tie female sexuality to procreative capacities.

That being said, Ruether's proposed rites provide a valuable foundation from which to develop woman-defined and woman-centred theological practices. For instance, she emphasizes the need for adult women to engage in authentic dialogue with girls regarding their sexualities, as well as to provide girls with opportunities to voice any questions they have pertaining to contraception, menstruation, and sexual engagement (1986: 188). Importantly, she also emphasizes the need for adult women to teach girls the importance of expressing sexuality in responsible ways (1986: 110-111). This point is particularly crucial, as a feminist theology of liberation acknowledges girls' and women's capacities to participate in systems of sinful oppression alongside their male counterparts. While such a theology rejects patriarchal discourses which construct sexual “sins” as those which violate male property rights, it also considers how girls and women may sin as they express their sexualities. In this sense, if patriarchal hierarchies can be contextualized as sinful in their denial of girls' and women's full and complex humanity, so too do girls and women have the capacity to sin when their sexual activities objectify, coerce, and exploit other aspects of human and non-human Creation.

I often wonder how different my adolescent perceptions and experiences might have been had I been given the opportunity to engage in liturgical practices and public prayers which affirmed my sexuality and allowed me to engage in authentic dialogue—unmitigated by fundamentalist doctrines—with trusted and supportive adult women. As I envision fostering such practices with potential daughters, nieces, grandchildren, and other girls whom the future may bring into my care and confidence, I imagine that these rituals will not be restricted to culturally sanctioned “milestones” such as menarche; rather, they may be celebrated during any occasion wherein girls and women gather together in sacred public and private spaces to honour their Creator for the pleasures and responsibilities that their sexualities bring. The content of such prayers and practices would be fluid and contextual, based on the occasion and those who are present to celebrate them. While these rituals would ultimately shift to reflect the voices and experiences of diverse girls and women, I imagine they may begin with a prayer similar to this:

We gather together in the presence of our divine and benevolent Creator to celebrate the joys, pleasures, and responsibilities with which you have endowed our bodies. We come before you as mothers and daughters; as aunts and nieces; as granddaughters, grandmothers, and great-grandmothers; as kinswomen and friends.

From the time we first emerged from our mothers' wombs we have been blessed with the capacity to explore and enjoy the intricate components of our sexualities—some of which may be used to give birth to new life, some of which may be used to enter into intimate relations with others, and some of which may be reserved for our benefit alone.

We ask that you teach us to embrace those parts of ourselves and each other that are devalued by our unjust world. Let us recognize the beauty in the many shapes, sizes, colours, abilities, and

desires which our bodies inhabit, all of which provide us with glimpses of your splendour. We thank you for creating our bodies in your divine image, and for the ability to recognize your righteousness in ourselves.

We also ask that you teach us to use these bodies in ways that mirror your goodness, justice, and beauty. Let us recognize and resist those practices which objectify, denigrate, marginalize, and exploit other aspects of your Creation. Teach us to use our abilities and desires to eradicate systems of oppression and to effect your righteous liberation in our homes, communities, cities, and nations.

Please bless us this day with the virtues of honesty, wisdom, fortitude, and compassion as we gather together, and please continue to do so each day after we have parted ways.

Amen.

On the whole, then, while a Christian feminist theology of liberation rejects patriarchal purity discourses which construct girls' and women's sexual "sins" as those which violate male property rights, it also recognizes girls' and women's capacities to engage in sinful systems of oppression. However, rather than promote discourses of sexual shame and repression, such a theology encourages girls and women to reflect on these capacities so they may utilize their skills, abilities, and passions to take up Christ's restorative social justice work. Here it is helpful to consider a theology of immanence as suggested by Mary Bednarowski, which elucidates the potential for girls and women to effect transformative social change through the seemingly mundane, taken-for-granted work they perform in their daily lives (43). Ruether's conception of "Women-Church" is further useful in this regard; her theology of liberation includes feminist base communities that re-claim Church as any formal or informal space wherein women gather

together to articulate their own perspectives and experiences, as well as resist patriarchal structures of oppression which dominate Christian religious language, thought, and practice (1986: 59, 64, 72). “Women-Church” may thus commence in any space wherein two or more girls and women gather to support each other in cultivating authentic, woman-centred and woman-defined spiritualities, as well as engage in social justice work.

Within a specifically Christian context, such feminist base communities will further benefit from seeking out diverse liberation theologies from majority world locations and non-Christian belief systems. Doing so may encourage participants to empathize with girls and women from different historical, geographic, and socioeconomic locations, as well as critically reflect on their own roles in perpetuating global systems of injustice and inequality. Arguably, this endeavour may even be necessary to ensure that such base communities avoid idolatrous discursive practices that presume Western Christian thought and language to be the only means of understanding and accessing the divine. As such, minority world evangelical girls and women may benefit from consulting mestiza feminist theology, which begins with the standpoints of Hispana-Latina women from Protestant and Catholic traditions as they share their stories and work to effect social change (Loya 235). Similarly, Chicana feminism operates as a mestiza spirituality and praxis which strives to eliminate local and global systemic injustice, while emphasizing liberation as a central political dimension of the Christian tradition (Aquino 136-137). Importantly, rather than construct salvation as an individualized accomplishment that is achieved through “purity” from sin, these liberation theologies conceptualize salvation as humanity's collective liberation from every form of earthly oppression, including poverty and exploitation.

In a similar vein, womanist theology emerges from the life narratives of black girls and

women, whose histories have been rife with violence and degradation within a patriarchal, white supremacist society. As A. Elaine Brown Crawford contends, womanist thought emerges at the intersection of black liberation theology and feminist theology (3). She explains how black women's particular histories of enslavement and discrimination inspire conceptions of hope and liberation that are markedly distinct from those of the white, economically privileged women who produce the majority of feminist theology. For instance, enslaved women re-interpreted Biblical notions of salvation, evil, and redemption so that white people would be held accountable for the suffering they inflicted (28). In this capacity, a womanist theology of hope focuses on effecting social change for the benefit of black lives, and it draws on the life narratives of black foremothers in envisioning liberating possibilities for future generations of black girls and women (112).

Evangelical girls and women may also benefit from looking beyond Christian belief systems in cultivating a theology of liberation. For instance, Margot Badran explains how Islamic Feminist movements argue for gender equality in accordance with teachings from the Qur'an—even though such theologies have been suppressed by male-defined interpretations and experiences—and perform social justice work with these teachings in mind (242-247). Similarly, Grace Ouellette unpacks the particular forms of racialization and exploitation that Aboriginal women have experienced in Canada, and she specifically addresses the deleterious consequences that Christian belief systems have wreaked within Indigenous societies through white-European colonial practices. For instance, she explains how many of Canada's First Nations were based in egalitarian gender relationships before Christian patriarchy was brutally enforced (39). In this respect, a Christian feminist theology of liberation stands to benefit when girls and women look beyond their own traditions and geographic contexts and critically reflect on how their beliefs

and practices may harm others across the globe.

On the whole, this project concludes that discourses of righteous femininity may be re-imagined and re-claimed in accordance with a feminist theology of liberation. This theological framework allows girls and women to reject the evangelical purity dialectic by affirming “the feminine” within themselves and each other; it also encourages them to recognize their diverse yet distinctly female bodies and sexualities as divine parables that have been created in God's own image, just as it acknowledges their capacities for sin as a testament to their full and complex humanity. However, rather than espouse discourses of repression and condemnation, it encourages girls and women to critically consider their role in perpetuating systems of sinful oppression, as well as to utilize their abilities, skills, and passions to continue Christ's restorative social justice work. Importantly, such a theology conceptualizes salvation as a collective endeavour that can only be realized when all of humanity is liberated from sinful systems of exploitation and inequality, and girls and women have the divinely-ordained agency—and the responsibility—to effect this redemptive transformation.

Limitations and Future Directions

Throughout the duration of this project I have sought to unpack, contextualize, and problematize the material and ideological variables which shape and perpetuate the contemporary evangelical purity dialectic. I have primarily done so by historicizing the demand for girls' and women's extramarital sexual abstinence within Christianity's ancient patriarchal rejection of the “divine feminine”; by considering how contemporary understandings of “purity” and “righteous femininity” culminated with the Victorian cult of “true womanhood”; by exploring how these constructs are propagated within a purposive selection of contemporary evangelical purity literature; by locating such discourses within a fundamentalist framework whose “truth regimes”

value girls as evangelicalism's "mothers of tomorrow"; and finally, by re-negotiating "purity" as an idolatrous, sinful discourse and re-claiming "righteous femininity" in accordance with a feminist theology of liberation. In addition to the scholarly materials and cultural texts referenced throughout, I have also sought to elucidate the meaning of "living" evangelicalism by sharing fragments of my own lived experiences as a girl and young woman. In this sense, as mentioned in Chapter 1, this project is limited by my social location, since my whiteness, heterosexuality, bodily abilities, socioeconomic status, and geographic location have shaped my particular experiences with evangelical purity doctrines. It is similarly limited by my chronological age and the impossibility for adults to recount "authentic" childhood perspectives and experiences. Furthermore, throughout this study I have sought to unpack and problematize "purity" as an assemblage of discursive practices in relation to my own lived experience; as such, I have not featured the perspectives of other girls and women who abide by, negotiate, or reject purity discourses within evangelical subcultures. While these current gaps neglect the myriad of voices necessary for cultivating a functional feminist theology of liberation, they also present auspicious possibilities for future research.

To begin, such research would place girls' and women's religious knowledges and experiences at the forefront of its epistemological framework and theoretical goals. In doing so, it would remain cognisant that women constitute the majority of church attendees in minority world contexts, as well as consider how their grassroots organizing largely sustains patriarchal religious institutions (Aquino 151). In this sense, rather than merely produce studies "about" women and religion, such research would incorporate a resolutely spiritual epistemological framework which takes seriously the joy, community, agency, and empowerment that many women derive from participating in patriarchal religious subcultures. In a similar vein, it would

not dismiss girls' and women's adherence to patriarchal doctrines as evidence of false consciousness; rather, as I hope to have to elucidated throughout this project, such research would critically consider how women maintain and exercise various privileges by supporting patriarchal beliefs and practices. Furthermore, because such research would take seriously women's capacities for perpetuating systems of sinful oppression, exploitation, and inequality, it would *not* seek to affirm religious beliefs and practices simply because some women derive empowerment from them. Rather, it would proceed with the understanding that certain aspects of religious praxis which benefit some women and girls may have deleterious consequences for others, and it would accordingly seek to understand the complex and varied reasons why women and girls adhere to such practices.

In this capacity, as documented by Dori Baker, there remains a gap in religious feminist research in terms of studying girls' spiritual knowledges and religious experiences. She accordingly proposes girlfriend theology as a method of religious education that invites girls to share their spiritual narratives, and also recognizes them as legitimate narrators of their own lives (6). Importantly, she describes the need for trusted adults to foster “mentoring circles” wherein girls may share their stories and engage in open, authentic dialogue, as well as receive affirmation for their ideas (165-166). Future research will benefit from these principles in seeking out adolescent girls' perspectives and experiences pertaining to evangelical purity doctrines. Such research would optimally provide the needed safe spaces for girls of varying socioeconomic and geographical locations to come together and openly discuss how and why they adopt, negotiate, and reject various aspects of evangelical purity culture. It would also seek to uncover how their perspectives are influenced by intersecting markers of race and ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, bodily ability, economic class, as well as denominational

affiliation, among others.

In a similar vein, this project has sought to demonstrate how “religious mother-work” presents a critical task for mothers who participate in fundamentalist religious subcultures which necessitate the pedagogical reproduction of patriarchal “traditions.” Future studies could thus aim to document the time, energy, and skills that are required of the many mothers who perform religious enculturation as part of their daily mother-work, and in doing so strive to elucidate the particular knowledges and experiences that mothers cultivate during these processes. Such research would pursue the personal narratives of women who perform this work in private domestic spaces, as well as in a formal capacity within religious institutions, all the while seeking to understand how and to what extent their religious commitments shape their mother-work.

Furthermore, such research would seek to cultivate spaces much akin to Ruether's vision of “Women-Church” wherein evangelical mothers and daughters of various life stages can come together and reflect on how the religious enculturation process impacts their relationships. This will likely be a contentious and exploratory process since neither daughters nor mothers may feel completely at ease in candidly articulating the tensions that religious mother-work potentially creates in their relationships. This may particularly be the case among daughters whose “child” status subjects them to adults' socially sanctioned authority and discipline. Nonetheless, future research would strive to foster “safe spaces” for mother and daughter participants to engage in authentic discussions wherein doubts, questions, and disagreements are expressed and supported as varying perspectives and experiences shape the dialogue.

It is July, and the fourth year of my Ph.D. enrollment is drawing to a close. While I had intended

to submit the completed first draft of this concluding dissertation chapter to my supervisor by the month's end, a sudden bout of illness has thwarted my otherwise seamless concession of self-imposed writing deadlines. In addition to the work hours I have lost, the unyielding symptoms of congestion, fever, and vertigo have deprived me of consistent sleep and solid food for the past three weeks. These events have been further exacerbated by the fact that my partner and I are moving to a new city in two days' time, and the ongoing dizzy spells have rendered me unable to complete the packing and cleaning that still needs to be done. Overwhelmed by the magnitude of the situation, I sit on my partially disassembled couch and allow the tears to wash over me.

It does not take long for my next course of action to unfold in my mind. In fact, it happens so suddenly and vividly that it feels instinctual—so much so that I wonder why I always wait until the hardships that I experience in my relatively privileged adult life often bring me to the brink of hopelessness before I finally pick up the telephone and seek encouragement from my mother. Indeed, although I know she would prefer it otherwise, my prideful facade of adulthood independence has caused me to keep her only vaguely informed of my prolonged illness through sporadic e-mail correspondence these past few weeks. This facade is shattered as soon as she answers my call, as my attempts to articulate my anxiety and exhaustion are immediately thwarted by sudden, unrelenting sobs. My mother remains steadfast, however, and does not probe me to “calm down” or unpack the details of my predicament. “Vanessa, I am going to pray with you,” is all she says. This simple yet resolute statement always constitutes her response to any hardship that her daughters bring to her, and when I am honest with myself, I admit that I expected nothing less from her on this particular occasion.

Still, the pride and scepticism that have caused me to renounce any solidified “Christian” identity as of late expel their protests from the depths of my mind. They whisper that

I do not need her prayers—what about the vast numbers of people throughout the world who are impacted by war, starvation, and denigrating poverty every day? If prayers have any capacity to effect healing, surely they should be used to address these more pressing matters. All I need in this moment is for my mother to listen to my plight and vocalize her compassion and love. But another part of me—dare I say the spiritual element that I still believe connects the two of us together in spite of our differing beliefs—knows that such routine words will not suffice for her. Praying for her now-adult daughters constitutes a vital component of the religious mother-work that she still performs every day, and I know that she will not settle for any lesser course of action in these circumstances. And so I do not protest her resolution through my slowly abating sobs—instead I simply say, “Okay.”

She begins. I feel an involuntary cringe pulse through my body as I hear her call The Lord Jesus Christ by name and address “Him” in explicitly masculine pronouns. I imagine what my academic colleagues would think if they heard her proceed to call on Satan to remove the bind of illness that “he” has placed over my body. But it does not take long for these superficial concerns to fall by the wayside. Instead I purposefully return to the present moment in which a mother is simply taking care of her daughter in the most thorough and sincere way that she knows how. Eventually I close my eyes and concede to my belief that, in spite of our diverging spiritual paths, she and I have come together in this moment to address the same Creator whose goodness, justice, and beauty radiates throughout all religious and non-religious worldviews that affirm life in its diverse splendour. I nod in silent agreement as she acknowledges God's abundant love, graciousness, and generosity. And when she explicitly calls for “Him” to bring healing to my body, I silently thank the same deity for these moments wherein I may pause from my daily routine and critically reflect on how the challenges I experience in my privileged life

may be contextualized within the larger suffering that occurs daily across the globe. I consider how I contribute to interlocking and deeply embedded global systems of sinful oppression, and I ask for wisdom and motivation to alleviate the suffering they cause. I also thank this deity for the gift that is my relationship with my mother, which, for all of its trials and tensions, remains an ever-present source of comfort, support, and affection in my life. And as my mother concludes her prayer with an enthusiastic “Amen,” I silently conclude my own query the same way.

As soon as we finish our prayer, my mother assures me that I will soon feel God's transformative healing overtake my body. While I do not expect any healing I may experience to manifest as instant physical relief, I also know this does not diminish the significance of her prayer. Instead I consider how her prayer reminds me of the often invisible religious mother-work that she still performs each day for her daughters' benefit, and I enjoy a peaceful release in knowing that, in spite of the various emotional walls I have erected in our relationship, I can still count on her love and support when I need it the most. With this in mind, I simply thank her for her prayer. Our call ends as she tells me how much she loves me, and I tell her the same.

Upon hearing the “click” of her receiver, I recline my head in the hope that sleep will provide some temporary solace from my ailments. However, I am immediately surprised to feel the nausea and dizziness that have incapacitated me for the entire afternoon suddenly alleviate as the painful congestion in my head simultaneously subsides. Doubtful of my own corporeal senses, I stand up and gingerly walk around the half-empty moving boxes that are strewn about the floor. I do not know what to think or who to thank. Is it merely the power of positive thinking taking its effect? Or is it perhaps a product of divine intervention? I do not pretend to have a conclusive answer to these questions, nor do I anguish myself to determine what has effected this apparent “healing.” Instead I thank the divine presence which is at once immanent,

transcendent, concrete, and unknowable that I am able to resume my work of restoring justice to the world I inhabit—albeit in accordance with my own, seemingly insignificant resources and abilities. Because in my woman-centred and woman-defined life narrative, this is the work of Christ's “princess-brides,” and it is the very same work that will bring myself and the rest of Creation somewhere closer to healing and redemption—and I daresay somewhere closer to an authentic vision of “happily ever after.”

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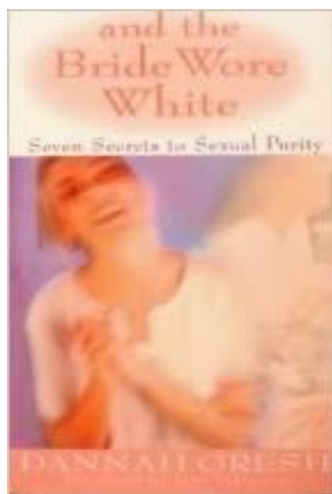
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Appendix A



(Front cover)




(Back Cover)

Appendix B

CHAPTER EIGHT 75
secret #3: purity is governed by its value

er elbows. Then I would take you into my
ing room where I would have the table
ered in silk and lace. Dainty, valuable
cups would be waiting for us with your
prite steaming tea at the perfect tempera-
e. I would have Godiva biscuits lying in a
stal bowl near your table setting. Close
r eyes and go there with me.
Rub your own hands and relax.
Hear the relaxing music in the back-
und.
Imagine the beautiful teacup as you lift it
your lips.
Crunch into that delicious biscuit,
othered in just the right amount of choco-
e. Mmmmmm! This is excellent. I feel
npered. Do you?
Oh, wake up! All I really gave you was a
isy bag of dead leaves in some hot water.
at's it! (OK, the Godiva was a bit costly.)
t it was not what I gave to you that made
a feel special. It was how I gave it. The lace
d silk and fine china cups gave value to the
ual gift. How I presented everything was
at made you feel valued.
You see, I could have walked down the
ll outside my office to a cold steel machine
d, after plunking a few coins into it,
ought you a Styrofoam cup full of tea leaves
d hot water. There would be no great mem-
es there. I gave you something "trashable."
I could have driven you to the local cot-
shop and ordered us a ceramic mug of hot
and maybe a bagel or something to go
th it. That would be OK, but if the mug
oke or we never got to go there again, no



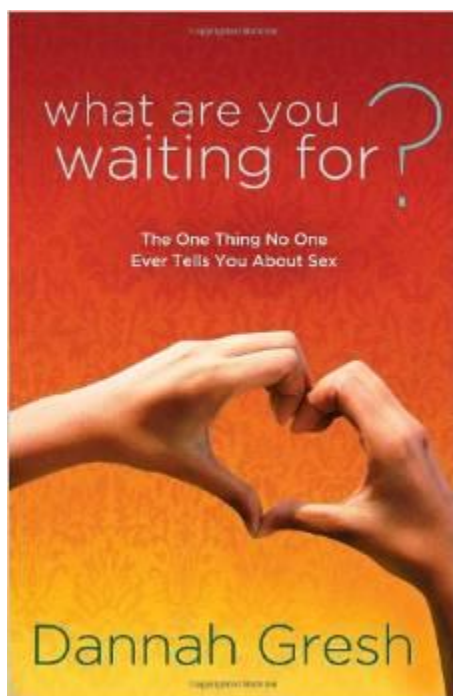
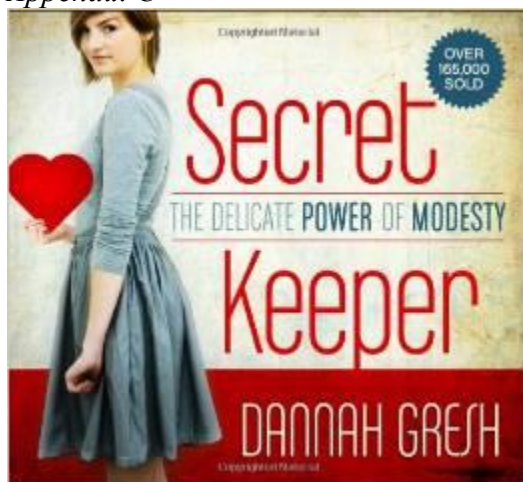
*Styrofoam Cup, Ceramic
Mug, or Priceless Teacup?*

Take this quick test. Decide in
each category whether you are a
Styrofoam cup, a ceramic mug,
or a priceless teacup. Fill in the
box with the appropriate letter.
(S=Styrofoam, C=Ceramic, T=Teacup)

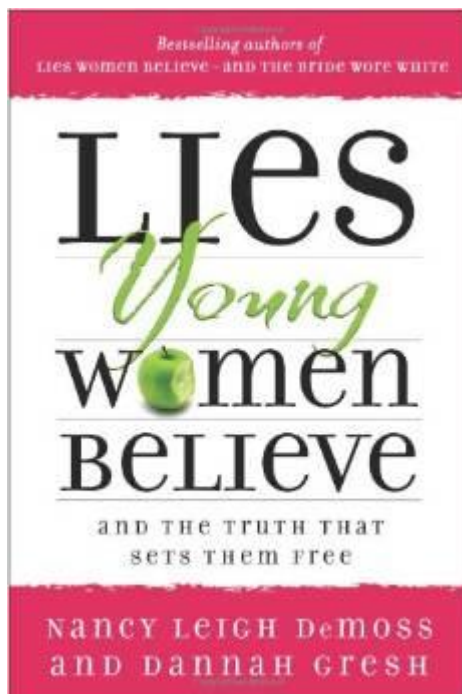
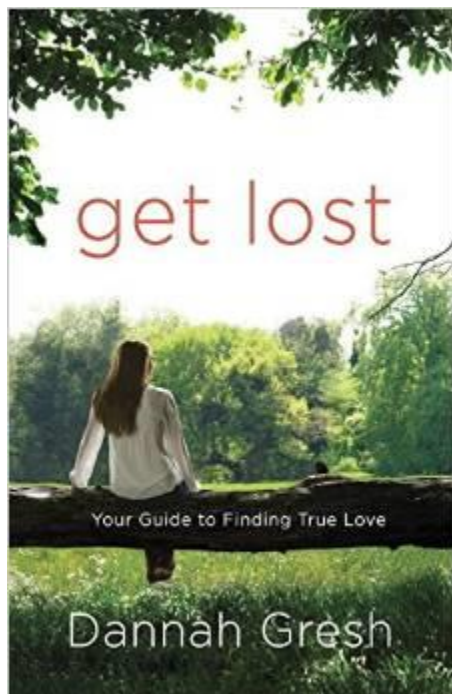
- In the way I dress
- In the movies I watch
- In the television shows I watch
- In the material I view on the Internet
- In the way I talk to girls about guys
- In the places I am willing to go on dates
- In the things I am willing to do on dates
- In the things I talk about on dates
- In the length of time it takes me to give a guy my heart
- In the way I treat friends when a dating opportunity pops up
- In the way I spend time with God specifically talking to Him about guys

How did you do? Hold that thought. We'll come back to it.

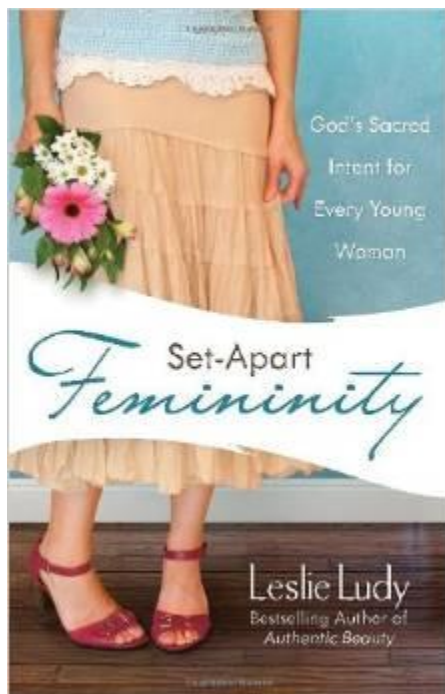
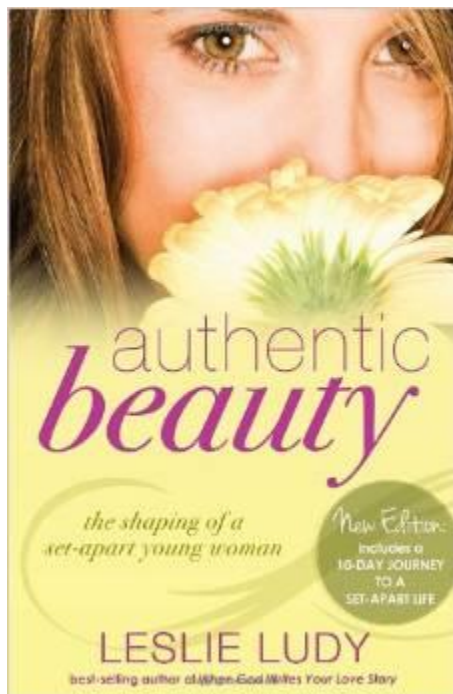
Appendix C



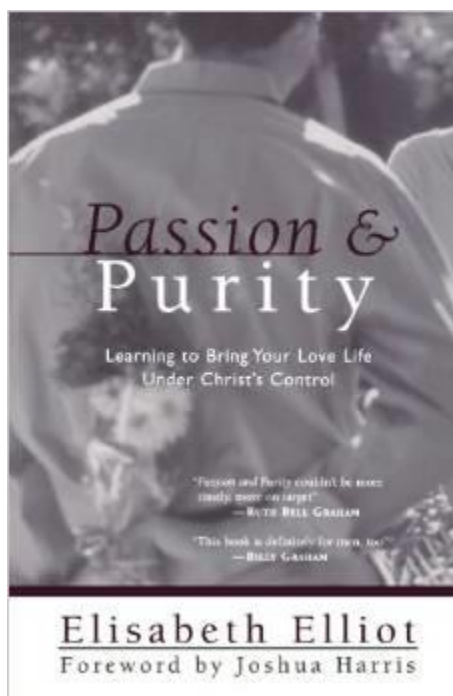
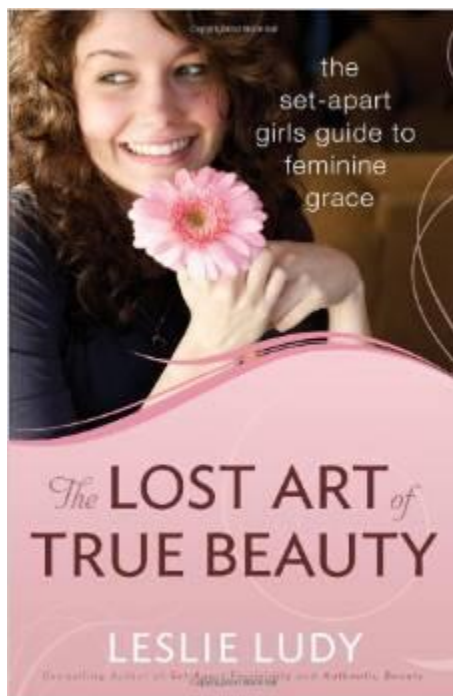
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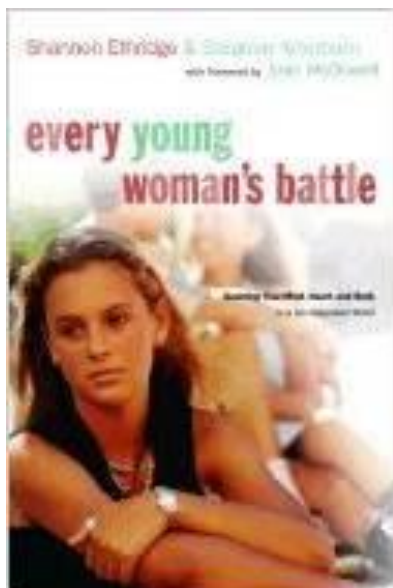
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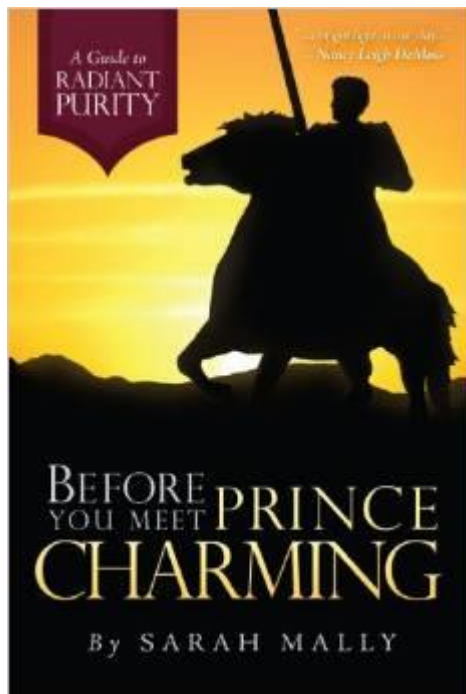
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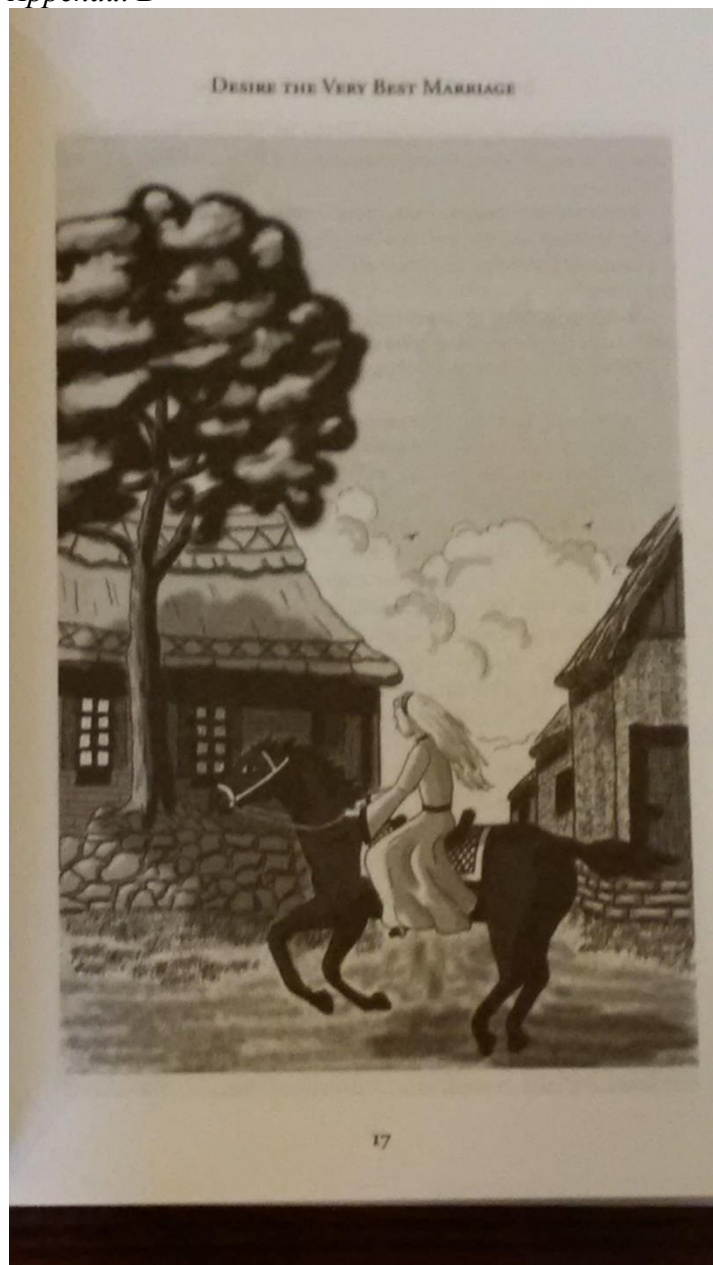
Appendix C (continued)



Appendix C (continued)



Appendix D



Appendix D (continued)

COULD HE BE THE ONE?

ability, and as of yet, none have been willing to challenge him."

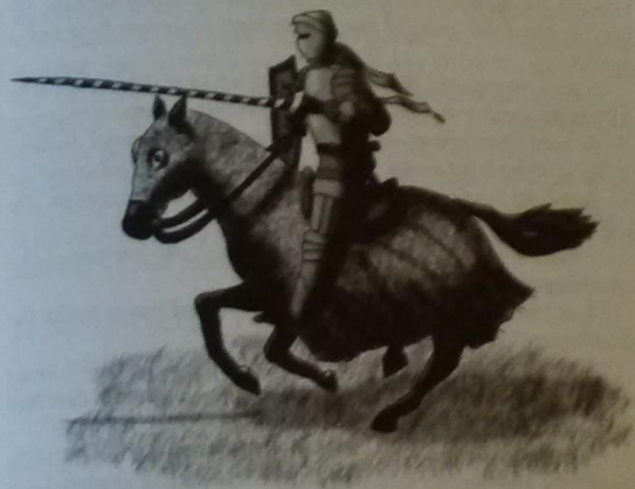
For a brief moment, Sir Eloquence's face gave the appearance of alarm and distress, but he recovered quickly and began a most articulate discourse.

"Ah, of course, meeting face to face in proper combat is thy intention. A brilliant plan, Sire. And yet, may I suggest that the honor of such a fight belongs to one of the more noble knights—perhaps Sir Valiant, Knight Trueblood, or Prince Gallant. I would not dream of taking the opportunity away from them."

"True, Mr. Scornful is experienced and skillful with the lance and the shield," replied the king, "but he is fearful and cowardly. A fight with him will be easily won. There is no need to defer to those you deem greater."

"Nay," said Sir Eloquence, "for Mr. Scornful is a liar and a cheater at best. He never plays by the rules. Whoever challenges him places himself in a most vulnerable position."

"Most certainly, there is risk involved. Yet if the kingdom is in



Appendix E

90

9 Sexual intercourse

8 "Experimental" nakedness

7 Petting while clothed

6 Open-mouthed, passionate kissing. A new desire awakens with this.

5 Kissing on the cheek or softly kissing on the lips. These are sweet, innocent signs of affection.

4 Hands on shoulders and hands on waist. A definite sign that romance is in the air.


3 Holding hands. This is a nice sign of attachment. It says you like each other. Your relationship is growing.

2 Talking with a guy. Remember to "stock up" for really comfortable and fascinating conversation.

1 Looking at a guy and making eye contact. A good sign that they are interested in you is that they smile and look right back at ya babe!

Steps to Physical Intimacy

Be governed by your value. Like a priceless piece of china, the way you present yourself deserves great care. Take the time to carefully draw a firm, uncrossable line, using the suggestions on the next page.



Adapted from Greg Johnson and Suei Shellenbarger, *What Hollywood Men? Tell You About Sex, Love and Dating* (Venture: Regal, 1994).

Appendix F

