GOD, SEX, AND THE INTERNET: THE FAITHFUL, VIRTUAL, AND SEXUAL LIVES OF CONTEMPORARY EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANS

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This dissertation examines a large network of evangelical Christian authors, speakers, business owners, and website creators and users who promote the idea that God intends married, heterosexual couples to have active and satisfying sex lives. Even the casual consumer of American media is probably familiar with evangelical positions against homosexuality and premarital sex, and indeed the ways in which evangelicals are anti-sex are often the only depictions of evangelical sexuality in academic scholarship. Yet it is precisely because they are active participants in American debates over sexuality, including those on sex education in schools, legal protection for gays and lesbians, and media censorship, that it is important to learn how evangelicals, both lay and professional, talk about sex as they believe God intends it. To do so, I collected a unique set of qualitative and quantitative data from online and face-to-face interviews, online surveys, observations of conferences, and content analysis of online and print material. I focus on websites because the Internet hosts conversations that are not likely to take place in face-to-face interactions. Participants in online discussions use frank language to talk about personal and sensitive aspects of their sexualities, sharing details that are not found in Christian books and not usually shared in less anonymous real-life exchanges. Since talk shapes how we understand gender and sexuality, these websites offer a unique opportunity for analysis. Lay evangelicals use the Internet to shape, interpret, and make meaning of sexual desire and pleasure. Although most scholars assume that evangelical messages about sexuality simply

reproduce gender inequality and homophobia, I argue that online discussions about evangelical sexuality both enable *and* limit women's agency and reinforce *and* challenge heteronormativity. Evangelicals who use Christian sexuality websites maintain their religious beliefs that privilege men and heterosexuality while simultaneously incorporating feminist and queer language into their talk of sexuality—encouraging sexual knowledge, emphasizing women's pleasure, and justifying marginal sexual practices within Christian marriages.

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1.0   INTRODUCTION

American evangelicals have a long and rich history when it comes to promoting sexual pleasure within marriage, having drawn upon multiple mediums—like books, workshops, and radio shows—since the 1970s. What these productions have in common, as historian Amy DeRogatis (2005:99) notes, is that they offer their audience information on both "the logistics of orgasm" and "a uniquely Protestant approach to sex." In other words, they provide the practical tools for achieving pleasure during sex and the ideological tools that promote the idea that God wants (only) married, heterosexual couples to experience sexual pleasure as a sign of a couple's commitment and an affirmation of God's love. In this dissertation, I examine how present-day evangelicals encourage sexual expression—both practically and ideologically—through published sex advice books, updated versions of their 1970s counterparts; group events like conferences and weekend couples' retreats; and especially digital media, including online stores that sell "intimacy products like sex toys," online message boards, blogs, podcasts, and virtual Bible studies that discuss a wide range of topics related to marital sex. I focus on the Internet because it provides an accessible and dynamic platform for online discussions of evangelical sexuality, a setting that is rich for sociological analysis.

In the United States, evangelicals are well-known for engaging in recent debates about sexuality, including how sex is talked about in schools (Irvine 2002), whether or not gays and lesbians are protected from discrimination (Dugan 2005), and women's reproductive healthcare

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(Munson 2008). In many of these debates, evangelicals seem to be fighting a losing battle, as American attitudes are increasingly progressive when it comes to sexuality (Attwood 2006; Giddens 1992). Recent survey data suggest that evangelicals who support abstinence-only sex education, restrictions on marriage for gay couples, and bans on women's access to abortion are outnumbered by a majority of Americans who oppose these views (Pew Research Center 2012a and 2013; Santelli et. al 2006). Yet religious conservatives' activism regarding sexuality issues remains strong, and evangelical Protestants make up the largest religious tradition in America, comprising approximately 30 percent of the population according to a 2006 nationally-representative survey (Putnam and Campbell 2010). My research sheds light on how religious conservatives thrive in a social world that appears to oppose their traditional values when it comes to gender and sexuality.

This dissertation examines how evangelicals create a discourse about sexuality that incorporates their religious beliefs while accommodating a (post)modern sensibility. I do not purport to find the "truth" about evangelicals' sexual lives, but instead examine how individuals make meaning of sexual practices, desires, and identities through online discussion (see D'Emilio and Freedman 1988; Peterson 2008). I incorporate online talk about sex with people's reported sexual behaviors and attitudes to show the complex, and sometimes contradictory, ways in which sexuality manifests in social life.

1.1   EVANGELICALISM AND POPULAR CULTURE

Shortly after the turn of the 20th century, a new sect of conservative Protestantism developed in America in opposition to social changes that believers perceived to signal unwholesome traits of

modernity, diversity, and secularism. Known as fundamentalism after a series of 1910-1915 publications titled, 'The Fundamentals,' that outlined their beliefs (Balmer [1989] 2006), this religious movement declared that they embodied the traditional Americanism—which emphasizes marriage, childrearing, and nationalism—that they feared was becoming obsolete (Bendroth 1993). Throughout the 20th century, fundamentalist groups expanded and morphed into what scholars today call *conservative Protestant evangelicalism* (Greeley and Hout 2006; Woodberry and Smith 1998), an umbrella term for a broad movement that, while "amorphous" with "blurry boundaries" (Putnam and Campbell 2010:13-14), shares a similar theology.[1] In general, evangelicals believe in repentance, salvation through Jesus Christ alone, and Biblical inerrancy (Noll 2001).[2] While fundamentalists of the early 20th century distinguished themselves from a seemingly secular culture by creating separate churches, schools, and social events (Bendroth 1993), evangelicals of the late 20th and early 21st centuries engage *with* secular culture, drawing from popular trends while simultaneously critiquing them (Hendershot 2004; Smith 1998). Negotiating an identity that is "in the world" but not "of the world," evangelicals are deeply connected to salient cultural values but have made them their own.

While there are many non-religious popular resources in the modern U.S. for how to improve your sex life (see Gill 2009; Peterson 2008; Spalding et. al 2010), the websites, programs, and print literature that merge talk of religion—God, scripture, and prayer—with

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[1] While many scholars continue to use the term 'fundamentalist' to describe this group (see Howard 2011; Barton 2012), I use 'evangelical' to refer to contemporary, not formally political, faith groups. Some people who may be labeled as fundamentalists by outsiders do not self-identify as such, since 'fundamentalist' today usually refers to a group of people who organize to advocate for social change, like the Moral Majority of the 1980s (Ammerman 1987; Smith 2000).

[2] Although many African Americans share these beliefs, scholars typically distinguish Black Protestants from (mostly white) conservative Protestant evangelicals due to their differing historical experiences and political beliefs (Greeley and Hout 2006). Although white evangelicals are often described as politically conservative, not all are. Sojourners, for example, traditionally support abortion rights, and some evangelicals identify as feminists (Stacey and Gerrard 1990).

discussions on how to have satisfying sex appear to be unique to evangelicals. Neither Catholics nor mainline Protestants have comparable programs, books, or websites.[3] This section situates evangelicals who promote sexual pleasure within a broader socio-historic context. It describes how, more than other religious groups, they draw from three overlapping social phenomena— therapeutic culture, mediated culture, and sexualized culture (Herzog 2008; Lee and Sinitiere 2009; Roof 1999)—in their proliferating Christian sexuality websites and other forms of evangelical sex advice.

The therapeutic, mediated, and sexualized culture(s) that so greatly shape evangelical religious expression have also been influenced by the religious values that ground the evangelical movement. As historian R. Marie Griffith (2004) writes about contemporary evangelical dieting programs, interest in promoting thinness comes from a long history of Protestants who connected the physical body with salvation. Indeed, these religious beliefs greatly shaped secular values throughout the 20th century; even seemingly non-religious beauty standards reflect Protestantism's profound influence. Similarly, sociologist Robert Wuthnow (1994) credits the popularity of support groups in the 1970s and 80s (what he calls the "small-group movement") with a popular desire to revitalize religion in America. The proliferation of therapeutic culture in the late 20th century does not signal the loss of religion, as some scholars have argued, but rather an integration of religious and moral values into a self-help ethos (McGee 2005). While scholars have traditionally described evangelicalism as appropriating trends from seemingly non-religious culture in order to appeal to contemporary believers (Flory

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[3] Mainline Protestants are not likely to interpret the Bible literally and include United Methodist, Lutheran (other than Missouri and Wisconsin Synod), Presbyterian, Episcopal, and United Church of Christ denominations (Greeley and Hout 2006).

and Miller 2008; Roof 1999), the boundaries and relationship between secular and evangelical is far from straight-forward.

1.1.1 Evangelicals and Therapeutic Culture

Efforts of self-improvement have become an important part of the American imagination, and the rise of what scholars call therapeutic culture has made emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being an important part of daily life (McGee 2005; Moskowitz 2001; Whelan 2004). People no longer rely solely on the religious identities that are shaped for them (by family, friends, religious leaders, etc.). Instead, they create their own religious identities that can be aligned with other aspects of their "selves" (Roof 1999; Wuthnow 1998). What Wuthnow (1998) calls *dwelling-oriented spirituality*—or a spirituality defined by sacred spaces, like the congregational church or home that dominated American religious life before the 1950s—has transformed to *seeker-oriented spirituality*—one that is based on personal experiences, rather than predetermined times and places that typifies American religion in the last half of the 20th century. This emphasis on individualism and voluntarism (the seeker) rather than established, compulsory religion (the dwelling) makes individuals feel like they are creating a spirituality on their own terms.

This sense of religious individualism reflects broader social trends in which "individuals [are] the measure of all things" (Wuthnow 1994, 18). Religion must, in the words of Wuthnow (1994, 18) have "practical results for everyday living." Evangelicals have found success in combining their religious message with a plethora of topics related to personal lifestyle—dieting, getting out of debt, raising children, and even marital sex (Brasher 1998; Griffith 2004). They find ways to connect their faith in God with the joys and toils of daily life. Everyday life

becomes a matter of making the right decisions before God and accepting His plan for your life. As Nancy Ammerman (1987:43) summarizes, "With the absolute truth of the Bible and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, any believer can discover the explanation for the events in his or her life." Evangelical believers connect even mundane events, such as a promotion at one's job, the safe travels of family member, and financial savings, to God's hand.

Evangelicals have easily adapted to the cultural value of self-improvement because their beliefs grant much authority and autonomy to individual believers. Like Protestantism generally, evangelicals believe that the Holy Spirit communicates directly with them. Their relationships with God may be assisted by, but are not dependent upon, a church body or preacher (Luhrmann 2012; Noll 2001). Relationship to clergy is also varied; many evangelicals have limited relationships with actual clerics but are authoritatively shaped by a range of lay leaders including Bible study and small group leaders (Balmer [1989] 2006; Wuthnow 1994). This means that individuals help shape their religion in profound ways. Some believe they have the authority to talk about how to improve their sex lives from a religious perspective without formal training or consulting religious leaders.

1.1.2   Evangelicals and Mediated Culture

Along with an emphasis on individualism, many American religions in the 20th century made themselves visible and appealing through the media. As Mara Einstein (2008:27) writes, "Being able to choose your faith doesn't mean anything if you cannot find out about religious alternatives. That is where media comes in." Evangelicals have used new media as it has historically emerged—from early radio broadcasting to home television to the World Wide Web (Hendershot 2004). This has allowed them to be "cultural innovators" (Lee and Sinitiere 2009)

while promoting traditional evangelical values. Highly mediated forms of religious expression—like Christian television, music, radio, and virtual Bible studies—thrive in today's technology-obsessed society, and Christian sexuality websites are but one of many examples of evangelical institutions that use digital media to convey their religious message.

Importantly, mediated religion offers believers a sense of religious community and fellowship without a congregation or physical church. Indeed, some evangelicals challenge traditional ideas about what makes a church, and establish "churches" in strip malls, people's homes, and online (Howard 2011; Flory and Miller 2008). Mediated religion, whether on the Internet, the radio, or television, allows believers to feel like they are connecting with others while they receive religious messages (Hadden and Shupe 1988). Unlike television or radio, where believers do not participate in the production of religious messages, the Internet allows individuals to *create* religion through virtual interaction (Campbell 2010). Jeffrey Hadden and Douglas Cowan (2000) distinguish between "religion online," which resembles other forms of non-interactive media where individuals learn about religion from formal institutions and recognized leaders, and "online religion," which allows for individual website users to construct religious faith through online practices.

1.1.3 Evangelicals and Sexualized Culture

Instructions on sexual morality have typified the evangelical movement since the 19th century (Balmer [1989] 2006; Bendroth 1993), and more recently, evangelicals have drawn on the cultural shifts in attitudes about sex to promote their own beliefs. Evangelicals naturalize gender and heterosexuality but rely on multiple, and sometimes contradictory, sources to do so. Those who claim that homosexuals are both biologically flawed and inherently sinful make gender and

sexuality a matter of science and the divine. Popular science, according to DeRogatis (2009: 279) provides "a new vocabulary" by which evangelicals can make claims about the pathology of homosexuality. But as Lynne Gerber (2008) points out, evangelicals must rely on more than science in order to insist that sexual change is possible (that people can transform from homosexual to heterosexual). By relying on God's authority when it comes to gender and sexuality, evangelicals "mediate tension, if and when it occurs, between scientific, natural, and other authoritative claims about homosexuality" (Gerber, 2008: 16). Since evangelicals believe that God provides the ultimate "truth" over human life, they can use their religious faith to counter (but remain in dialogue with) popular discourse about sexuality.

Yet, as DeRogatis (2005:98) writes, "evangelicals did not turn away from the sexual liberation movement begun in the 1960s; they have simply made it their own." Evangelicals have found ways to thrive in what Fiona Attwood (2006:78) calls *sexualized culture* that developed from the influences of women's liberation, gay rights, and the therapeutic movement. The dimensions of this sexualized culture include:

> a contemporary preoccupation with sexual values, practices and identities; the public shift to more permissive sexual attitudes; the proliferation of sexual texts; the emergence of new forms of sexual experience; the apparent breakdown of rules, categories and regulations designed to keep the obscene at bay; our fondness for scandals, controversies and panics around sex […].

In other words, sexualized culture is a culture obsessed with sex, in all of its multiple manifestations. The combined messages of feminism, gay liberation, and self-help literature suggest that all Americans should strive to have personally fulfilling sex lives and that their sexuality—when fulfilled—produces overall happiness (McGee 2005). For evangelicals, it has both allowed them to develop a sense that they can talk about sex without appearing obscene and

provided the imperative that they *should* talk about sex, in order for believers to learn about their own sexual interests and tastes.

Two contemporary examples of evangelical engagement with sexualized culture are evangelical sexual abstinence campaigns and ex-gay ministries. On the surface, both appear to focus on what evangelicals deem to be negative aspects of sexuality—premarital and homosexual sex—yet both also incorporate postmodern understandings of sexuality. As Christine Gardner (2011:26) writes about abstinence campaigns, "Part of what makes abstinence sexy is the campaigns' construction of its audience as autonomous, choice-making individuals who have the ability to control their bodies and wait for sex." Evangelical arguments to convince teens to remain chaste until marriage draw from individual choice as a salient cultural value— that men and women can choose their sexual partners (or choose to have no sexual partners) based on their individual interests—and apply it to their religious message.

Similarly, ex-gay ministries are remarkably adaptive when it comes to talk about sexuality. Although this movement's goal is to eliminate participants' same-sex sexual activity, it grapples with their desires and sexual identities in complex ways (Erzen 2006; Gerber 2011; Wolkomir 2006). The movement does not demonize same-sex attraction, but instead encourages participants to talk openly about their desires and attempt to reconcile the conflict between those desires and their religious beliefs. In fact, scholars have pointed out this movement's "queerness:" Tanya Erzen (2006) describes ex-gay therapy as a "queer conversion" and Gerber (2008) calls aspects of the movement "queer-ish." This is because evangelical ex-gays believe in sexual fluidity, that sexual change is possible, and that there is space beyond the narrow identity categories of homosexual or heterosexual. This allows individuals who fail to meet normative heterosexual standards to be accepted within a Christian framework. As these examples show,

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evangelicals have adjusted expectations for how and when to discuss sexuality as a wider range of sexual practices are publicly talked about and receive social approval (DeRogatis 2005; Herzog 2008).

1.2   THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Broadly, my project is based on two theoretical assumptions: (1) that interactions shape social realities—how people make meaning of their own and others' identities (Blumer [1969] 1986; Goffman [1959] 1990; Mead [1934] 1967); and (2) that such interactions are bound within regulatory systems of power and inequality (Bourdieu [1979] 1984; Foucault [1978] 1990). Specifically, I examine social (online) interaction that shapes how people make meaning of gender and sexuality within the overlapping regulatory systems of gender hegemony, heteronormativity, and evangelical Christianity. I draw from diverse bodies of literature: feminist and queer studies; communications and studies of new media; cultural studies; and religious studies that inform how gender, sexuality, and religion are socially (and virtually) constructed through interaction and practice.

1.2.1   "Doing" Gender, Sex, and Religion

As Candace West and Don Zimmerman (1987) famously argue, gender is a process that we continually *do*, not something that we *are*. Since gender is "accountable to interaction" (Messerschmidt 2009), individuals engage in what Erving Goffman ([1959] 1990) calls "impression management" to make their identities appear normal and consistent and to orient

themselves in the social world. People manage impressions based on shared social scripts that instruct what kinds of behaviors and appearances are appropriate in different contexts. Just as gender relies on actions, gestures, and appearances that create a gendered being, there exist similar normative behaviors and codes for "doing sex" and other "erotically significant aspects of social life and social being, such as desires, practices, relationships, and identities" (Jackson 2006:106). What John H. Gagnon and William Simon ([1973] 2005:13) call *sexual social scripts* involve,

> learning the meaning of internal states, organizing the sequences of specifically sexual acts, decoding novel situations, setting the limits on sexual response, and linking meaning from non-sexual aspects of life to specifically sexual experience.

Sexual social scripts allow us to interpret our bodies, thoughts, and emotions and others' bodies and gestures.

Just as gender and sexuality are dependent upon being "manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means" (Butler [1990] 1999:173; see also Jackson and Scott 2007), so too is religion socially constructed through practice and discourse (Bender 2003). Scholars of religion increasingly ground their research in everyday experiences and talk, what they call *lived religion*, in order to understand how individuals recreate, transform, and challenge religious institutions (Becker and Eisland 1997; Hall 1997; McGuire 2008). Sociologist Orit Avishai (2008:413) calls this "doing religion"—how people actively construct their religious identity. She writes, "doing religion is a mode of conduct and being, a performance of identity." Like the construction of gendered and sexual beings through (inter)action, religion does not exist prior to or outside of the ways in which people practice it.

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Like gender and sexuality, religion is *embodied*. Sociologist Meredeth McGuire (2008:111) argues that "lived religion"—religious experiences, beliefs, and practices—cannot be disentangled from the body:

> Lived religion is constituted by the practices people use to remember, share, enact, adapt, create, and combine the stories out of which they live. And it comes into being through the often-mundane practices people use to transform these meaningful interpretations into everyday action. Human bodies matter, because those practices— even interior ones, such as contemplation— involve people's bodies, as well as their minds and spirits.

Drawing from Bourdieu ([1980] 1990), McGuire argues that religious practice is embodied—cognitively, by developing beliefs and a moral framework; emotionally, by developing a sense and feeling of the divine; and physically, by enacting religious rituals that involve the body. As Philip A. Mellor (2007:587) argues, "all religions […] seek to shape bodily experiences, actions, and ways of thinking."

The proliferation of digital media like the Internet potentially transforms the ways in which people related to their own and others' bodies—gendered, sexual, religious and otherwise. In one sense, new technologies cause a "'fading away' of an experiential awareness of the body" (Shilling and Mellor 2007). In another sense, such technologies reflect the discursive and embodied work that produces our identities. As Chris Schilling and Philip Mellor (2007:545) write, technologies "nurture types of lived experience that invest individuals with a sense of meaningfulness and connection to others and the world." Although virtual reality is distinct from the physical world, new technologies often reflect the values of their "real" life, creating online environments that reinforce regulations of the body and marginalize others (Howard 2011; Schneier 2013).

1.2.2   Gender, Heterosexuality, and Religious Hegemonies

Although gender, sexuality, and religion are constructed through practice, they are not entirely "self-authoring projects" (Avishai 2008:413); instead, each is regulated by specific and intertwined social controls. "Doing gender" and "doing sex" means that we must "perform masculinity and femininity" in the *right* way, according to social norms (Dozier 2005:314). These norms reflect what Mimi Schippers (2007) calls *gender hegemony*, extending R.W. Connell's (1995) now classic concept of *hegemonic masculinity* to the overall system of organizing and regulating bodies of men and women. Hegemony refers to the implicit ways in which forms of privilege regulate social life, or in the words of Foucault ([1978] 1990:91), how power manifests "without the king." Claims of gender equality, despite ongoing gender imbalances, are indicative of a trend some scholars call *postfeminism* (Burkett and Hamilton 2012; Gill 2009; McRobbie 2004). Postfeminist culture merges anti- and pro-feminist ideas, giving women a sense that they control their sexuality while at the same time sending messages that their sexuality should be heterosexual and submissive/available to men (Crawford and Popp 2003).[4] Gender hegemony captures the ways in which postfeminst society continues to naturalize beliefs about gender and sexuality that privilege men.

Central to gender hegemony and postfeminism is *heterosexual* hegemony—what Adrienne Rich ([1980] 1983) calls "compulsive heterosexuality," Gayle Rubin ([1984] 1999) calls "obligatory heterosexuality," and Judith Butler ([1990] 1999) calls the "heterosexual matrix." Heterosexuality affects social life at multiple levels: at a structural level, through laws and the state; at the level of meanings, through talk and labeling of social identities; at the level

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[4] As Burkett and Hamilton (2012) point out, coerced sexual activity is a common experience for many western women and these experiences are normalized by mainstream media.

of everyday practices, through sexual and non-sexual social interactions; and at the level of embodiment, through people interpreting bodily practices (Jackson 2006). The perpetual naturalizing and normalizing of heterosexuality, and making invisible alternate forms of sexual expression, constitute what scholars call *heteronormativity* (see Hyde and Jaffee 2000; Ingraham 2005; Kitzinger 2005). Doing gender implies not only who you should be, according to normative standards about femininity and masculinity, but also who you should want or desire sexually. As Schippers (2007:91) writes,

> Compulsory heterosexuality […] establish[es] the naturalness of the complementary and hierarchical relationship between masculinity and femininity. Placed in relation to each other, these features of masculinity and femininity provide the hegemonic scaffolding for relationships between men and women as 'naturally' and inevitably a relationship of dominance and submission.

In other words, hegemonic heterosexuality depends upon and ensures an asymmetrical relationship between men and women.

Like gender and sexual identities, religion is constructed and enacted, in the words of Avishai (2008:413), "in the context of social norms and regulatory discourses." As Tracy Fessenden (2007:4) writes, America has a "Protestantized conception of religion," since beliefs and practices associated with Protestant Christianity have been taken for granted as normal and acceptable and are the standard by which the American public judges other belief systems. This means that society is most accommodating of religions within or close to Protestantism (Gupta-Carlson 2008; Mahmood 2009). Further, Protestantism acts as a regulating, albeit unseen, force in "secular" America, especially on heterosexuality and gender hegemony. In the words of Janet R. Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini (2003:3), "Christian theological pronouncements" about sex are synonymous with "good old American values." As Bernadette Barton (2012:14) describes in her (auto)ethnographic work on being gay in the American south, conservative Christianity (and its

belief system regarding sexuality) "permeates the multiple environments in which residents work, socialize and worship." It is embedded in everyday life, from the statements of elected officials to bumper stickers on cars to mundane conversations with neighbors. Although often overlooked by scholars of sexuality, gender hegemony and heteronormativity are profoundly influenced by a "Protestant Christian hegemony" that regulates public life in America today (Bernstein and Jakobsen 2010).

1.2.3 Maneuvering Restraints

Religious, heteronormative, and gender hegemonies do not construct a single coherent definition of "normal." Rather they produce a contradictory and complex notion of sanctioned and valued gendered and sexual expressions (Rubin [1984] 1999; Warner 1999). As Judith Lorber (1994:64) puts it, "certain [sexual] practices are actively encouraged and others punitively forbidden. In between are shifting levels of tolerance." In general, sexuality in the contemporary U.S. is normal when it "is exclusively between adults, conforms to dichotomous gender norms, is private, tender, caring, genitally centered, and linked to love, marriage, and monogamy" (Seidman 2002:17). Yet, sexual norms are often implicit and difficult to pinpoint since normal behavior receives little societal scrutiny and doesn't require explanation or justification (Foucault [1978] 1990). As Butler ([1990] 1999:41) writes, "gay is to straight *not* as copy to original, but, rather, as copy is to copy." Although Protestant ideals of heterosexuality appear to be the "original," or the grounds on which all other sexual identities are situated, they are social constructions—copies for which there is no original. What counts as normal sexuality, therefore, must be continually defined and defended (Canaday 2009; Halley 1993).

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In examining how evangelicals use Christian sexuality websites, I consider how gender, sexuality, and religion are restrained *and* malleable. Their identities are "heteronormatively ordered" (Jackson 2006:114) within a system of Protestant hegemony but, as social constructions, also must be continually reproduced (and therefore potentially changed). Expressions of religion, gender and sexuality are neither universal nor predictable given their complex intersections with race, class, and nationality (Kimmel, Hearn, and Connell 2005; West and Fenstermaker 1995). For example, Laura Carpenter (2005:12) points out in her work on virginity loss that individuals create meaning associated with sexual acts in varying ways. Even for a single sexual act (losing one's virginity), there may be multiple interpretations, varying attachments, and distinct memories for different people (see also Gamson 2001). Even for heterosexuality, which risks being portrayed as ubiquitous and unchanging, there is much room for individual interpretation and action (Ingraham 2005; Jackson 2006; Ward and Schneider 2009).

1.3   DISSERTATION AIMS

Much is known about how evangelicals talk about the sexuality of others—teenagers, homosexuals, and secular society at large—but much less is known about how evangelicals talk about their own sexuality. Studies that do examine sexuality talk within evangelical groups generally focus on negative aspects, like evangelical efforts to curb teenage sexual activity before marriage (Gardner 2011; Regnerus 2007) or to eliminate homosexual desires (Erzen 2006; Gerber 2011; Wolkomir 2006). However, there is little scholarship on how evangelicals talk positively about sex. The few studies of how evangelicals promote marital sexuality (DeRogatis

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2005; Herzog 2008) rely primarily on evangelical sex advice books for their data. In contrast, I have collected a unique set of qualitative and quantitative data to examine both the messages about sexuality produced by evangelical preachers, writers, and leaders and the ways in which ordinary evangelicals talk about sexuality online. By examining how these evangelicals promote marital sexuality, my project provides a more complete understanding of the relationship between evangelicalism and sexuality in contemporary society.

My dissertation contributes to three broad, interdisciplinary, or overlapping bodies of scholarship. First, I add to studies of American religion. I show how the Internet offers new ways for religious persons to express their faith, connect with other believers, and interact with secular culture. Evangelicals have thrived since the mid-20th century by engaging with secular society through commercial products, such as Christian rock music and self-help books (Flory and Miller 2008; Lee and Sinitiere 2009). Like these older forms of evangelicalism, today's evangelical sexuality websites are successful, in part, because they use a secular vehicle to promote a religious message. Further, my project explores how evangelical website users confront secular issues on the web, such as the prevalence of Internet pornography, user anonymity, and lack of control over how their online messages are used by others.

Second, I contribute to queer theory and studies of sexuality by showing that evangelical approaches to sexuality are more complicated and nuanced than commonly assumed. By focusing on discussions of sex in the context of online religious communities, I add to the literature on heterosexuality, which typically ignores religion (Ingraham 2005; Jackson 1999). My findings show how website users engage in sexual boundary-making as they justify who is allowed to participate in certain sexual acts and what kinds of sex count as "good" and "normal."

Lastly, my project adds to feminist scholarship on postfeminist culture by showing the subtle ways that website users perpetuate gender hegemony, despite using gender-equal language to talk about pleasure. Evangelical women advocate for their own sexual pleasure by citing its benefits for their relationships with God and their husbands. Evangelical men use their positions of privilege to maintain their masculine status while participating in non-normative sex acts. By examining how evangelicals promote marital sexuality, my dissertation project contributes to understanding the complex intersection of religion, sexuality, and gender in postfeminist culture.

1.4   DISSERTATION OUTLINE

In the next chapter, I outline the process of data collection and analysis, including interviews, content analysis of online and print material, participant observations, an online survey (Christianity, Sexuality, and the Internet Survey, or CSIS), and my analysis of a secondary data source, the 2006-2010 National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG). I discuss the advantages and challenges of using Internet data, including research ethics associated with confidentiality and anonymity. This chapter also provides a description of the Christian sexuality websites included in my study and the website users who completed my survey and participated in interviews. I discuss their demographics, religiosity, and sexual attitudes, as compared to the NSFG national sample.

In Chapter Three, I provide an overview of what most evangelicals who promote sexual pleasure within marriage believe when it comes to rules about sex. This includes a permissive attitude about sex in marriage but a restrictive attitude about sex outside of marriage. I discuss the major arguments presented in books and in websites and the attitudes and practices of survey

respondents to show how evangelicals construct a definition of "Godly sex" that relies on contradictory logics: on the one hand, a belief in an objective truth when it comes to who is allowed to have sex; and on the other hand, a belief in individual choice and personal taste when it comes to what kinds of sexual practices are allowed.

In Chapter Four, I show how online communities develop as *religious* and distinctly *evangelical* in the ways in which website creators and users incorporate their spiritual beliefs into both the content of online material and the conduct of online interaction. I argue that the "community" that website creators and users describe exists because they apply commonly held evangelical beliefs to online activity. Their efforts legitimize Christian sexuality websites as places of religious expression, where dialogue about sexuality is credible within an evangelical framework.

In Chapter Five, I analyze the sexual awakening stories women website users. These stories describe three types of obstacles—cultural, religious, and physical—that get in the way of experiencing sexual pleasure within marriage. By overcoming these obstacles, these women claim to realize God's plan for marital intimacy, which involves pursuing personal pleasure for the good of the marriage relationship and one's relationship with God. I argue that for these women, overcoming obstacles, discovering God's plan for marriage, and experiencing pleasure leads to an "awakened" self that is still a subjugated self.

In Chapter Six, I focus on men who use Christian sexuality websites to create alternative meanings of gender-deviant sex that are consistent with evangelicalism. I show how these website users construct *gender omniscience*—a spouse and God's privileged knowledge about one's "true" gender identity—to reconcile their interests in non-normative sex with their status as Christian patriarchs. By constructing gender as relational and spiritual, they simultaneously

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normalize their behaviors and condemn those who participate in similar acts but lack relationships with (heterosexual) spouse and God.

I conclude my dissertation by revisiting the contributions my project makes to studies of religion, sexuality, and gender. I examine how my findings extend the ways in which scholars theorize distinctions between what is normal and subversive; who is empowered or oppressed; and differences between public or private, virtual or real, and sacred or profane. I then offer three directions for future research.

2.0   METHODS AND DESCRIPTION OF DATA

This dissertation examines the multiple ways that evangelicals promote sexual pleasure within marriage. I focus on the Internet as a medium for evangelicals to engage in this task since Christian sexuality websites host many conversations that are not likely to take place during face-to-face interactions. Participants in online discussions use frank language to talk about personal and sensitive aspects of their sexual lives, sharing details that are not found in Christian books and that are not usually shared in less anonymous real-life exchanges (see Constable 2003). Since talk shapes how we understand gender and sexuality (Butler [1990] 1999; Foucault [1978] 1990), these websites offer a unique opportunity for analysis. I supplement online data collection with offline methods, including content analysis of print sources, face-to-face and phone interviews, and real-life observations of Christian sexuality conferences.

The Internet is both a producer of culture (where social interactions form cultural practices) and a product of culture (where texts and visual representations exist as cultural artifacts) (Hine 2000). Therefore, I used mixed online methods to capture both phenomena, including online observations, content analysis, interviews, and surveys. Together, these constitute a "virtual ethnography" (Constable 2003; Hine 2000), in which I immersed myself in my research field in order to examine how evangelicals understand and articulate sexual practices by maintaining a critical sociological perspective. Unlike traditional ethnographers, I did not travel to any specific physical space for an extended time nor identify a population within

spatial boundaries. But like traditional ethnographers, I was "uniquely placed to give an account of the field site, based on [my] experience of it and interaction with it" (Hine 2000, 46). I not only collected online data from an outsider perspective (as an unannounced researcher analyzing websites), but also, to an extent, from an insider perspective, immersing myself in the world of an online Christian sexuality message board, observing activity on the site, and interviewing website users (see Fetterman 2010).

2.1 DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

2.1.1 Pilot Study

To test my online methods, I conducted a pilot study in the fall of 2010. I did mock interviews with colleagues and asked them to complete an online questionnaire to work out any technical malfunctions online data collection, such as problems entering the chat-room forum or accessing the SurveyMonkey.com questionnaire. To further pre-test my methods, I attempted to contact three websites that discuss sexual practices (two were religiously affiliated and one was not). The writer of the dating advice column on an online Catholic magazine, BustedHalo.com, agreed to post my research request. While there are some differences between the websites in my dissertation project and BustedHalo.com, this site is comparable because of its religious perspective on romantic relationships and the public comments section it provides. I received permission to write a special column for the website detailing my study and requesting participation in online interviews and questionnaires. Over 100 BustedHalo.com readers completed the online surveys, and I conducted 15 online interviews. This pilot study helped me

to evaluate the content of interview and questionnaire questions for problematic responses that included terseness, rambling without focus, and refusals to answer. I asked pilot study participants for feedback following the interview and questionnaires to gauge the clarity of questions and any points of confusion. I then modified my interview template and questionnaire.

2.1.2 Identifying and Accessing the Study Sample

This project examines multiple websites that I label as Christian sexuality websites. Although the Internet is constantly expanding and transforming, informants told me that this was an exhaustive list of these types of sites at the time of my study. I included websites in my study that met two criteria: (1) they were easily identified as Christian (this usually means that the word "Christian" was displayed prominently on a website's homepage) and (2) their content focused specifically (and explicitly) on positive expressions of sex/sexuality within marriage.[5] I did not include websites whose content focused on broad expressions of sex/sexuality because this would include the large number of websites focusing on "marriage recovery," typically from pornography addiction, beyond the scope of my project. I also excluded a large number of websites that focused generally on enhancing marriages, whose content sometimes included discussions about sex/sexuality. I excluded these websites to maintain reasonable boundaries for the project and because a preliminary exploration of these sites revealed that their content on sexuality usually drew from one of the sexuality websites included in my study.

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[5] There are a few exceptions to these criteria. I included some websites that revealed religious identifiers somewhere other than the homepage, but the influence of Christian values was obvious in the sites' content. I also included three websites whose explicit focus is general marriage enhancement but whose content frequently includes discussions about sex/sexuality. I chose to include these three sites because they were frequently mentioned by users of websites within the parameters of the study.

I identified three types of sites within the population of Christian sexuality websites: blogs (n=16), online stores (n=18), and message boards (n=2).[6] Blogs included any site with written content that allowed a public readership to comment. Online stores were Christian-owned businesses that sold a similar range of sex toys, including vibrators, penis rings, massage oils and lubricants, erotic games, and light BDSM toys (blindfolds, handcuffs). Two stores sold non-tangible products: one sold personalized erotic stories and the other sold phone counseling sessions on behalf of certified Christian sex therapists. Both message boards were organized similarly: website users registered with the site (free membership) to access all the site's content and to post on the site. I recorded descriptive information for each site and used purposive sampling techniques to identify a sample from which to collect in-depth data.

I initially gained access for this study by attending a real-life conference organized by an administrator of the one of the websites in my study, BetweenTheSheets.com (BTS).[7] The creators of the website knew I was attending for research purposes, and afterward gave me permission to use the BTS website to collect data and recruit interview and survey respondents. Meeting me in person likely made the administrator and creators of the site more comfortable with my use of the site to aid my project. The other websites that helped with recruitment for my study agreed to do so, in part, because of my access to BTS, a well-known and respected site. Many website creators, however, did not respond to my requests, either because they dismissed my message or because they did not receive it. I contacted a total of 14 websites, seven of which accommodated my research requests.

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[6] Some websites overlap in their type of content; an online store may also host a blog, for example. I categorized a website based on what I deemed to be its primary purpose.

[7] All names of websites are pseudonyms.

Like many researchers, I likely gained access to my research site because of my appearance and familiarity with evangelical Christian culture. I was actively involved in multiple evangelical churches, organizations, and programs as a teenager. Research participants were also able to see a photo of me (a white cisgender woman) on a website I created for this project. They made assumptions about my sexual identity and current religious beliefs, which I neither confirmed nor corrected.

2.1.3 Content Analysis

I analyzed the content of a sample of Christian sexuality websites (n=12). This sample included the message board I observed (see below), six blogs, and five online stores. I selected this group using purposive sampling procedures, surveying the entire population of sites and choosing a sample that reflected the dominant types of website in the population. Based on observation and interview data, I created a dictionary (see Table 1) of key-word search terms/phrases that guided my content analysis of Christian sexuality websites (with the exception of online stores which are discussed below). This dictionary focused on search terms that would reveal debates and tension over sex acts because disagreements are often where values are revealed and meaning-making takes place (Blee 2012).

Table 1. Dictionary for content analysis of Christian sexuality websites

Key search term	Alternative related terms
Anal	
Dildo	Dildos
Fetish	Fetishes
Gay	Gays
Homosexuality	Homosexual, Homosexuals
Kink	Kinks, Kinky
Lesbian	Lesbians, Lesbianism
Pornography	Pornographic, Porn
Sin	Sinful, Sinned, Sinning
Vibrator	Vibrators

To perform a standardized search of all websites, I used Google.com's Advanced Search feature to search the webpages of each blog and message board in my sample.[8] I performed searches for key words within each site. Searches for seven websites (all sites in my sample except online stores) yielded 72,070 results of webpages that included key search terms. Because it was not feasible to analyze the content of each of those webpages, I performed additional keyword searches on the websites themselves. I relied on the ways in which the sites organized their search results (usually sorting by most relevant), to analyze a sample of webpages on each site. Because the amount of content varied greatly across the sites in my sample, I analyzed between approximately 10 and 50 webpages per site (about 200 webpages total). To analyze the

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[8] Websites have different formats for displaying search results, which make results of searches impossible to compare across sites. For example, one site may return a high number of results reflecting every instance a word is mentioned, while another site may return a smaller number of results that reflect every webpage that includes the search term (that could be included multiple times on that page).

content of the sample of online stores, I viewed every product page and documented the types of products sold on the site. Stores varied widely in the amount of products they sell, ranging from 5 to over 1,000 items. I also read and analyzed any additional webpages on the site, typically an "About Me/Us" page that detailed personal and professional information of the store owner(s) and an FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) page.

Based on content analysis of websites, I also selected a sample of ten print Christian sex advice books, one podcast series, and two virtual Bible studies (see Primary Sources in the Bibliography). I used themes derived inductively from website data collection to guide my analysis of print literature and other online content.

2.1.4   Online Observations

Online observations were done by following all activity on a single website, BetweenTheSheets.com. Though the process of analysis is similar to the content analysis I described above, I distinguish observation from content analysis for three reasons. First, online observations took place over an extended amount of time and therefore showed how content was added, modified, or removed by website users, unlike content analysis in which content was extracted for analysis at a single point in time. Second, online observations included all content posted to a website during a given amount of time (including content that is mundane or repetitive), whereas content analysis involved key-word searches using a deductive key-word list (a dictionary) and only included content that featured the key-word(s). And third, to maintain research ethics, I announced my presence as a researcher on the site I observed, unlike content analysis where I searched the content of public websites without disclosing my status as a researcher.

After receiving permission to collect data from a site administrator, I observed the message boards on BetweenTheSheets.com (BTS) for three months (October-December 2010). I chose this site because it was, by far, the most active website in my study. During the observation period, there were 61,176 unique visitors. Most were returning visitors, although 38.9% were first time visitors. BTS hosts a message board with several hundred comments posted every day. During the observation period, there were 49,511 comments posted on the site (on average, 538 comments per day).[9] Due to the high number of posts, I conducted a preliminary exploration of the site before my observation period to determine the most active and relevant board topics for my study. I observed 23 board topics, almost half the total topics on the site (n=50). [10] These topics received the most "traffic" and contained active and often lengthy threads discussing issues related to sex practices. The boards I excluded from observation were those that typically contain shorter threads or were not directly related to sexuality.

I conducted observations at least twice a week (usually on Tuesdays and Fridays since activity levels on the board decrease during the weekend) and read and analyzed every new thread added to the board topics I selected. Each week I read approximately 1000 comments (about 12,000 comments over the three month observation period). These comments either contributed to existing threads or began new threads. I did not read threads that started before September 1, 2010 (one month prior to the observation period) even if users posted comments to these threads during the time of my observation. I restricted my observations in this way in order to be able to keep up with threads that were developed during my observation period.

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[9] Statistics for BTS message board use were compiled using Google Analytics and provided to me by the owners of the site.

[10] My observation excluded board topics that discuss housekeeping and topics that exclude regular members, those boards created for moderators or the oversight group.

2.1.5 Online Surveys

My Christianity, Sexuality, and the Internet Survey (CSIS) included 87 questions about demographic information, religious affiliation and participation, Internet use, sexual history and sexual attitudes (see Appendix E for survey questions). The wording of these questions was based on those asked in the General Social Survey (GSS) and the largest and most comprehensive survey on American sexuality to date, the National Health and Social Life Survey (NHSLS). Eighty-nine percent of respondents completed the survey once they started it, a total of 768 respondents from links posted on seven Christian sexuality websites. Table 2 describes the websites that advertised the survey and the distribution of completed surveys. I capped the number of respondents at 150 for each website so that users from a single website did not disproportionately comprise the number of survey respondents. The websites that collected the most survey respondents, LovingBride.com and LustyChristianLadies.com, made up 40 percent of overall survey respondents. The website that collected the least respondents, MatrimonialSex.com, made up about eight percent of total respondents.

Table 2. Distribution of completed CSIS by advertising website

Name	Type	Percentage of survey respondents
LovingBride.com	Blog	19.5% (150)
LustyChristianLadies.com	Blog	19.5 (150)
LovingGroom.com	Blog	18.2 (140)
MarriageOfMaribel.com	Blog	16.1 (124)
BetweenTheSheets.com	Message board	9.6 (74)
StoreOfSolomon.com	Store	9.2 (71)
MaritalSex.com	Blog	7.7 (59)
Total		**100 (768)**

2.1.6 Interviews

I conducted 50 interviews for this project, most online.[11] I interviewed two owners of online stores; five creators/administrators of Christian sexuality websites; one author of a popular Christian sex-advice book; one Christian sex therapist; one church leader in women's ministries, and 40 users of two active Christian sexuality websites—BetweenTheSheets.com (BTS) and LustyChristianLadies.com (LCL). I recruited participants from these sites by asking website

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[11] I asked interview respondents who were affiliated with Christian sexuality websites to participate in online interviews but allowed phone interviews for three respondents, all of whom were website administrators. In one case, the respondent was without a computer at the time of the interview and asked if the interview could take place on the phone. In the other case, I suggested a phone interview with two website administrators who could only commit to an hour-long interview together, since online interviews typically require more time than this since people tend to type slower than they talk. My interviews with the author and therapist were face-to-face, and my interview with the women's ministry leader took place on the phone. Because these three respondents were unaffiliated with Christian sexuality websites, I did not ask them to participate in online interviews and instead used more traditional, offline formats.

users who completed the CSIS to volunteer for an online interview, for which they would be compensated with a $20 Amazon.com gift card (see Appendix C). Online interviews took place between January and March, 2011 for BTS members and October and November, 2011 for LCL readers.[12] They were one-on-one, semi-structured and lasted about two-hours (usually with one five minute break) and produced transcripts between 4,500 and 6,500 words in length.
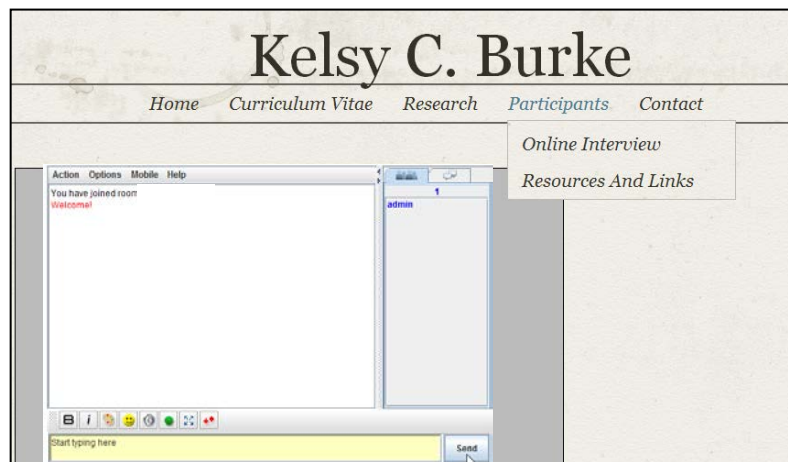
Figure 1. Screenshot of interview chat-room on KelsyBurke.com

I used online interviews to preserve the original form of social interaction being studied (Hine 2000; Mann and Stewart 2000) and chose a format that allowed interviews to take place synchronously (in real time). In order to conduct real-time online interviews, I created a personal website that described my research project and my professional credentials (see Figure 1). I contracted with a chat-room service that hosted a private and secure chat-room on the site; automatically stored chat-room transcripts in a password-protected account; and allowed me to set a unique password that was necessary to access the chat-room that I changed for each

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[12]Even though male readers of LCL completed the CSIS, I limited my interviews with LCL readers to women because the site is geared specifically toward them and because I interviewed a disproportionate number of men from BTS.

interview participant. During the interviews, I was able to type instant messages to respondents who then typed their responses.

Before interviews with website users and administrators took place, I reviewed their answers to the CSIS, so that I had a general knowledge of the respondent's relationship history, religious affiliation, sexual attitudes, and Internet use. During the interviews, I asked detailed questions about how respondents used Christian sexuality websites, questioning how they first found the site(s), how often they read and post content, and what motivated their online participation. I asked how their online activity affected their real-life relationships and whether or not their real-life relationships included conversations about sex that were similar to those that take place online. I asked respondents if they used any other resources for information about sex and encouraged detailed responses about what kinds of sources have shaped their beliefs about sexuality. At the end of the interviewed, I asked any follow-up questions I had from their answers in the CSIS, usually pertaining to questions about sexual attitudes (see Appendix D for the complete interview template).

2.1.7   Participant Observation of Real-Life Events

Through interviews, online observations, and content analysis of website, I identified real-life events whose speakers promoted beliefs similar to those found online (that God wants for married couples to experience sexual pleasure). With permission of event organizers, I observed three face-to-face Christian sexuality events. I chose these events, all that were advertised online, because they targeted different Christian audiences. The first was geared towards married couples who attended the event together. The second was for women only. The third was for any Christian—single or married, man or woman—who wanted to learn about sexuality from a well-

known evangelical pastor. I took detailed fieldnotes at all three events and used a template to guide my observation (see Appendix B).

The first event was a two day conference that took place in October 2010, organized and hosted by administrators of BetweenTheSheets.com. I observed all sessions of the conference (except a session for men only) and talked informally to all conference participants (a total of 18 people, including the organizers). The "Intimate Issues Conference" was the second conference I observed, in January 2011. This conference takes place bi-annually in churches across the country and is based on the best-selling evangelical sex advice book based on the same name (Dillow and Pintus 1999) that is geared towards women. Five hundred and fifty women attended this conference, and I talked casually with about six of them through the duration of the conference. I observed all sessions of the two-day conference except for a session geared toward single women (an alternate session for married women took place at the same time). I interviewed one of the authors of *Intimate Issues*, and speaker at the conference, and the organizer of the conference, the leader of Women's Ministries at the evangelical church that hosted the conference. The third conference I observed was a one day event called "Love Life" that was part of Pastor Mark Driscoll's book tour for his most recent book, *Real Marriage: The Truth about Friendship, Sex, and Life Together* (2012). I observed the entire conference, chatted informally with protestors outside of the conference and with young adults working at the merchandise table.

2.1.8   Data Analysis

To analyze qualitative data, I read all transcripts, notes, and excerpts from online content and wrote memos on emerging patterns. After reading these memos, I developed codes and returned

to my data for coding using qualitative analysis software, NVivo 8. This iterative process involved a continual questioning, exploring, and comparing of data to understand significant themes that emerged (Corbin and Strauss 2007).

To compare the study's sample with evangelicals nationally and the overall population, I used a secondary data sources: the 2006-2008 National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG), a nationally representative survey collected by the National Center for Health Statistics (a division of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention). Questions that overlap in the NSFG and CSIS include questions about demographic information, number of sexual partners, religious affiliation and participation, and two questions measuring sexual attitudes (the appropriateness of same-sex sex, and sex between two unmarried adults).

To analyze quantitative data, I used statistical analysis software SAS to perform descriptive statistics, mostly frequency tables, to find out information about the CSIS survey sample, including where most live; what percentage are married; and how often most use the Internet. I compared their religious affiliation, sexual attitudes, and sexual practices with evangelicals nationally and the overall population using NSFG data. My analysis is univariate; I do not use more advanced multivariate analysis, like correlations or regressions, because the CSIS is not a representative sample. Appendices F and G include the CSIS and NSFG codebooks for the variables used in analysis.

2.2   INTERNET RESEARCH ETHICS

Ethics about Internet research are complicated and murky. Throughout the collection and write-up of data, I have done my best to anticipate risks and minimize any harm that could come to

research participants. I store fieldnotes, excerpts of online content, interview transcripts, and questionnaire data in password protected, SSL encrypted online accounts and on a personal password-protected computer.[13] Because of the unique nature of Internet data, I understand the longevity of data storage and the potential risk of data intrusions and work to mitigate that risk (Buchanan 2010; Johns, Chen, and Hall 2004). I also respect the "psychological boundaries, purposes, vulnerabilities, and privacy" of the groups I study (Sharf 1999:255). Although I use a critical sociological perspective in my analysis, I do not attempt to discredit or challenge my participants' religious beliefs.

2.2.1   Expectations of Privacy

Even though most of my data is publicly accessible—no log-in information or membership is required to view content, expectations about online content are different than expectations in public physical spaces (Buchanan 2004).[14] Posters on websites dealing with unique and sensitive issues, such as sex from a Christian perspective, do not expect that their comments will be used for purposes other than to contribute to that online community. These expectations may be increasingly irrelevant as issues of privacy and ownership of online content gain media attention and spark public debate. Still, I do believe that posting on an online message board is more similar to sharing a story in semi-public spaces—like a Bible study or Alcoholics Anonymous— than public spaces like a park or busy town center. Even though strangers could plausibly enter these semi-public spaces, there is general consensus that it is unethical for a researcher to invade

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[13] SSL refers to Secure Sockets Layer that provides security for online communication. SurveyMonkey.com stores questionnaire data for this project; ParaChat.com sends copies of interview transcripts to my research email account.

[14] BetweenTheSheets.com is the only site that contains content that requires membership in order to view. I received permission to read and use this content from an administrator of the site.

these spaces without permission and use what they hear or observe as data (Merten and Ginsberg 2009). But the comparison between online spaces and semi-public physical spaces only goes so far—the likelihood of a stranger entering a Bible study or Alcoholics Anonymous is not great and that stranger would surely be detected and questioned upon entering. People using online spaces, however, must generally expect the presence of strangers—since lurkers can read online content without ever disclosing their presence.

Following the guidelines of the Association of Internet Researchers (Markham and Buchanan 2012), I attempt to find middle ground in understanding the Internet as both a public and private space: While I did not request permission from website administrators to use as data online content that is publicly viewable, I take seriously the privacy of website users and take actions to protect their identities. I quote and describe online content as anonymously as possible, changing details that may reveal the online identity of the author and using pseudonyms for all website users and names of websites.

2.2.2   Online Authenticity

Although authenticity poses a challenge for all Internet-based research (Buchanan 2004), the websites analyzed in this article take great measures to moderate their sites, making it less likely that I analyzed content posted by trolls or posters who use the sites maliciously. LCL bloggers must approve all comments before they are posted, and BTS requires membership in order to post content that is then closely monitored by administrators and fellow members. As one of the creators explained to me, "we've developed this sense of community and people are aggressive in protecting that" (see Chapter Four). Members flag inflammatory or off-topic comments that

are then investigated by a team of administrators. One administrator told me that he takes this job seriously and deactivates members once or twice a week for violating the site's terms of use.

I am fairly confident that interview respondents were Christians and regular website users—interviews were lengthy and I likely would have suspected deception in the responses to detailed questions related to their website use, religious faith, and sexuality. CSIS data further confirm patterns among website users that align with the stated beliefs of the sites and are similar to evangelicals nationally.

2.3   DESCRIPTION OF STUDY PARTICIPANTS

Although it is difficult to gauge how many people use Christian sexuality websites and who they are, Christian sexuality websites are among the types of sites used by many Americans. Data from the Pew Internet and American Life Project show that about one in four American adults have at some point used an online chatroom or online discussion forum, and as of 2010, about one in three Americans have used the Internet for information regarding religion or spirituality (Pew Research Center 2012b).[15] Christian sexuality sites are easy to find for anyone looking for online discussions about Christian sexuality. The top results in a search for "Christian sex" include three active sites in my study: LustyChristianLadies.com, BetweenTheSheets.com, and StoreOfSolomon.com.   Creators of LCL reported that their site receives over 400,000 hits per month. The owner of StoreOfSolomon told me that her business continues to grow each year.

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[15] Between 2000 and 2010, the percentage of respondents who have ever used chatrooms or other online discussion forums was between 22 and 25 percent. In 2010, 32 percent of respondents reported that they looked for spiritual or religious information online (Pew Research Center 2012b).

And statistics gathered for the BetweenTheSheets message board between March 2004 and June 2011 indicate that over 31,000 members posted almost 300,000 comments on nearly 15,000 threads.

Tables 3 and 4 summarize demographic information of study participants. The first (Table 3) compares interview participants, CSIS respondents who did not participate in an interview, evangelicals nationally, and the overall American population.

Table 3. Demographic characteristics by sample for interviews, CSIS, and NSFG[16]

	BTS and LCL Interview Respondents (n=44)	CSIS Respondents (n=768)	Evangelicals Nationally (weighted sample)	Overall Population (weighted sample)
Male	43.2%	49.3	47.3	49.8
Female	56.8	50.7	52.7	50.2
18-25	11.4	13.2	25.1	27.4
26-35	27.3	33.9	35.6	31.8
36-45	27.3	24.7	39.3	30.8
46-55	29.6	20.6		
56+	4.5	7.7		
White	88.6	91.1	84.7	74
Non-white	11.4	8.9	15.4	26
Married	95.5	93.7	54.2	43.9
Not married	4.5	6.4	45.8	58.1
Children	79.5	78.8	55.9	48.9
No children	20.5	21.2	44.1	51.1
College degree	50	58.6	19.8	25.1
No college degree	50	41.4	80.2	74.9

Like evangelicals nationally, interview and CSIS respondents are mostly white. They are more likely to be married and to have children, which is expected given the subject matter of the websites they use. They also report more education than evangelicals nationally and the overall

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[16] NSFG data includes respondents ages 15 to 45. I included only adults (ages 18 and over) in my analysis.

population, supporting evidence that privileged populations use the Internet at higher rates than do low-income and less educated groups (Zickuhr and Smith 2012). CSIS data are not generalizable to evangelicals given these important demographic differences. Users of Christian sexuality websites comprise a distinct group with higher rates of marriage and higher levels of education than evangelicals generally.

Table 4. Demographic characteristics by website for CSIS respondents

	Lusty Christian Ladies	Marital Sex	Marriage of Maribel	Store of Solomon	Loving Bride	Loving Groom	Between the Sheets
Male	50.3%	49.2	17.1	59.5	7.4	95.7	62.9
Female	49.7	50.8	82.9	40.5	92.6	4.3	37.1
18-25	17.3	11.9	39.5	5.3	4.7	3.6	4.3
26-35	30	42.4	46.8	30.7	46	20	17.1
36-45	30.7	18.6	8.9	29.3	28	27.1	28.6
46-55	16	23.7	3.2	20	14.7	36.4	40
56+	6	3.4	1.3	14.7	6.6	12.9	10
White	92	83.1	94.4	94.7	98	90.7	92.8
Non-white	8	16.9	5.6	5.3	2	9.3	7.2
Married	89.3	86.4	88.7	97.3	81.3	97.1	94.3
Not married	10.7	13.6	11.3	2.7	12.7	2.9	5.7
Children	70	69.5	57.3	82.7	79.9	90.7	92.9
No children	30	30.5	42.7	17.3	20.1	9.3	7.1
College degree	58.8	64.4	68.6	62.2	62	65.7	54.3
No college degree	41.2	35.6	31.4	37.8	38	34.3	45.7

Respondents from each website that collected survey responses are remarkably similar. As Table 4 shows, they are mostly white, married and fairly evenly distributed by age. And as Figure 2 shows, respondents are fairly evenly distributed by geographic region, with the highest proportion of respondents from each website except MarriageOfMaribel.com residing in the U.S.

South.[17] Another difference is the gender of respondents: women comprise the vast majority of respondents for MarriageOfMaribel.com and LovingBride.com, which are both sites geared specifically toward women, and men make up nearly all respondents for LovingGroom.com, a site geared toward them. Yet for MaritalSex.com and LustyChristianLadies.com, which are also sites intended for a women audience, respondents are fairly evenly distributed by gender, signaling a mixed readership despite the women's focus.
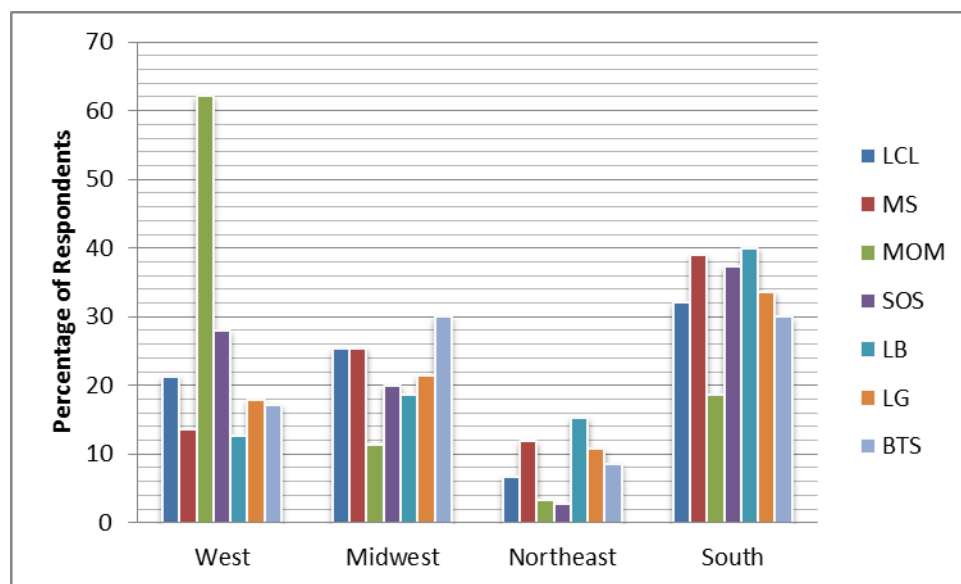
Figure 2. Distribution by geographic region and website for CSIS respondents

Most CSIS respondents have been married for at least five years. Figure 3 summarizes the relationship status of CSIS respondents: very few participants are single (two percent), in a relationship but not married (2.3 percent are in a long-term relationship and 1.2 percent are engaged), or divorced (1.2 percent); no respondent was widowed; 21.8 percent have been

[17] I used the geographic regions used by the U.S. 2010 Census to categorize respondents' states of residence (see CSIS Codebook in Appendix F).

married five or less years; 28.1 percent between six and 15 years; 26.6 percent between 16 and 30 years; and 16.8 percent have been married more than 30 years.
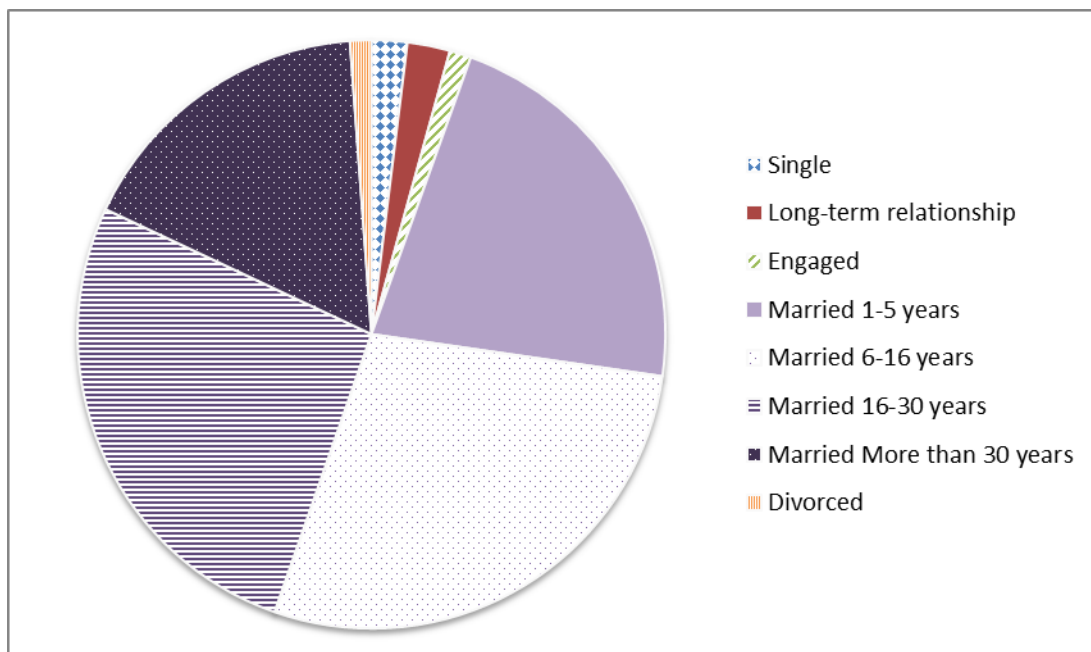
Figure 3. Relationship status for CSIS respondents

According to the Pew Research Center (2012b), religious Americans use the Internet at slightly higher rates than their non-religious counterparts (79 percent compared with 75 percent). Table 5 shows how often CSIS respondents use the Internet for purposes other than email or work. CSIS respondents report moderate levels of Internet use; most report what amounts to one to two hours online each day (between one and 12 hours each week), and only four percent report that they surf the web more than 30 hours each week. Users of Christian sexuality message boards, blogs, and online stores are among the 16 percent of American adults who

consider themselves members of an online group; 42 percent who read someone else's blog; and 71 percent who have purchased a product online (Pew Research Center 2012b). As Figure 4 shows, most CSIS respondents have viewed more than one type of Christian sexuality websites (stores, blogs, and message boards). Nearly all respondents (97.7 percent) have viewed at least one Christian sexuality blog, and over half have viewed at least one message board (65.5 percent) and online store (62.5 percent).

Table 5. Amount of time spent online per week for purposes other than email or work for CSIS respondents

Amount of time spent online per week	Number of respondents	Percentage of sample
Less than one hour	22	2.9
Between 1 and 6 hours	266	34.8
Between 7 and 12 hours	204	26.7
Between 13 and 18 hours	145	19
Between 19 and 24 hours	72	9.4
Between 25 and 30 hours	24	3.1
More than 30 hours	31	4.1
Totals	764	100
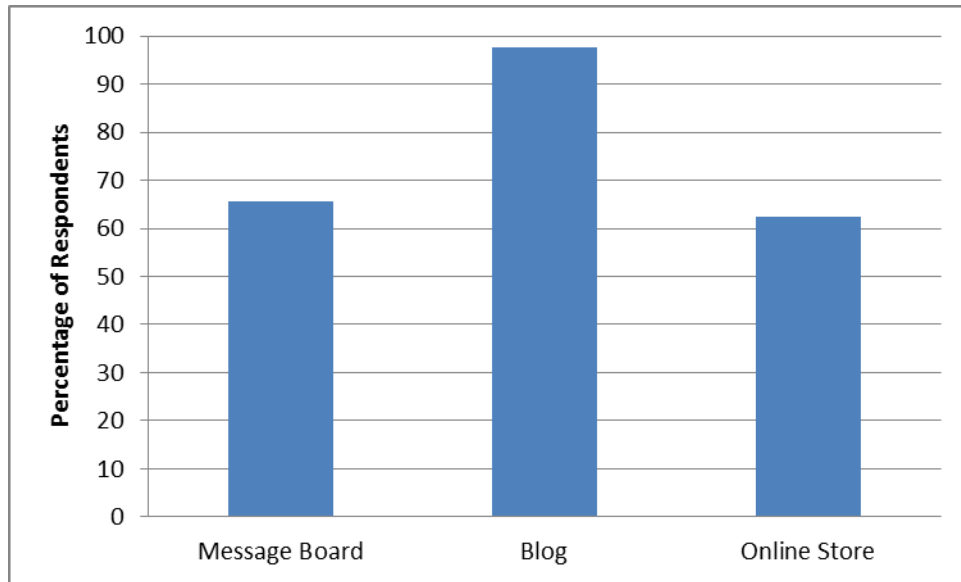
Figure 4. Percentage of respondents who use Christian sexuality websites by type

In sum, users of Christian sexuality websites are both similar to and different from evangelicals nationally and the general public. They are more likely than most Americans to use message boards and read blogs, perhaps supporting data that religious persons, on average, use the Internet more than non-religious persons. Like evangelicals nationally, they are likely to be married and have children; they are mostly white; and they are likely to reside in the American South (Barton 2012). Unlike evangelicals nationally, CSIS respondents are highly educated. They are about twice as likely to have received a college degree than evangelicals nationally. The following section continues to compare CSIS respondents and evangelicals nationally to discuss similarities and differences in religious beliefs and practices.

2.4   WHAT "CHRISTIAN" MEANS ON SEXUALITY WEBSITES

Although Christian sex advice books and sexuality websites identify broadly as "Christian," they are best categorized as conservative Protestant evangelical. They reveal what scholars agree are beliefs widely held by evangelicals today: Biblicism; crucicentrism; conversionism; and activism (Noll 2001); authors of popular books are well-integrated into mainstream evangelical culture; and CSIS respondents fit a profile of American evangelicals today.

2.4.1   Four Evangelical Tenets

Biblicism refers to the belief that the Bible is the inspired word of God (Noll 2001), what some scholars refer to as Biblical inerrancy or literalism (Woodberry and Smith 1998). Evangelicals emphasize the Bible as the ultimate and unquestioned source of religious instruction for Godly living.   As the authors of *Intimacy Ignited: Conversations Couple to Couple* (Dillow et. al 2004:11) tell their readers, "We wanted God's Word to drive this book. Nothing written in ages past, nor anything written in the ages to come, can compete with the 'flawless' Word of God […] Only scripture can boast that it is the very breath of the Almighty." Like sex advice books, Christian sexuality websites, whether they are message boards, blogs or online stores, repeatedly reference the Bible when making claims about marital sex. Stores use the Bible to justify the use of sex toys within Christian marriages. As owners of one store state on their website's homepage, "We believe if you search the scriptures with an open mind you will be blessed as you discover the playfulness, passion, and satisfaction that God has created to be a part of your love life." The emphasis that authors and website creators and users place on the Bible is one

indication that Christian sex advice books and sexuality websites are best categorized as evangelical.

Online and print Christian sexuality sources also are crucicentric, displaying the idea that salvation can be achieved only through Jesus Christ who died for mankind's sins. As bloggers on LCL tell their readers, "The core of our identity is that we belong to God and have a connection to Him because of our faith in the saving power of the work of Jesus Christ on the cross." Similarly, guidelines for posting on BTS's message boards state that users must not debate that "Jesus, and Jesus alone, is the ONLY way to salvation, and the Bible is the final authority." Websites frequently call themselves "Christ-centered," "Christ-focused," or "Christ-loving" and use their relationship with Jesus Christ to situate themselves religiously.

Conversionism is another evangelical trait found on Christian sexuality websites and in sex advice books. This means that they emphasize the act of conversion, being "born again," or "saved" when expressing their religious faith. As Judy, the blogger on MaritalSex.com, told me, "When we acknowledge Him [Jesus Christ] as the One True Lord and Savior and repent and ask forgiveness for our sins, we are indeed forgiven and have eternal life." Authors and website creators often share their own conversion stories through personal testimony. For example, the creators of BTS, John and Barbara, share in a post called "Our (Messy) History" how they transformed their lives from sexual brokenness to sexual fulfillment with the help of God. The transition from non-believer to believer is an important component of evangelicalism and is reflected on Christian sexuality websites and in sex advice books.

Finally, there is much evidence of what David Bebbington calls "activism" (cited in Noll 2001:13) on Christian sexuality websites and in sex advice books. Activism, also described as proselytizing, refers to encouraging non-Christians to become Christians. This component of

evangelicalism extends the importance of conversion to others. Authors Ed and Gaye Wheat ([1977] 2010:263) do this at the end of their book, *Intended for Pleasure*, when they tell their readers, "If you have not asked Jesus to be your Savior, you can do it now" and suggest a prayer that unsaved readers may recite to become Christian. Similarly, customers who browse the online store, StoreOfSolomon.com, will find a page titled, "Better than Sex," that details evangelical beliefs in Biblicism, crucicentrism, and conversionism and then offer instructions (and a suggested prayer) for how to be born again. For the non-Christians who may encounter books or websites, authors and website creators encourage conversion to evangelical Christianity.

2.4.2 Authors of Popular Books

While it is problematic to assume that the positions taken on Christian sexuality websites and by authors of sex advice books are held universally by American evangelicals, it is clear that the authors of the books most mentioned online are well-integrated into mainstream evangelicalism. As indicated by their continued success in the Christian publishing industry, they appear to have a large readership (DeRogatis 2005). Co-authors of *Intimate Issues: 21 Questions Christian Women Ask About Sex* (1999), Linda Dillow and Lorraine Pintus, have appeared on Focus on the Family's radio show. Author of *The Sexually Confident Wife: Connecting with your Husband Mind Body Heart Spirit* (2008), Shannon Ethridge, is also a spokesperson for TeenMania, one of America's largest evangelical youth organizations. Tim LaHaye, co-author of one of the earliest evangelical sex advice books, *The Act of Marriage: The Beauty of Sexual Love* (LaHaye and LaHaye [1976] 1998) was named one of the top 25 most influential evangelicals in America (TIME Magazine 2005).

Pastor Mark Driscoll is arguably the most well-known evangelical leader who frankly and frequently discusses sexuality. He is the founder of Mars Hill Church in Seattle, a mega-church that reported 4,481 members in 2010. His sermons are downloaded on iTunes approximately seven million times per year (Mars Hill Church 2010). He has spoken at conferences with other well-known evangelical leaders, including John Piper and Tim Keller, given a guest sermon at the church of Rick Warren, and has been interviewed on Pat Robertson's television program, *The 700 Club* (Menzie 2012). His appearances on secular media outlets include *Nightline*, *The View*, and *Loveline with Dr. Drew*. Before publishing his views about sex for pleasure within marriage, he was well-known for discussing the perils of pornography and co-founded the anti-porn online ministry, XXXChurch.com. Driscoll and his wife recently published *Real Marriage: The Truth about Sex, Friendship, and Life Together* (Driscoll and Driscoll 2012), which was listed by *The New York Times* (2012) as the number one best-seller in its category upon its release. Thomas Nelson, the publisher of Driscoll's latest book, publishes a large percentage of sex advice books written by evangelicals along with other works of non-fiction written by well-known evangelical authors like Billy Graham and Max Lucado.

2.4.3   Religious Affilation and Participation of Study Participants

In my analysis of CSIS data, I lumped together religious denominations that have overlapping beliefs (Putnam and Campbell 2010) and distinguished between evangelical and mainline Protestants.[18] Evangelical denominations include Assemblies of God, Lutheran Church—Missouri and Wisconsin Synods, Pentecostal Church of God, Seventh Day Adventist, Southern

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[18] The CSIS does not include a separate category for Black Protestants since the vast majority of respondents are white.

Baptist Convention, Vineyard Churches, and those labeled "nondenominational." Mainline

denominations include United Methodist, Lutheran (other than Missouri and Wisconsin Synod),

Presbyterian, Episcopal, and United Church of Christ (Greeley and Hout 2006).

The CSIS allowed respondents to specify their religion as "Other" if the categories

presented did not match their self-identification. Many respondents who selected this response

wrote in Latter-day Saint (LDS) or Mormon since this was not among the religious traditions

from which to choose.[19] Others specified their religion as "Christian." Somewhat hesitantly, I

coded these responses as evangelical. As Putnam and Campbell (2010:13-14) point out about

evangelicals,

> Because they are an amorphous group defined by admittedly blurry boundaries, one can debate just who counts as evangelical. The label is not necessarily one that people willingly adopt for themselves, even if their belonging, believing, and behaving all align with the standard scholarly usage of the term. […] We asked a number of people at this high-profile [widely identified as evangelical] church […] how they describe their religious affiliation. Overwhelmingly, they said 'Christian,' not 'evangelical.'

I label my "Christian" respondents as evangelical based on this reasoning and the fact that they

found my survey on websites created by individuals who align themselves with evangelical

beliefs. Many respondents elaborated on their Christian label. For example,

> Evangelical I guess the name doesn't mean much to me

> I choose not to identify with a specific denomination, including nondenominational

> [I am] simply a Christian

> I believe that I am saved through the blood of Jesus Christ through faith & that He died on the cross to bear my sins.

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[19] I based CSIS questions about religious affiliation on questions used in the General Social Survey (GSS), which does not include Latter-day Saint or Mormon as a response category for questions of religion.

NO NAME BUT CHRIST

I believe in a relationship with Jesus Christ not a religion

Bible believing Christian

These expressions of faith clearly align with an evangelical worldview, which emphasizes Jesus Christ above a specific religious institution or denomination (Noll 2001).

Table 6 compares the religious affiliation of interview respondents, CSIS respondents, and the overall U.S. population. Whereas about 30 percent of the overall population can be identified as evangelical, 72 percent of CSIS respondents may be considered evangelical and an even greater percentage of interview respondents (93.2 percent). Figure 5 specifies the specific evangelical denominations of CSIS evangelicals. The highest percentage is affiliated with nondenominational churches (43.2 percent), followed by Baptists (25.6 percent).

Table 6. Religious affiliation by sample for interviews, CSIS, and NSFG

	BTS and LCL Interview Respondents (n=44)	CSIS Respondents (n=768)	Overall population (weighted sample)
Evangelical Protestant	93.2	72.1	29
Mainline Protestant	6.8	11.9	15.9
Catholic	0	3.3	25.3
Other	0		9
LDS		11.6	
Jewish		0.1	
Other		0.1	
No religion	0	0.9	20.6
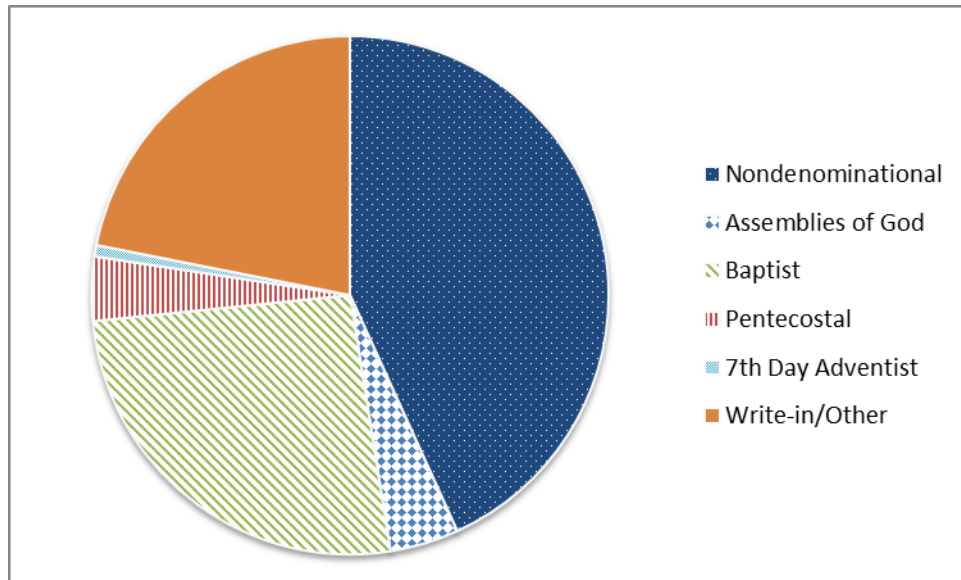
Figure 5. Denominational affiliation for CSIS evangelicals

Studies show that evangelicals tend to have higher levels of religious participation than other groups (Putnam and Campbell 2010). Compared with evangelicals nationally and the general public, CSIS report higher levels of religious participation. Figure 6 summarizes levels of attendance at religious services for all three groups.
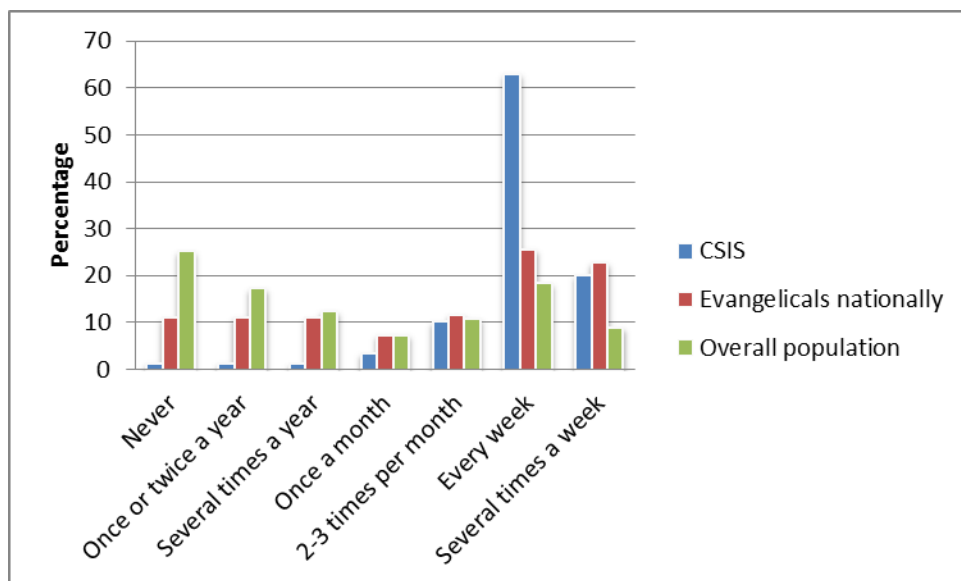
Figure 6. Levels of attendance at religious services by CSIS and NSFG

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These high levels of participation in religious services suggest that CSIS respondents remain connected to real-life religious communities as well as virtual ones. A vast majority of CSIS respondents attend church at least every week (82.9 percent), compared with just 48.2 percent of evangelicals nationally. Although I cannot adequately compare levels of religiosity between CSIS respondents and evangelicals nationally based on church attendance alone (see Clayton and Gladden 1974), these data suggest that CSIS respondents are different than other evangelicals in the importance they place on connecting with other believers, both online and in real-life.

2.4.4   A Note about "Other Christians"

For the most part, the websites, programs, and print literature that use religion to promote pleasurable sex in marriage are unique to evangelicals. However, there are both Catholic and Latter-day Saint (Mormon) resources that discuss sex for pleasure, though they are much less prevalent than evangelical sources.

For Catholics, counselor and author Gregory Popcak has written *Holy Sex: A Catholic Guide to Toe-Curling, Mind-Blowing, Infallible Loving* (2008), the only readily available contemporary Catholic sex advice book. This text shares many similarities with its evangelical counterparts, including an emphasis on scripture and its acceptance of sexual practices other than penile-vaginal intercourse within heterosexual marriage (including oral sex and the use of vibrators). Unlike evangelical authors, Popcak opposes contraception and instructs his readers to follow the "One Rule," in which all sex acts must lead up to penile-vaginal intercourse where a man ejaculates, thereby allowing a possibility of conception into all sexual activity. In addition to this book, there are online marriage and family resources geared towards Catholics that sometimes discuss marital sex, usually as it pertains to natural family planning (NFP). However,

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there are no online resources specifically created for married Catholics to discuss sex for pleasure.

Latter-day Saints have a wider range of marital sexuality resources than do Catholics, including a small number of sex advice books and websites. Mormons also appear better integrated into the evangelical culture that promotes marital sex than are Catholics. The author of one LDS sex advice book, Laura M. Brotherson (2004), for instance, sells many well-known evangelical sex advice books on her website. LDS resources, like evangelical ones, often are identified only as "Christian," and require additional context in order to establish that they are created by Latter-day Saints. Latter-day Saints make up 12 percent of overall CSIS respondents; similar to mainline Protestants (12 percent) and much more than Catholics (3 percent).

In the remainder of this dissertation, I generalize about "evangelical website users," even though not all users are evangelical. CSIS data suggest that non-evangelical respondents attend religious services at a similar rate as evangelicals; on average, slightly more than once a week. Non-evangelicals have slightly more permissive sexual attitudes. For example, Figure 7 compares attitudes of CSIS non-evangelicals and evangelicals about consensual sex between unmarried adults.
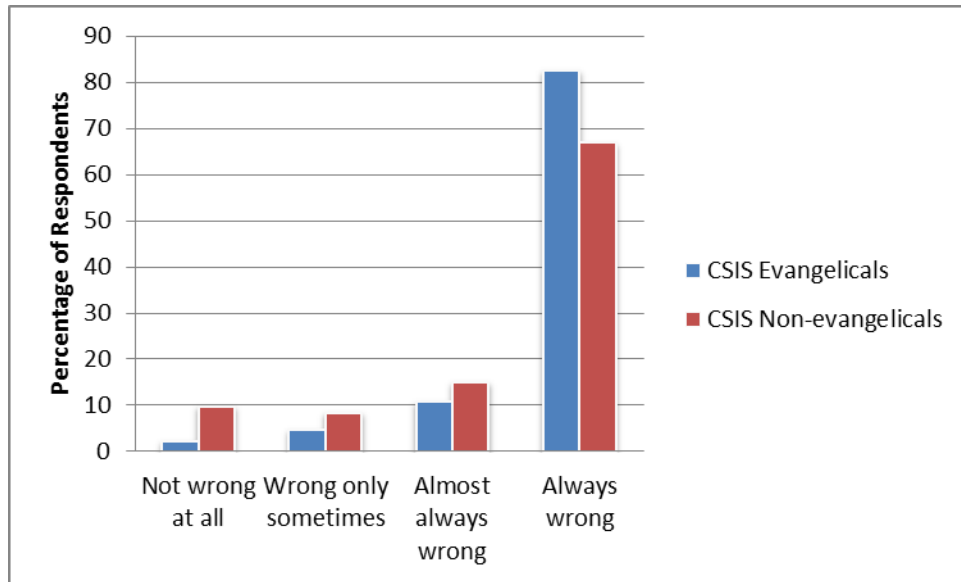
Figure 7. Attitudes about consensual sex between two unmarried adults by CSIS evangelicals and non-evangelicals

CSIS respondents who are not affiliated with evangelical denominations appear to be more permissive when it comes to sex outside marriage, which supports other findings on non-evangelical Christians in the U.S. (Pew Research Center 2012a). Yet, the sample of non-evangelical website users is too small to make definitive conclusions about this group.

3.0   GODLY SEX: A NEW EVANGELICAL SEXUAL LOGIC

In 1976, Pastor Tim and wife Beverly LaHaye published what has arguably become the most well-known Christian sex manual of the 20th century. *The Act of Marriage: The Beauty of Sexual Love* describes what the LaHayes declare a Christian perspective of sex, provides an overview of men's and women's reproductive systems, instructs couples on how to have sexual intercourse and climax, and offers advice on common sexual problems that couples may encounter. The authors outline in detail what a couple's first sexual encounter may be like, providing step-by-step instructions on how to engage in foreplay and have sexual intercourse.

The Act of Marriage sold 500,000 copies by 1979 and 1.5 million copies by 1993 (DeRogatis 2005). Before its publication, the LaHayes hosted a radio program on Christian married life that touched upon some of the book's themes. Following its publication, Tim became well-known for his involvement in the Moral Majority with Jerry Falwell and later for the publication of the post-apocalyptic fiction series, *Left Behind*. Beverly participates in conservative politics alongside her husband, having led the conservative women's organization, Concerned Women for American (CWFA), since 1979. She also has published solo-authored non-fiction publications related to Christian womanhood. Tim and Beverly LaHaye promoted their book in several Christian venues, like Focus on the Family, and also appeared on the mainstream TV program, the Phil Donahue show. *The Act of Marriage*, according to its authors

in an updated edition published in 1998, has been used in premarital counseling by ministers more "than any other" book on sex.

Thirty-five years after *The Act of Marriage* was originally published, Mark Driscoll's book, co-authored with his wife Grace, *Real Marriage: The Truth about Sex, Friendship, and Life Together* (2012), may be its contemporary counterpart. Like LaHaye, Driscoll also pastors an evangelical mega-church, uses contemporary technology to promote his religious message, and has gained recognition in the evangelical community for his outspoken views on sexuality and relationships. *Real Marriage* was listed on *The New York Times* (2012) bestsellers list and the Driscolls have appeared on several mainstream television programs to promote the book, including *Loveline with Dr. Drew* and *The View*. The book discusses more than sex, but its frank conversations about sex are what make the book notably different from other Christian books about marriage (Beaty and Graves 2012).

Both *The Act of Marriage* and *Real Marriage* support conservative Christian beliefs that emphasize heterosexuality, marriage, monogamy, and essential differences between men and women. Yet they are different in important ways, reflecting three decades between their publication dates. LaHaye's ([1976] 1998) *The Act of Marriage* advises against engaging in oral sex, masturbation, anal sex, and using sex toys, unlike *Real Marriage* (2012), which encourages couples to experiment sexually to find practices that optimize their pleasure, even if they include oral or anal sex or sex toys. Both LaHaye and Driscoll support complementarianism, or the belief in men's headship and women's submission, yet *Real Marriage* emphasizes women's autonomy and choice in sexual interests and desires. The books represent different moments in evangelical history and show how discourse regarding sexuality changes over time.

Evangelical sex advice books and Christian sexuality websites thrive because there is an imperative for evangelicals to construct standards for Godly sexuality so that they know how to live as sexually-active Christians. According to evangelical beliefs, instructions about sex, like other aspects of everyday life, should come directly from the Bible (Ammerman 1987; Luhrmann 2011). However, the Bible is relatively silent on many sexual matters of interest to contemporary evangelicals, including any sexual act other than penile vaginal intercourse, sodomy, and (arguably) oral sex.[20] As many sociologists of sexuality have pointed out, sex acts require social context—so people may interpret their bodies, thoughts, and emotions and others' bodies and gestures (Gagnon and Simon 2005; Jackson 2006). Yet the social context for evangelical sexuality is complicated by the fact that evangelicals claim to reject all "worldy" social cues when it comes to sex. This chapter outlines generally-agreed upon contemporary evangelical beliefs about sex—what counts as good and Godly sex. I bring into dialogue with these evangelical guidelines about sex the sexual attitudes and practices of CSIS respondents, arguing that contemporary website users create a "new evangelical sexual logic" that both reflects traditional beliefs about gender and sexuality and accommodates a postmodern understanding of sexual identities, practices, and desires.

As Mark and Grace Driscoll (2012:109) write in their book, *Real Marriage*, "The reason that sex is fun, pleasurable, and wonderful is because it is a reflection of the loving goodness of God, who created it as a gift for us to steward and enjoy." In this section, I discuss how evangelicals construct the "goodness" of sex—referring to both "good" as it means normal/allowed/God-sanctioned and "good" as it means pleasurable and satisfying. First, I

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[20] Some evangelical authors and preachers interpret the Song of Solomon (sometimes referred to as the Song of Songs) as justifying sex acts other than penile-vaginal intercourse, like Song of Solomon 2:3—"his fruit was sweet to my taste"—that presumably references oral sex (Dillow et. al 2004; Nelson 1995).

outline the basic beliefs about who evangelicals believe are allowed by God to experience sexual pleasure—monogamous, heterosexual married couples. Second, I describe how evangelicals discuss "good" sex by emphasizing pleasure using gender-equal language and the subjective nature of sexual interests.

The difference in these two dimensions of "good" sex is that the former (who's allowed to have sex) depends upon what evangelicals believe to be objective and non-negotiable truths, while the latter (how couples can experience pleasure) relies on arguments about individual tastes and choice. These dimensions illuminate how evangelicals merge their religious beliefs with secular ideas about free will and autonomy, allowing them to align their specific sexual interests with their moral framework. The result, as I discuss in this chapter's conclusion, is a new evangelical sexual logic that defines Godly sexuality.

3.1   GOOD SEX: WHO'S ALLOWED

Christian sexuality websites and sex advice books differ from their secular counterparts in their willingness to talk about God within discussions about sexuality. Talk of God makes sense in this context because authors and website creators and users share an implicit theological conservatism that shapes *how* users talk about God: making claims about God's intentions when it comes to sexual activity. Despite the appearance of diversity—a LCL blogger for example tells me that readers of the site include "a vast demographic from men to women, liberal to conservative, feminist to submissive, Catholic to Protestant, young to old"—the main contributors to Christian sexuality websites promote theologically conservative beliefs. They insist that the Bible is the literal word of God, that God created women to submit to their

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husbands, that He only approves of sexual relationships within heterosexual marriages, and that believers of Jesus Christ are the only people allowed into heaven.[21] Commentators on evangelical sexuality in print and online spend little or no time justifying and debating theology about the privileged status of heterosexual, matrimonial and monogamous sex.

Table 7. CSIS respondents' attitudes about consensual sex among same-sex adults, unmarried adults, and married adults viewing pornography

	Homosexual sex	Unmarried sex	Pornography within marriage
Not wrong at all	3.5% (27)	4.4 (34)	8.3 (63)
Wrong only sometimes	4.4 (34)	5.7 (44)	11.1 (85)
Almost always wrong	4.3 (33)	11.9 (91)	16.5 (126)
Always wrong	87.7 (673)	78 (599)	64.1 (490)
Totals	100 (767)	100 (768)	100 (764)

Table 7 summarizes the sexual attitudes of CSIS respondents when it comes to marriage, heterosexuality, and monogamy, specifically whether respondents consider consensual sex between two unmarried adults, two adults of the same-sex, or viewing pornography by a married couple to be wrong or permissible. Their attitudes suggest that they reject beliefs that are increasingly common among mainline Protestants and Catholics and establish themselves as distinctly evangelical.

Although religious Americans, regardless of affiliation, are likely to support monogamy and the belief that sex should take place between a committed couple (Laumann et. al 1994),

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[21] For the LCL readers who completed the CSIS survey, 84 percent are affiliated with evangelical denominations or are self-identified evangelicals.

most evangelicals believe sex should take place only within legal marriages. Groups promoting abstinence until marriage exemplify this tendency (Gardner 2011), and popular authors express similar sentiments, repeatedly writing about the importance of remaining a virgin until one's wedding night. According to popular evangelical author Kevin Leman (2003:17, 19), "I believe that any sexual experience outside of marriage is ultimately destructive." Xena, an owner of an online sex toy store, told me that even for older adults, sex outside marriage is a sin: "I don't think God is changing the rules just because you're 35." Because they believe there are no exceptions to God's rule that sex outside of marriage is sin, BTS members often suggest that an engaged couple who is struggling to remain chaste consider moving their wedding date forward. Marriage recognition is an important part of good and Godly sex.

For CSIS respondents, 78 percent report that it is "always wrong" for an unmarried couple to have sex (see Table 7). As Table 8 shows, their reported sexual practices align more closely with this belief than evangelicals nationally and the general population. CSIS married respondent report fewer sexual partners and are more likely to have sexual encounters with only their spouse.[22]

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[22] The CSIS did not ask respondents specifically if they remained virgins until marriage, so although I infer that respondents who report a single sexual partner refer to their spouse, I cannot make claims about whether or not sexual activity took place before marriage.

Table 8. Percentage of total number of adult consensual sex partners for married respondents

	CSIS Respondents	Evangelicals Nationally	Overall Population
1	59.0	28.0	26.4
2-4	22.0	30.8	28.9
5-9	10.8	21.8	22.6
10 or more	8.5	19.5	22.2

CSIS respondents have more conservative practices that evangelicals overall because, perhaps more than evangelicals generally, they are preoccupied with sex. Their use of Christian sexuality websites indicates that they are interested in applying their religious beliefs to their sexual lives. The overall evangelical population may not share this interest and thus have sexual histories that, at least when it comes to number of sexual partners, closely resembles the broader public.

Concerned with the dangers of pornography as well as extramarital sex, evangelicals emphasize monogamy within marriage. Pornography has been the cause of concern for many groups, including feminists, parents, and health educators (Dines, Jensen, and Russo 1998). For popular evangelical authors and website creators, viewing pornography violates the Biblical principle that no third person should participate in sex acts with a married couple and is particularly destructive because it is so easily accessed (see, for example, Arteburn, Stoeker, and Yorkey 2000). Eighty-one percent of CSIS respondents report that it is "almost always wrong" or "always wrong" for a married couple to view pornography (see Table 7), and 76 percent report that they never view pornographic websites. Nearly all Christian sexuality websites I surveyed contained at least some information warning their users about the perils of pornography use (or addiction, as many evangelicals—and some scholars [see Levert 2007]—term habitual viewing of porn). As one online Christian sex toy store, GardenFruit.com, proclaims,

"pornography is the number one reason for failed marriages." Similarly, Driscoll and Driscoll (2012:109) write "Sinful sex inclues [...] erotica, [...] sinful lust, pornography." This preoccupation with pornography means that evangelicals who write about sex emphasize the importance of monogamous behaviors *and thoughts*.[23]

Although many religious traditions are becoming more accepting of homosexuality, especially when couples conform to normative expectations regarding monogamy and domesticity, evangelicals consistently construct homosexuality as sinful (Barton 2012; Jordan 2011). According to the Pew Research Center (2012a), Catholics and mainline Protestants have dramatically increased their support for same-sex marriage (for Catholics, a shift from 40 percent to 54 percent since 2001; for mainline Protestants, a shift from 38 percent to 52 percent). White evangelical Protestants' support remains lower than any other religious group, with 13 percent supporting same-sex marriage in 2001 and 19 percent in 2012. Evangelicals who write about sex suggest that God only approves of sex if it takes place between married, heterosexual couples. As popular author and preacher, Mark Driscoll, states simply, "the Bible repeatedly forbids" homosexual sex. One blogger on LustyChristianLadies expands upon this sentiment:

> Homosexuality is a choice my dear ones. A sin that is chosen, not genetically infused in you when you were born. God doesn't make any junk and he doesn't wire us to sin…we choose to sin. God tells us that we were meant to be together as man and wife. There is no other choice, unless you choose to sin.

For this blogger, her beliefs about who is allowed to have Godly sex are quite clear: only heterosexual couples. The vast majority of CSIS respondents agree: 87.7 percent report that it is

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[23] Emphasizing sexual feelings as sin is not universal within evangelicalism. As Gerber (2011) points out, ex-gay groups distinguish between sexual feelings and actions and are wary to label the former as definitively sinful.

"always wrong" for consenting adults of the same-sex to have sex (see Table 7).[24] Three percent of respondents report that they have had same-sex sexual encounters, which is only slightly less than the general public.[25] Nonetheless, heterosexuality is the foundation upon which Godly sex may take place, and to "choose" otherwise is to forgo the possibility of participating in sex that is approved by God.[26]

By naturalizing heterosexuality, evangelicals bolster beliefs that gender differences between men and women are natural and directed by God. At a conference for BTS members, creators of the site explain God's intentionality in designing men, women, and their union in marriage. "Men and women are like apples and oranges," John tells us, "we are all designed by the same creator but men and women are very different from one another." Evangelical beliefs about gender typically fall into two camps: complimentarianism and mutual submission (Gallagher 2003; Smith 2000). The former refers to the belief that men and women were created to fulfill different and complementary roles in which a husband should practice leadership over his wife and household and a wife should submit to him. It is the belief system that is endorsed officially by most evangelical leaders and denominations (Bartkowski 2001; Smith 2000), most Christian sexuality websites, and nearly all of the sex advice books in my sample.[27] Mutual submission refers to the belief that both men and women should submit to God and to one

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[24] Although younger generations generally express higher levels of support for same-sex marriage (Pew Research Center 2012a), CSIS respondents are consistently against homosexual sex, regardless of age. The average level of support for homosexual sex is the same across age groups.

[25] According to the National Health and Social Life Survey (Laumann et. al 1994), between four and five percent of adult men and women have had same-gender sexual partners since the age of 18.

[26] Although the evangelicals explicitly condemn homosexual sex, their opinions on what they call same-sex attraction (SSA), or the recognition of same-sex *feelings* without acting on them, is much more mixed. Sex therapist and popular author, Douglas Rosenau ([1994] 2002), for example writes sympathetically of those who "suffer" from same-sex attraction, and there are many evangelical groups intended to support believers who struggle with homosexuality (see also Erzen 2006; Gerber 2011).

[27] The only books that do not discuss women's submission to men are Shannon Ethridge's *The Sexually Confident Wife* (2008) and Bill and Pam Farrel's *Red, Hot Monogamy* (2006).

another and that marital relationships should focus on acts of service and compassion without determining a household leader. This approach, according to Sally Gallagher (2003), is what is carried out most often *in practice* in evangelicals' daily lives. However, evangelicals, regardless of whether or not they support complementarianism, mutual submission, or something in between, naturalize heterosexuality and differences between men and women and support sex only within the context of marriage (Bartkowski 2001; Gallagher 2003).

3.2   GOOD SEX: TASTE AND PLEASURE

The idea that God created sex for pleasure is foundational to Christian sexuality websites and sex advice books. As Pastor Mark Driscoll told his audience at a conference to discuss marital intimacy: "the reason sex is so fun is because God made it." And as author Kevin Leman (2003:17) writes in his book, *Sheet Music*, "One of the most loving and holy things you can do in marriage is to provide a sexually fulfilling pursuit of your husband or wife." Mainstream authors and speakers as well as website users and creators frequently reference The Song of Solomon, an Old Testament book that details the consummation of the relationship between Solomon and his bride, as an example of God's approval of sexual pleasure (see Dillow et. al 2004; Driscoll 2010; Nelson 1995). Co-authors Joseph and Linda Dillow and Peter and Lorraine Pintus (2004:10, 13) claim that the Song of Solomon has been their "sex manual" for years and that from the book, "heat rises from the pages as we view the steamy, yet appropriate, exchange of endearments and caresses."

Evangelical interpretations conclude that God encourages sexual passion and lust within marriage. By focusing on its pleasures, which are highly interpretable and subjective, evangelical

couples can justify a wide range of sexual practices based on their specific "tastes," and women, as well as men, can advocate for their own pleasure even within a complementarian framework. The following section details how notions of individual tastes and mutuality influence how evangelicals talk about marital sex.

3.2.1 Good Sex: Individual Tastes

Evangelical writers and speakers typically do not (and cannot) discuss in great detail the wide range of sex acts available to married couples. Instead, they present what are usually brief, Biblically-based criteria that can be applied by couples to their specific situation (see Driscoll and Driscoll 2012; Ethridge 2008; Rosenau [1994] 2002). For example, at their *Intimate Issues* conference, authors Linda Dillow and Lorraine Pintus instruct an audience of women that once they establish that they are having sex within God's design of heterosexual, monogamous marriage, they need only ask a single question to determine what sexual activities are permissible for them: *is it beneficial?* The authors emphasize that even if a particular sex act is not forbidden within scripture, all sex that takes place within a marriage should strengthen that marriage and bring a husband and wife closer to God. This means that what is appropriate for some couples will not be for others.

The guidelines presented by Dillow and Pintus, like the guidelines presented in other popular advice books and online, are highly subjective and open to multiple interpretations. Table 9 summarizes the attitudes of CSIS respondents when it comes to sexual practices within marriage, including oral sex, manual stimulation, masturbation, anal sex, and the use of

vibrators.[28] With the exceptions of anal sex and masturbation, the vast majority of CSIS respondents agree that a wide range of sexual activities within marriage are permissible. And even for these acts, only 10 percent and 20 percent of respondents report that masturbation and anal sex or "always wrong," indicating that the vast majority of respondents believe that there are circumstances in which both acts are acceptable within marriage. The majority of CSIS respondents are willing to firmly condemn sexual encounters outside heterosexual marriage, but they are not willing to make such judgments on sexual practices within marriage.

Table 9. CSIS respondents' attitudes about consensual sex among married adults who engage in masturbation, manual stimulation, oral sex, anal sex, and sex involving a vibrator[29]

	Masturbation	Manual stimulation	Oral sex	Anal sex	Sex using a vibrator
Not wrong at all	24.9% (189)	98.4 (750)	95.8 (730)	57.3 (436)	87.9 (671)
Wrong only sometimes	53.1 (403)	1.2 (9)	2.5 (19)	17.1 (130)	6.2 (47)
Almost always wrong	11.7 (89)	0.3 (2)	0.7 (5)	5.3 (40)	2.1 (16)
Always wrong	10.2 (78)	0.1 (1)	1.1 (8)	20.3 (155)	3.8 (29)
Totals	100 (759)	100 (762)	100 (762)	100 (761)	100 (763)

The creators of BetweenTheSheets use the analogy of a playground to describe the limits (or limitlessness) of sex within marriage. Inside the playground, there are:

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[28] Marriage is no longer an exclusive privilege of heterosexual unions, as gay couples throughout North and South America and Western Europe receive marriage recognition. The CSIS uses "marriage" without specifying "heterosexual marriage," yet I am confident that the respondents understood non-specified "marriage" to refer to heterosexual relationships.

[29] Statistics on attitudes about oral sex, manual stimulation, and vibrator use refer to questions about a woman performing the act on her husband. The difference in attitudes for acts that a man performs on his wife was insignificant.

> A great number of pieces of playground equipment (sex acts) that a couple may enjoy if they so desire. What each couple enjoys varies just as preferences in playground equipment vary. If he gets dizzy and sick on things that spin, the merry-go round is not a good choice. If she is uncomfortable with heights, that very tall slide is a bad idea. If they both enjoy him pushing her in the swing, but neither is big on her pushing him, that's just fine. Start with a few things and over time test out others.

Within marriage (the playground), couples are free to determine what kinds of sex (different equipment) that bring them the most pleasure. This analogy reflects what Gerber (2011:89) argues are some of the "most central values structuring [contemporary evangelicalism]." She writes that "free will and the preservation of choice are at times depicted as God's greatest values." Emphasizing what couples *choose to do* within what is depicted as a level playing field means that discussions about what's allowed sexually emphasize individualized preference and taste, unlike discussions about who's allowed to have sex, in which evangelicals emphasize an unambiguous interpretation of the Bible.

Evangelicals appear to be more comfortable making claims about who can have sex than making judgments about what they do sexually. Although the vast majority of CSIS respondents reported that sex between an unmarried or same-sex couple is "always wrong" (78 percent and 87.7 percent respectively), their attitudes about other sexual acts are less straightforward. I asked interview respondents about any response to CSIS questions about their sexual attitudes that was ambiguous ("almost always wrong" or "wrong only sometimes"). One respondent, a LCL reader junebug, explained why she answered that for a married person to masturbate, it is "almost always wrong" (she was among 53.1 percent of respondents): "well 'a person' is pretty general, I guess, haha. I guess it is grey for me. […] I don't think it's the best scenario, but I don't think it's wrong in a marriage as long as it is something that helps the relationship." Junebug hesitated about making judgments about specific sexual acts without knowing the relational context in

which those acts occur. Similarly, BTS member, Chloe, explained to me why she skipped a question asking about her attitude about anal sex within marriage, a practice for which 57.3 of CSIS respondents report is "not at all wrong" and 20.3 percent report is "always wrong:"

> I am undecided. I guess I haven't "researched" it sufficiently. It is not something DH [dear husband] and I are interested in. Of course, there can be negative health consequences related to it, [and] the little I've heard about women experiencing it is that they don't like it. Those things would probably cause me to shy away from it in general. If DH were really interested in it, I'd be willing to look into it from a Biblical and health standpoint and hope we could reach some common ground on it. I don't know that I'd say across the board that "it is wrong," but again I don't know that if I gave it time and thought that I wouldn't say it was wrong. I might. ???

Chloe refuses to take a stand about whether or not she considers anal sex to be right or wrong. Her concluding question marks (???) suggest that she is unable to make universal judgments about the appropriateness of this act for all couples and doesn't have a definitive answer since it's not an act in which she or her husband wish to engage.

3.2.2   Good Sex: Mutual Pleasures

Without specifying what kinds of sex should be pleasurable for all couples, mutuality—or sexual satisfaction of both husband and wife—is an important dimension of sexual pleasure. As Clifford and Joyce Penner ([1973] 2003:30) write, "We are expected to give ourselves to *each other* in marriage; this is a mutual command, not for wives only." This is how authors, even those who explicitly support complementarianism, justify women's entitlement to sexual pleasure. Ed and Gaye Wheat ([1977] 2010:31), for example, write at length about the importance of wives' submission to their husbands: "Submission is the most important gift a wife can give her husband. A responsive and receptive wife willingly demonstrates that she surrenders her freedom for his love, adoration, protection, and provision." Yet, they go on to describe women's

entitlement to experiencing sexual pleasure: "If you [directed towards women] desire to have an orgasm, *because you know it is your right*, your provision from God. […] Your goal, now, is satisfaction given by a loving husband, and achieving the fulfillment of orgasm" (113, 116, emphasis added). According to these authors, women must submit to their husbands, but husbands must also give sexual pleasure to their wives.

Emphasizing individual taste and mutual pleasure allows evangelicals to simultaneously support natural differences between men and women but also use gender-equal language when talking about sex. In this way, they illustrate recent findings that evangelicals make sense of their gendered beliefs and everyday practices by combining ideas about complementarianism and mutual submission (Gallagher 2003; Smith 2000). Evangelicals who write about sex make several claims about what men and women are like sexually: that women have more difficulty reaching orgasm than men; that men physically require sexual release (orgasm) and women do not; that sex for women is largely emotional rather than physical; and that women are less flexible in their sexual repertoires than are men. A common theme in these generalizations is that women are less sexual than men—they don't like sexual variation, they don't physically need sex in the ways in which men do, that sex offers emotional connections for women and may easily be replaced with a cup of coffee and long conversation with a spouse. Alternatively, men are much more sexual than women—they can experiment with different types of sexual play with confidence and pleasure, and they physically require it in order to live happy, productive live as. Yet as Kevin Leman (2003:25) writes about such generalizations: "every stereotype will be proven false by somebody, which is why individual communication is so crucial in marriage. I can give you advice about what most men like, but that very advice might really turn your

husband off." In other words, gender stereotypes may not always be relevant or useful when applied by individual couples, who have specific, individualized tastes.

Stereotypes about men and women do, however, suggest an imperative for information specifically geared towards women (since it is thought that women are generally less sexual than men). Suggesting practical ways to enhance women's pleasure allows them to proverbially "catch up" with men, who evangelicals assume know physiologically how to experience pleasure. As blogger Judy tells me, "Not being able to climax is a huge issue for women. And men don't quite get it because obviously they climax nearly every single time." Most popular advice books include specific instructions for clitoral stimulation, since many women struggle with arousal and climax. As Shannon Ethridge (2008:107) writes,

> From the time we are toddlers, we're taught, "This is your nose; it is form smelling. This is your tongue, it is for tasting. […] But rarely is a female ever told, "This is your clitoris; it's for having orgasms." Can you envision your mama ever teaching you that? Neither can I. Most of us had to figure it out on our own. Too bad, because I get frequent emails from women who, even in their thirties, forties, and fifties, have yet to experience their first […] clitoral orgasm.

Popular books and Christian sexuality websites, even those that support complementarianism, give women the "right" to experience pleasure and often discuss at length ways for them to achieve it.

Many popular authors and website users critique cultural double standards that encourage men's sexual expression, while condemning women's. According to them, this goes against God's design for mutual pleasure within sex. As Penner and Penner ([1973] 2003:207) write,

> Misconceptions about submission and dominance have caused a great deal of stress and turmoil in people's lives. […] Some women do not feel comfortable pursuing pleasure. They adopt a double standard: It is acceptable for a man to be active in the pursuit of sexual stimulation, but it isn't appropriate for the woman to do so.

They encourage women to overcome their hang-ups and experiment with different sexual positions that will optimize their pleasure: for example, writing that "when the woman is in the top position, she can be more active in going after the specific stimulation she needs." Women, as much as men, should be able to express their sexual interest and achieve sexual pleasure.

Website users' sexual attitudes and practices, as reported in the CSIS, appear to support this gender egalitarian framework. For attitude questions about different sexual acts, results for questions about acts performed by a woman are nearly identical to questions about acts performed by a man. The greatest difference was reported for vibrator use within marriage where 87.9 percent of respondent report that it is "not at all wrong" when a woman uses a vibrator on a man, compared with 90.2 percent who report that it is "not at all wrong" when a man uses a vibrator on a woman. This extremely small difference could reflect broader social expectations about what men and women are expected to do during sex (see Chapter Six).
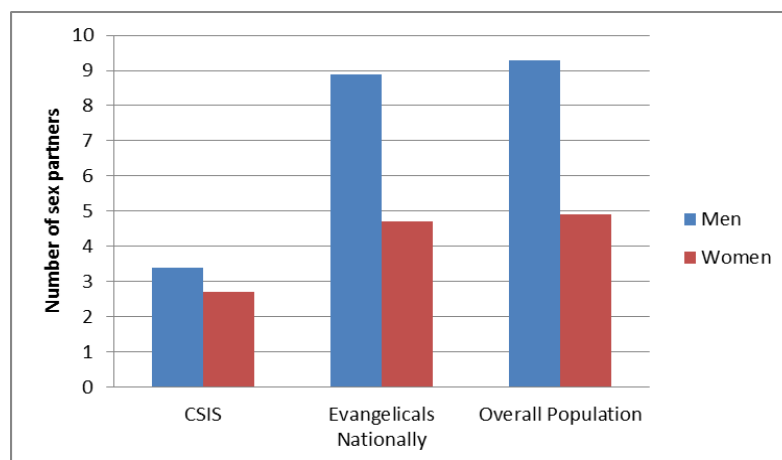
Figure 8. Comparison of total number of sex partners for married respondents by gender

In practice, CSIS men and women report similar levels of sexual activity. On average, they report about three adult consensual sexual partners, which is less than the average number of sexual partners for evangelicals nationally and the overall American population (see Figure 7). While there are significant disparities between the number of sex partners for men and women within the national evangelical sample and national sample, the sexual histories of CSIS men and women are relatively similar (see Table 8). CSIS men, on average, have fewer sexual partners than evangelicals overall, perhaps suggesting that men whose lives closely align to their religious beliefs about sex are drawn to Christian sexuality websites. The similarities in number of sex partners for CSIS men and women further supports the appearance of gender egalitarianism on the websites.

CSIS men and women engage in different kinds of sexual activity at a similar frequency. For example, Figures 9 and 10 shows that men and women both perform and receive oral sex at similar rates.
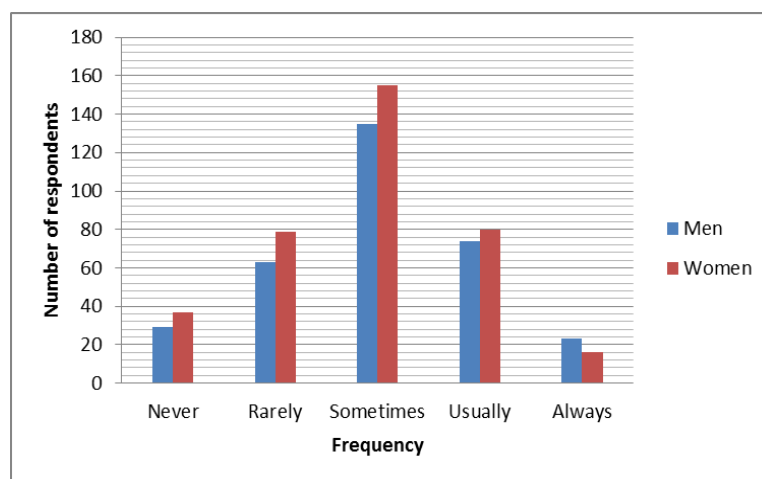
Figure 9. Frequency with which CSIS married respondents perform oral sex by gender
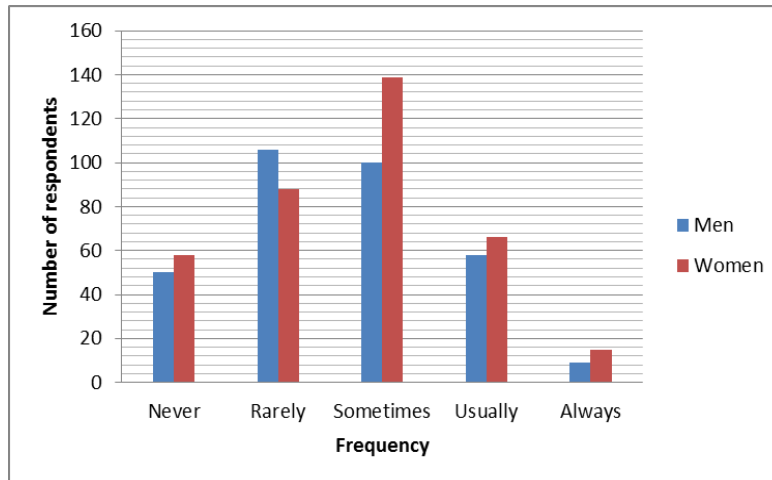
Figure 10. Frequency with which CSIS married respondents receive oral sex by gender

Not only do CSIS men and women report similar numbers of sexual partners, they also report similar levels of sexual practices within marriage. These data suggest that evangelicals practice what they preach when it comes to sexual reciprocity and mutual pleasure.

3.3   GODLY SEX: A NEW EVANGELICAL SEXUAL LOGIC

This chapter details what evangelicals who write about sex online and print believe when it comes to sexuality. As DeRogatis (2005:110) writes about authors of evangelical sex advice books, "they are deeply concerned with guiding the entire sexual encounter. […] they tell readers how they should feel and what a 'normal' response is to sexual stimulation." In other words, such texts are important in creating an evangelical definition of sex, encompassing what believers should experience sexually and also how they should interpret these experiences. Throughout the rest of this dissertation, I use the phrase, Godly sexuality, to signal this definition of *what sex should be according to evangelical believers*.

Despite the popular stereotype that evangelicals are antiquated when it comes to their beliefs about sex, how evangelicals define Godly sex involves merging old ideas with modern and secular ways of viewing the world. As Elizabeth Bernstein (2010:60) writes about contemporary evangelicals who advocate against human trafficking, "new evangelicals' embrace of human trafficking as a focus of concern must be situated as a *culturally modernizing project* rather than a traditionalizing one" (emphasis added). She goes on to describe how these evangelicals' efforts do not mirror separatist fundamentalist attitudes of the past century but rather allow them to "participate in sexually explicit culture, international travel, and the previously forbidden corners of urban space." Her articulation that evangelicals can engage in culturally modernizing projects shows how adept believers are at navigating their religious faith *within* contemporary culture.

The evangelicals in this study draw from two different (and seemingly contradictory) sets of logic in order to integrate their sexualities—their sexual desires, practices, and identities—with their moral framework. On the one hand, they draw from evangelical beliefs that the Bible is the literal word of God and that His instructions for how to live a Christian life are straight-forward, black and white, with no exceptions. This sets the boundaries for who is allowed to be sexual—only married, heterosexual, monogamous couples. On the other hand, these evangelicals draw from salient cultural ideas that emphasize individuality, personal choice, and distinguished tastes in order to make claims about what is sexually possible for those with permission to be sexual. In doing so, they uphold the major tenets of their evangelical faith but also keep up with (post)modern attitudes about sex. This logic allows a wide range of sexual acts to be practiced and encouraged within evangelical marriages and encourages women, despite beliefs in their submission to men, to advocate for their own pleasure. In the remainder of this dissertation, I

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examine how online communities develop to host this new evangelical sexual logic and the implication of this logic for both men and women.

4.0   VIRTUAL AND VIRTUOUS: USING RELIGION TO TALK ABOUT SEX

ONLINE

BetweenTheSheets.com had a humble beginning. It started as an amateur webpage in the late

1990s and soon after transitioned to a small message board on America Online (now AOL). In

their interview, the creators of the site, John and Barbara, described why they started it:

> When we got married, we had a really great marriage in virtually every area, but
> we had significant sexual problems. And we couldn't find anyone in the church
> who was willing to deal with that. "It was just sex and it'll work itself out," most
> people told us. So we sort of understood having issues around sexuality but not
> having a Christian ministry for dealing with them. And that's why we were
> willing to be pushed [by God] in that direction. When we first started [the
> website], [..] we couldn't really find anyone [who was interested in joining it],
> well it took a while, but we ended up finding people. (laughs)

Despite an initial struggle, the BTS creators eventually attracted people to their site. And they

attracted a lot of people (thus laughing at the understatement, "we ended up finding people"). As

described in Chapter Two, BetweenTheSheets.com currently hosts an online message board with

nearly 30,000 registered members with hundreds of new posts added to the site every day. The

creators spend a considerable amount of time maintaining the site and receive monetary

donations from members to sustain their efforts.

Attempting to convey what it's like to be actively involved in the BTS message boards,

ExodusGuy told me:

> Imagine a long distance pen-pal friendship. I'm almost 53. When I was a kid, it
> was popular to get a pen-pal: someone you never met who lives far away (even

overseas), and just start writing…you pour out your heart. VERY close friendships are forged here [at BTS]. It's real, even though it's virtual.

ExodusGuy is one of BTS's earliest members. He is now a moderator and usually reads and posts to the site more than once each day. He insists that BTS is a place for "real" relationships, despite their virtual existence, where members of the site share details of their sexual lives and develop friendships with other Christians. This chapter examines data from both website creators and users to show how these sites flourish despite obstacles affecting online interaction.

Websites like BTS thrive at a time when people's attitudes about online interaction are mixed. Despite the success of social networking sites like Facebook and the popularity of online shopping, media stories of lost innocence, cyberstalking, and identity theft give the impression that using the Internet is risky business. Americans today access the Internet more than ever before (74 percent in 2009 compared with 46 percent in 2000 according to the Pew Research Center [2012b]),[30] but research shows that Americans have also become more wary of Internet dangers. According to a 2005 report by the Pew Research Center (Lenhart 2005), there was an increase since 2000 from 41 percent to 54 percent in families who use Internet filters to limit their teenagers' access to potentially harmful content.

Warnings of Internet perverts have become a cliché in today's web-saturated society, in which people worry about who posts information online and to what end who is exposed to sexual material (Barak and King 2000; Handel and Stern 2001). Christian websites try to avoid this problem by presenting their sexually explicit content as appropriate. Their creators work to convince users that discussing how to use a penis ring with strangers online can be an example of Christian fellowship, rather than creepy or gross. For the evangelicals in this study, using the

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[30] On average, CSIS respondents go online for reasons other than work or email 7-12 hours per week.

Internet to discuss sexuality requires them to balance conflicting beliefs. On the one hand, they firmly believe that online interaction is a way to spread the message that God wants married couples to celebrate sexual pleasure and to provide support for one another who struggle with issues related to sexuality. On the other hand, they must confront concerns about using the Internet for information related to sexuality: webpages may not reflect sound Christian teaching; users may be inadvertently exposed to pornographic images; and other users may be devious or voyeuristic creeps intent on misusing Christian sites.

This chapter shows how some evangelicals justify their creation of or participation in Christian sexuality websites. These online communities develop and are strengthened as *religious* and distinctly *evangelical* communities in the ways in which website creators and users incorporate their spiritual beliefs into both the content of online material and the conduct of online interaction. Talk of God makes sense on Christian sexuality websites because users share an implicit theology that shapes *how* users talk about God. Creators of the sites use evangelical tenets to justify discussions of sex online as appropriate within evangelicalism, and website users find ways to integrate evangelical tropes in order to establish themselves as insiders within these online communities. These efforts legitimize Christian sexuality websites as places of religious expression, where dialogue about sexuality is credible within an evangelical framework.

4.1   CREATING CHRISTIAN SEXUALITY WEBSITES

To spread the message that God wants married couples to enjoy sexual pleasure, the Internet has a number of advantages. The bloggers I interviewed all mentioned that they like to write and that a blog was an instant way to share their writing. Blogger Maribel told me: "My best friend

actually was always encouraging me. I really like to write and she thinks I have a good marriage (laughs), so she just kept saying you need to write like a marriage blog and tell people these things. So that's kind of where it all started actually." She went on to say that she writes a blogs instead of hosting a Bible study or pursuing a book: "I think probably because it's a little bit less commitment, it can be done when I have time to do it, and it's a little bit more in my time frame." Similarly, John and Barbara of BTS told me that ministering online fit into the rest of their everyday lives. Before they committed to the site full-time, they both held full-time jobs:

> Being able to do [our ministry] on the Internet where there wasn't a time factor was really important. So if we were up at one in the morning doing it, it didn't matter. People didn't have to be there "live;" they could read it the next day or the next week. So it allowed us to continue a job that was bringing in income.

For the creators of BTS and Maribel, the Internet was compatible with the activities and responsibilities of their everyday lives. Similarly, all interview respondents described how their online activities easily fit within the rest of their busy schedules.

Despite the advantages of online work for Christian ministries, creators of the sites were acutely aware of the need to legitimize their sites as authentically Christian. "Getting to know" the creators of Christian sexualities sites is one way they establish credibility online. Creators of BTS told me that website users "want to know there is a real person there," and that's why they reveal certain facts about their lives that are unrelated to their faith or sexuality: where they live; their political leanings; their hobbies and reading interests. Some bloggers share lengthy autobiographies on their sites. Others share details about their personal lives gradually, as they add new posts to their site. Maribel, for example, says very little about herself on her "about me" page: only that she is a married Christian woman who loves God and her husband. Yet her posts reveal tidbits about her life—she is a mom; she is affiliated with a specific Christian denomination; she and her husband are relatively newly married. We also learn mundane details

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about her life: she is a horrible baker, likes to dance, doesn't like her downstairs neighbors. Together, this information gives readers a sense that they are reading the stories and advice of a real person—someone who is who she says she is and someone with whom they can relate.

Although they share some personal information on their sites, website creators tend not to use individual credentials, other than their faith in Jesus, to legitimize their sites as authentically Christian. Creators are not, for the most part, ordained pastors, published authors, or trained therapists (at least they do not say so on their sites),[31] and many do not disclose identifying information (such as their name or a personal photograph). Of the eight website creators I interviewed, half include their real names on their websites. John and Barbara, the creators of BTS, who do share their real names, personal photos, and an autobiography on their site, told me that they're careful not to disclose too much personal information online:

> We don't want people to use us as a standard. We want people to take the word of God and look at themselves against *that* standard, so we try to be as helpful as we can with some information [about ourselves]. People know that we're happily married and that we enjoy each other in the bedroom, but what we do specifically, we don't talk about.

John and Barbara feel comfortable revealing some personal information about themselves, but consider their own sexual interests and activities to be off-limits since such information may give website users a false standard from which to judge their own sex life. They reference God and the Bible as the standard couples should use to judge their own marriages. Similarly, one of the LCL bloggers told me that she and her fellow bloggers intentionally keep their identities private (all use pseudonyms and cartoon characters as avatars): "we feel that it is enough for the readers to know our love for God and our message through our writing without needing to show them

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[31] For the 36 websites in this study, four were created by/for published authors, two by ordained clergy, and one by a licensed therapist.

pictures of ourselves or tell everyone our names." In other words, it is their Christian message that is important, not their identities.

Creators use their religious beliefs to justify sexually explicit material as appropriate for a married Christian audience. These include three sets of beliefs that are familiar to and supported by most contemporary evangelicals: (1) God directs individual action; (2) God grants married couples special privileges when it comes to sex; and (3) individuals are accountable for sin (Ammerman 1988; Gardner 2011; Luhrmann 2011; Putnam and Campbell 2010). Website creators use these beliefs as evidence that online talk about sex—often quite graphic and including images—can take place in a Christian context.

4.1.1   Answering God's call

Website creators insist that God uses the Internet as a tool to reach believers who might otherwise not receive important information about sexuality. Bloggers and owners of online stores refer to the work they do in creating and managing the sites as ministries, not unlike a missionary's work in a foreign country or a church that offers a soup kitchen. Blogger Judy said that "God wanted to use me in this particular way" (referring to why she decided to write a blog rather than write a book or lead a Bible study). Xena, who runs an online sex toy store, described to me how she was able to start her business:

> I got a private message from some people […] that said that, "We have a website-building company [..] and once a year we do a pro-bono site to a ministry. If you could offer the full range of these kinds of products [sex toys] but in a non-pornographic way, we would really think that's a ministry, so we would like to offer our web-development services." And I said, "Well, my gosh, I accept, yes."

Although unconventional, the owners of the company who created Xena's website believed her work to be a ministry for God.

Another store owner, Ann, described God literally stirring her from sleep to start her on the path to establishing an online sex toy store:

> After the birth of our first child, I had a hard time feeling intimate with my husband. [..] I went online to try to find something to kind of jump-start things and was disgusted by what I was filtering through just to add some spice to my marriage bed. […] A year later, I was lying in bed thinking and praying about the same topic when the Lord put it on my heart to do something about it. I woke up my husband and told him and we ended up staying awake for hours discussing ways to offer intimacy products for married couples like ourselves.

Ann referenced God in describing how she started her business and also referenced Him in discussing ending the business. On the topic of criticism she's received about the site, "I take those moments [when people criticize the business] to the Lord. I do not care if [the business] is gone tomorrow; it is actually a lot of work some days. I just lay it down before Jesus each day for Him to direct it as He may, and He continues to bring people to us for help." By detaching herself from the outcome of her business and emphasizing God's control of her life, she distanced herself from her critics and made her business pursuits reflect her Christian values.

Evangelical website creators describe being called by God to take on the responsibility of navigating the secular World Wide Web so that other Christian web surfers don't have to. This is especially true for online store owners, like Ann and Xena, who buy sex toys from secular companies to sell to their Christian customers. Xena described her decision to sell Liberator sex furniture, which include instruction manuals containing images of nude models. Her assistant altered these images so that they would be safe for Christian customers. She considered the figurative cost of this process—her assistant being exposed to pornography—as being outweighed by the benefit of being able to sell Liberator products to Christian customers:

> It was our desire to offer this [product] to people and so she said, "for me personally, I don't feel triggered [by viewing nude models]. I don't have an issue with sexual addiction. I don't feel ensnared with this, but I know a lot of people would, so if I can help someone and use my skill as a graphic artist then…" And

we were very much in agreement that this was a way that we could be of service to people.

Xena's assistant felt confident that she could view the original Liberator images without succumbing to sin, and by doing so, she would be serving the Christian community who want to have satisfying sex but may be "triggered" or "ensnared by" pornographic images. John, the creator of BTS who also writes the blog geared towards men, LovingGroom.com, used similar reasoning in describing why on his blog he writes summaries of scientific studies beyond just providing links to articles, which are contained on secular websites: "I don't know where they [his readers] are in their faiths, I don't know what temptations they're dealing with. […] I'm fairly good at separating the facts from the conclusions" He described how he wants his site to be one where readers can learn about science related to sexuality but do not have to fear that a secular researcher or journalist influences scientific data with anti-Christian biases.

4.1.2   For Married Couples Only

In addition to describing how they were called by God to develop Christian sexuality websites, website creators also justify their sites by insisting that the sites are intended solely for married couples. Creators of evangelical sexuality websites reason that since God allows couples to *have* sex once married, He also allows them to *talk about* sex once married. They point out that having good sex does not necessarily come easily or intuitively for married couples; therefore Christians should be able to use resources available to them to improve their own sexual lives. The owners of one online store share on their homepage that they created the store to "help the body of Christ through educational and provision of written, audio, or video material and also more literal means of help through marital aids." They go on to say that married couples who "become more

intimate with each other" will also become more intimate with Christ. In other words, God approves of Christians who help others improve the intimacy of their marriages because good sex signals a good relationship with God.

Website creators often say explicitly that their sites are intended for married couples (both husband and wife) and that viewers of these websites should disclose their online activity with their spouses if they don't surf the web together. Guidelines on one Christian sex toy store instruct viewers: "This site should ONLY be viewed by married couples! Single individuals or dating couples should not view these products as they appropriately invoke and promote sexuality as God intentionally designed it: for a married man and woman." Attempting to restrict the online audience is similar to the efforts of some popular authors to control their reading audience. For example, popular author Kevin Leman offers reading guidelines that differ for single and married readers, telling his single audience to read only the first half of his book *Sheet Music* (2003).

Creators of Christian sexuality websites argue that married persons can read about sexual material as long as they apply that material (either in their minds or in practice) to relationships with their spouse. Store owner, Holly, explained:

> The commandment to have sex only with your spouse includes in your fantasies […]. My goal [in starting my sex toy business] was to research companies who did not have ties to [the] pornography [industry] and to purchase items from them that were offered in classy packaging. I wanted to present a site where anything could be asked and having fun was encouraged, but no one would feel they were violating their conscience by being there.

Holly believes that God permits talk of sex and thoughts of sex so long as they are in the context of monogamous marriage. This sentiment—that couples can be exposed to sexual material outside of their actual sex lives and *apply* these materials to the activities within their actual sex lives—allows creators of these websites to justify their Christian identity.

Applying stories about sex to one's own marriage is why an online business called GodOfLove sells customized erotic stories for married Christian couples. On their homepage, the owners write:

> Some *non-Christian* counselors recommend that couples use erotica to help a woman get in an aroused state of mind. They may suggest explicit romance novels or even videos to help their heads in the mood for sex. Nearly every Christian marriage counselor would strongly advice *against* this approach. The dangers and drawbacks of sexual videos and overly sensual books are many. […] At [GodOfLove], we believe that the only sexual fantasies that don't fall into the category of sinful lust are those that involve just the husband and wife who are reading the stories. Those sexual thoughts and stories help build a desire for each other and fuel the kind of sexual enjoyment that God intended for married couples.

This site offers a way for married Christians to read erotic stories to help their sexual relationships without compromising their religious beliefs about lust (see Chapter Three). Couples interested in purchasing custom erotic stories are able to choose their story's "flame rating" (the higher the flame, the more explicit the story) and its theme (such as "vacation fun"). Customers fill out an extensive profile about themselves and their spouse, which is used to fill in the details of the story so that they include only characters that resemble themselves. Married Christians are given permission by God to be sexual, which includes erotica, purchasing sex toys, and reading about others' sex lives on message boards, so long as sexual thoughts and fantasies remain within the confines of their own monogamous, heterosexual marriage.

4.1.3   Individual Accountability for Sin

Despite efforts to regulate who views Christian sexuality websites, creators cannot prevent their online content from being used for sinful purposes. For example, owners of online stores cannot guarantee that customers will only use their products within the context of heterosexual

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marriages. Further, names of products that online Christian sex toy stores sell—like the "Climax EZ Bend Shaft vibrator" or the "Screaming O penis ring"—evoke mental images of sexual activities that, when viewed by an individual sitting in front of a computer screen rather than in bed with a spouse, may provoke sinful thoughts. Indeed, Christian critics of these websites argue that the topics discussed on these sites verge on the sexually explicit and may encourage thoughts of lust outside marriage.[32] The author of one popular Christian sex advice book told me in an interview that she is "skeptical" of Christian sex advice websites and does not endorse any of them. About BTS, she explained that she asked her assistant to look into the site and what she found was "inappropriate" and "explicit." Websites like BTS include specific instructions and frank language about sex acts so that they provide concrete advice for couples who seek it. This advice is often quite graphic, like BTS's instructions to married women on how to give a strip tease:

> Understand that he likes seeing your hands on the parts of you that he wants to touch, so stroking, squeezing and rubbing your breasts and crotch is a good idea. Do this through clothing, under clothing, and unclothed. You can accentuate these things by making a face that says 'that feels good.' Remember, tease, tease, tease.

Despite the tame language—the words "breast" and "crotch" instead of more vulgar alternatives—these instructions clearly convey a sexual image and a scenario that could cause sinful lust for some readers.

Creators of Christian sexuality websites work to desexualize the language and images they use on their sites so they are not pornographic. Creators dub images as purely "instructional," like the anatomical drawings that depict men and women's reproductive organs

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[32] These sites have non-religious critics as well. Websites like BTS have gained the attention of several liberal bloggers and online magazine contributors, who have written columns highly critical of the logic presented on the site that permits many sexual activities within heterosexual marriage but prohibits sexual activity between two committed adults who are not married or who are gay. For examples, see Wood 2006 and Wypijewski 2006.

(see, for example, Figure 11, an image Maribel uses on her blog to explain how men and women become aroused).
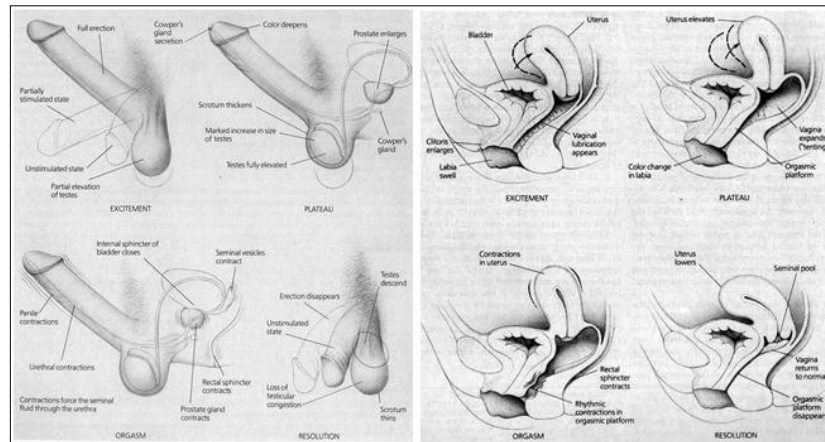
Figure 11. Illustration of sexual arousal, MarriageOfMaribel.com

They mirror the ways in which notably un-sexual places, like schools, use such images for educational purposes. Similarly, an article on BTS offers an image (Figure 12) to help instruct couples on how to engage in the "woman-on-top" position so that the woman partner is stimulated. When viewed online, the image moves (the top oval shifting up and down) to better illustrate sexual intercourse:
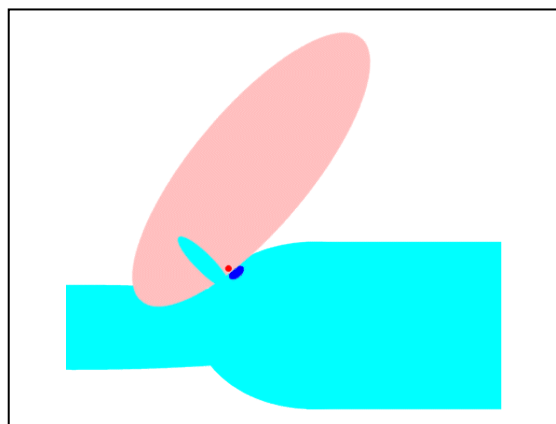
Figure 12. BetweenTheSheets.com image illustrating "woman-on-top" sexual position

Shapes that represent bodies are used in place of images of actual bodies, yet the sexual act depicted is quite clear.

Images on Christian sexuality websites, though never containing nude models, connote sexualized bodies engaged in sexual actions. Xena, the owner of one online Christian sex toy store, for example, takes great effort to use images that she deems are not pornographic, but recognizes that this may not be enough to prevent some website users from sinful thoughts that stem from the images. Her store sells Liberator sex furniture, products that resemble giant, plush Lego pieces that support couples in a variety of sexual positions. She explained to me, "if you look at the shape by itself, […] you're like, 'what is that?!' If you don't have [instructions with] models then you don't really see what positions are available." No other Christian-owned store sells Liberator furniture because their instructions contain what store owners regard as pornography: images of nude models. Xena decided to contact the company and ask for their help in selling their products without using the nude-model instructions.

> With Liberator's cooperation, […] we took their photos and traced them and rendered them as line art so that the Liberator product is still in color but the couple are a black and white line drawing. So it's educational, but it's certainly not titillating. Nobody's going to 'get off' on our line art! But they can certainly see what's available and what's possible [by using the instructions along with the product].
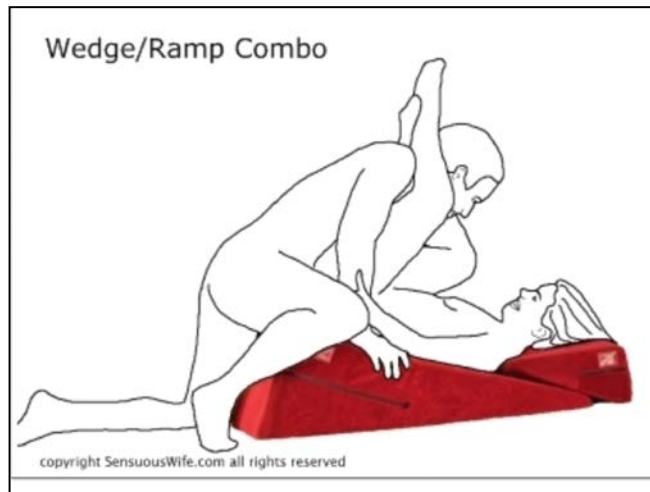
Figure 13. Illustrated instructions for Liberator sex furniture, SexyBride.com

Because Xena replaces images of live nude models (see Figure 13), she believes she allows Christians to purchase and use the Liberator products without viewing pornography.

I questioned Xena about the Liberator images: despite her best efforts, the line art images still depict a couple engaging in sex. Couldn't the images be used for sinful purposes, like masturbation or thinking about someone other than one's spouse? She responded without hesitation: "it is not my job to be the Holy Spirit and convict people. I feel like my job is to love people and help them and let God do the work to convict them and change them." In other words, Xena is committed to her Christian business but recognizes that how people use the products she sells or how they use her website are ultimately outside of her control. She told me that she hopes non-Christians use her site to learn a Christian approach to marriage and intimacy:

> I believe the offer of the gospel—life and health and healing—is an invitation to everyone. I don't want anyone to feel disqualified [from using the site], and if they happen to grow in their faith and take the next step, then that's cool, but I am not an evangelist. I'm more like offering a positive alternative.

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Xena insists that she is "not an evangelist," yet her actions reflect an evangelical effort to work for the salvation of others: to show the "positive alternative" that is available to non-believers and pray that they will "take the next step" and develop a relationship with Jesus.

Evangelical website creators rely on their belief in God to come to terms with the ambivalent uses of sexual content posted to the sites. It is God's job, not their own, to regulate how individuals use the sites, since this is ultimately beyond the control of website creators. This logic resembles one presented by a blogger on LustyChristianLadies on the topic of sexy dressing:

> [F]or the brother who is so weak that he will lust after a woman wearing attractive, but modest clothing, I hold no accountability for [am not responsible for sin]. I do not believe it is my responsibility to manage his sin in such a case. I am not going to walk around wearing frumpy, boring clothing in an attempt to keep someone else from sinning lustfully. Such a man has a problem with lust that I cannot control.

This attitude, that evangelicals cannot control the sins of others, is used repeatedly on websites to reinforce individual accountability to action. This allows website creators to avoid responsibility for anyone who uses their sites in ways they deem inappropriate or sinful.

Creators of Christian sexuality websites go to great lengths to make the content on their site appropriate within an evangelical context. Users of these sites, however, face a different task in becoming integrated into these online communities. They must develop online personas that reflect evangelical beliefs in order to be accepted among other members/readers. The following section describes how interview respondents find and use BTS and LCL and how they gain acceptance within these online communities.

4.2   JOINING AN ONLINE COMMUNITY

The majority of interview respondents, users of BTS and/or LCL, reported that they found these sites as a result of an Internet search for a topic related to Christian sexuality. This reflects a broader trend in American life, where a majority of Internet users have used online resources for information regarding personal health.[33] Many interview respondents told stories similar to BTS member Sunshine:

> I did a Google search for female orgasm difficulties, and […] the main Marriage Bed website was near the top. I read through many articles on the site, and then noticed a link to the forum, so joined in order to get some Christian-based feedback on some difficult areas my own marriage bed was facing.[34]

Many users of LCL and BTS, unlike Sunshine, said that they cannot remember the specific details that brought them to the sites. When asked how he first found out about BTS, member Wagner told me, "I think I was just surfing the internet one day, reading about Christian views on sexuality." Chloe, a BTS member, said that she initially searched for the site because she wanted to do "research ☺" to "spice things up in our MB [marriage bed]." Most interview respondents made reference to an Internet search motivated by wanting to improve their personal sex life that brought them to Christian sexuality websites.

When asked why they didn't stick to offline resources for information about sexuality, like from a Christian book or a trusted friend, respondents cited the accessibility and anonymity

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[33] Surveys conducted since 2000 by the Pew Research Center show that between 75 and 83 percent of adult Internet users have looked online for health information (Fox and Jones 2009).

[34] A Google Internet search for "female orgasm difficulties" (quotation marks included) does, in fact, return a message board discussion on BetweenTheSheets.com as the top search result.

of the Internet.[35] One BTS member described himself as a "tech geek" who finds it "easy" to use the Internet "for all sorts of information." When I asked Frodo, another BTS member, why she was googling "Christian marriage" when she first found BTS, she responded: "not sure…wondering about things that I was not discussing with anyone 'live'…found good wisdom there with anonymity." She went on to say how she felt uncomfortable asking questions about her sex life to anyone she knew in real life; BetweenTheSheets answered her questions in an anonymous setting. Another BTS member, BernardG, described how he decided to join BTS, wanting to talk about sex within marriage with fellow Christians. "And you could do it anonymously, which was a big plus, as we talk about things you probably couldn't share with most IRL [in real life] friends."

Interview respondents also described the benefits of the Internet as interactive and specific, unlike books that offer advice to a general audience. BTS member Kylee2000, a woman who reports having a higher sex drive than her husband, told me that Christian sex advice books didn't help her since they tended to discuss men with high sexual drives and women with low libidos. "I had read *Sheet Music* [Leman 2003] and didn't find any help in that. It just perpetuated stereotypes," she explained. Joining BTS, however, did improve her sex life. At first, she encountered some resistance when another BTS member, a man whose wife had a low sex drive, accused her of being a man disguising himself as a woman. Immediately following this accusation, however, several other BTS members came to Kylee2000's defense and offered her encouragement and support. She started to have private-message conversations with other women who were in similar situations and described those interactions as "the first time where

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[35] Most interview respondents had read Christian sex advice books. For the BTS members I interviewed, 15 out of 24 had attended some kind of event that discussed marital intimacy from a Christian perspective.

ladies could relate to me and I could share my frustration." Unlike books, Christian sexuality websites allow evangelicals to glean advice that attends to their specific experiences.

In using the Internet for sex advice, interview respondents were adamant that they were interested in a specific kind of website: one that reflected their own Christian values. When I asked BTS member hammerHead if it was important to read information about sexuality that is faith-based, he responded: "ABSOUTELY! […] If you really want to know about a product you read what the manufacturer says. Since God created not only our bodies a certain way but He also created the gift of sex, I think it's important to see what He has to say about it." For this BTS member, to talk about sex without talking about God fails to capture one of its most important dimensions. Some respondents admitted that they sometimes use secular sites for what they deemed to be straight-forward advice—one LCL reader told me that she would use a secular site to look up a sexual position "if it wasn't all smutty and stuff"—but they described taking this advice "with a grain of salt," as one BTS member put it.

Wariness about secular sites reflects the messages of many evangelical spokespersons, who describe pornography as a nearly ubiquitous presence on the Internet. One reader of LCL comments after finding the site, "I didn't think in this age of porn and filth that I would ever find a site like this. God bless each and everyone one of you!" Of those gender and sexuality issues discussed by evangelical preachers and authors, the problem of pornography is among the fastest growing concern (Arteburn, Stoeker, and Yorkey 2000; Driscoll 2008). The male leaders at BetweenTheSheets conference, for example, talked repeatedly about pornography: sharing that they both became "addicts" at ages five and seven respectively and have since struggled to avoid watching it. The supposed ubiquity of the "pornography problem," especially for men and boys,

means that many evangelicals who use the Internet to discuss sex must tread carefully in how they talk about and visually depict it.[36]

The risk of pornography is a constant threat, according to evangelical website users. Most interview respondents described their distrust of *all* non-Christian sites, even those that appear similar to BTS or LCL—blogs or message boards whose primary purpose is discussion and education, not titillation. Evangelical website users consider even a website that appears decent but is moderated and used by non-Christians to be dangerous: it may contain unwholesome advice or a link to an "un-safe" website (one that may include pornography). BTS member and interview respondent Samwise explained to me that he avoids secular websites that discuss sex since they usually "border on pornography:" "I find it offensive. I don't want to be exposed to pornography but rather want wholesome advice that strengthens marriage." Samwise generalized about all secular sites, not only those that are explicitly pornographic. For many respondents, the ease with which they describe accessing the Internet means that it is easy for others to use it to promote values that go against their own beliefs. This is why it is especially important for them to use websites that are clear about their Christian identities.

Most interview respondents suggested that they first use Christian sexuality websites in order to find information that will improve their sex lives, but many continued to use the sites long after finding this initial information. Perhaps they had additional questions that were answered within these online communities, but more often respondents grew attached to the online network and learned to contribute to them in ways that are personally fulfilling, like by

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[36] Evangelicals typically describe pornography as a problem primarily for men. Many popular authors, for example, claim that men are naturally inclined to respond to porn, arguing that visual images physiologically produce arousal for men (unlike women who supposedly are turned on by intimate conversations and touch) (see Driscoll and Driscoll 2012; Leman 2003; Rosenau [1994] 2002; Wheat and Wheat [1977] 2010). Yet, increasingly evangelicals are using gender-equal language when discussing porn as women vocalize their experiences as pornography addicts (for example, Dirty Girls Ministries).

sharing their personal experiences and advice to newer members. As BTS member BernardG put it, "I quickly saw that it was a great community of people who loved God." Figure 14 shows how often BTS and LCL interview respondents read the sites. Reading frequency does not drop for long-time website users. Rather, long-term members and readers continue to actively follow the sites, and for many respondents, the longer they have followed the websites, the more frequently they view them.
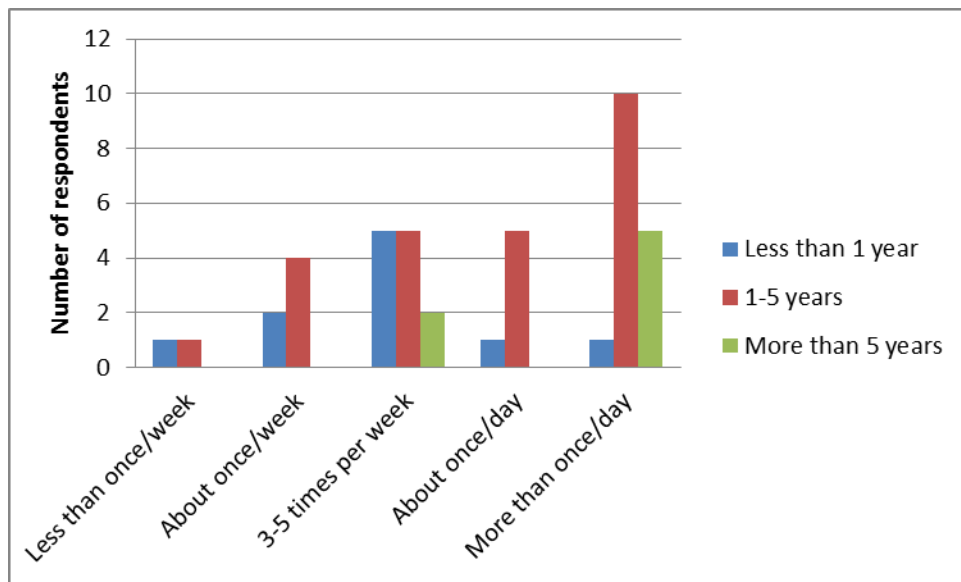
Figure 14. Frequency of website viewing by length of membership/readership for BTS members and LCL readers

Although online and real life realities sometimes merge, the communities forged on Christian sexuality websites exist almost exclusively online. Table 10 provides details about online and real-life relationships related to BTS membership.

Table 10. Interview respondents' online and real-life relationships among BTS members[37]

BTS Member	Has member spouse	Has private messaged other members	Has online relationships with members outside BTS	Has met members in real life
Kylee2000		•		
PhoenixGirl	•	•		
HoneyPot		•		
Wagner				
SteelTown	•	•	•	•
Samwise	•			
Sunshine	•	•		
BernardG	•	•	•	•
Leia		•		
Frodo		•		
Chloe	•			
hammerHead	•	•	•	
1999pq		•	•	•
ExodusGuy		•	•	•
Cody		•		
Rebecca	•			•
BestBuyGuy	•	•		•
4Christ	•	•	•	
Colonel_Mustard		•		
Y2K	*	•	•	•
Kate		•		
Popeye		•	•	
BoyNextDoor	•	•	•	•
Staccato	•	•	•	•
LoneStar		•		
Totals	48% 12	84% 21	40% 10	36% 9

* Respondent is not married

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[37] This table includes data only from interview respondents who were BTS members. LCL does not require membership to read content on the site, nor does it offer ways for readers to privately correspond with one another.

For the married BTS members I interviewed, half (12 of 24) report that their closest real-life companion, their spouse, is also a BTS member. Although all interview respondents disclose their Internet activity to their spouse, not all have partners who share their interest in discussing sex in online Christian settings. The vast majority of BTS interview respondents (21 of 25) have used the Private Message function of the site, engaging in one-on-one private correspondent with another member. Some members (9 out of 25) have online relationships with other BTS members beyond the site—the most frequent example of this is Facebook friendships—and these members are also likely to have offline contact with other members, like phone conversations or face-to-face meet ups. Most interview respondents, however, have no contact with BTS members beyond the site itself.

Interview respondents said that the anonymity afforded on the site is the primary reason why the BTS community remains online. Samwise put it this way: "I think one of the great advantages of BTS is the privacy of the participants. […] That makes it easier for me to participate in conversations that are of such an intimate nature." Another BTS member, Rebecca, expressed a similar sentiment explaining why she doesn't tell other people that she and her husband use the site: "If our friends who we're closest to (who also attend our church) knew of our membership and read the posts, it would be hard (maybe more for them than for us) for them to know." In other words, an environment where individuals talk frankly about their sex lives is best suited for an online setting, where website users do not worry about what their friends and family may think about knowing intimate details of their sexual lives.

There are other more practical reasons why the BTS community is mostly limited to online interactions. In an attempt to expand this community to real-life, one administrator of the site decided to host a face-to-face conference exclusively for BTS members. The conference,

which took place in a small town in the Midwest, attracted much interest among members, suggesting that members have mixed views about online anonymity. One member posts to a board announcement about the conference: "I'm sad I can't go ☹ Hoping you guys have an awesome turn out and a GREAT conference so that it becomes an annual thing that might end up close to my neck of the woods." While some members express hesitation about meeting others members in real life—one interview respondent, for example, said that she wouldn't attend a real-life conference because "I would feel awkward and embarrassed to meet members face-to-face who have intimate knowledge of my own marriage bed"—most of the members posting to the conference announcement thread offer practical reasons why they cannot attend. For most, the conference was too far away; they couldn't afford airfare or take the time away from work. Contributing to BTS online, on the other hand, takes little time or energy and can fairly easily be integrated into the other activities of everyday life.

Despite the fact that websites exist within a virtual, not quite real-life, reality, website users make repeated reference to the community that is fostered online. One of the BTS members whom I interviewed, Chloe, said she uses the site because of her sense of "community with similar interests." She pointed out that in real-life, it is extremely difficult to find a like-minded community to openly talk about sexuality: "I can find a similarly-minded 'health nut' mom much more easily than a friend/community that is willing to discuss fun sex ideas, tips, etc." One of the LCL readers I interviewed, Mrs. B, put it this way, "I don't really have a network of friends where I am. It's freeing being able to talk about these things [sex] with women who understand some of the things I'm going through." The network of women who use LustyChristianLadies offers support for Mrs. B who lacks friends with whom she can discuss sex. A BTS member whom I interviewed, SteelTown, coped with his frustration over another member's "attitude

problem," by saying: "but we are a community, so I might not like this member's blunt style, but that's okay!" Another BTS member, Cody, said that he joined the site after finding it because "I wanted to be a part of that community." When asked to elaborate on what he meant by "that community," he responded: "I felt like people there do respect each other and care. Everyone is so supportive. And I wanted to feel some of that. And be able to support others." This member insisted that community—which is based on respect, care, and support—exists on the BetweenTheSheets site.

4.2.1   God and the Issue of Internet Anonymity

Although some website users deem Internet anonymity as a risk—some of my interview respondents expressed a concern about other users who may use the sites maliciously—most of the website users I interviewed weren't concerned about whether or not website users are who they say they are. Many respondents said that they don't worry about deception on the sites any more than they worry about deception in their real lives, pointing out that only God has the power to "really know" who anyone is, either in real-life or online. One BTS member, Frodo, told me that she doesn't really worry about deception on the sites since "we all have our 'public selves' and 'actual selves' IRL [in real life] anyways." In other words, she recognizes that the way she is perceived in public may be different than her "actual self" of which God knows, but others may not. Another BTS member, BoyNextDoor, put it this way:

> I don't see it much differently than IRL situations where people are putting on masks and act differently around you in a social setting than they would at home to those who know them intimately. If I meet a person at a restaurant I don't really know them, they might be acting totally different than they would when not working there or when going there for a meal if they don't work there. So it's the same type of thing on BTS, these people are real people, they may or may not be representing themselves honestly, but it's the same risk IRL.

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BoyNextDoor was among several interview respondent to mention the "masks" that we all wear in social interactions. For evangelicals, only God has the power to see through such masks, and therefore it is futile to attempt to discover people's "true" identities in online settings.

When I asked interview respondents if they ever worried about users not being who they say they are on the sites, a common theme in their responses reflected the idea that God, not them, is in control of their lives. One BTS member, Popeye, explained, "I have no control over where my words go and how people use them. […] If they [other users] are not who they [say they] are, perhaps my words will start them on some path to finding their relationship with God. Who knows." Popeye suggested that there is a reason for anyone, regardless of their motive, who finds Christian sexuality websites. This makes him feel comfortable posting intimate details about his own life since God is ultimately in control of people use the site.

4.2.2 Who's Who

Regular users of Christian sexuality websites work to make themselves known in these anonymous online settings. Doing so helps to form boundaries between insiders and outsiders in these online communities. As BTS member, Chloe, explained to me in an interview:

> I think it takes a long time to actually "break into" the community [at BTS]. […] I think the "long time" BTS members are very wary of new folks, they protect the old folks like close friends […], and are wary of someone coming on to stir up contentious issues. Even though I'm fairly new, I will not respond right away to a seemingly "strange" […] question from a "newbie" unless a few others have responded. Especially if the question isn't very clear--like it's not coming from their real life.

Chloe described the kind of gate-keeping that takes place at BTS. For users who have participated in the site since its inception (over a decade ago), they are "like close friends." Chloe points to the difficulty in joining the community as a new member.

Although interview respondents talked about their faith in God as guiding their Internet use, website users don't naively trust everyone who uses Christian sexuality websites, and website creators take measures to censor posts to the sites. John, the creator of BTS told me about how they moderate online content:

> Moderation is an art not so much a science (laughs). We do have some specific rules that help us to coral those who are clearly out of line. When people are walking the line, we give them the benefit of the doubt. [We …] try to coach and teach people because a lot of people coming into the boards may or may not know reasonable etiquette, they may not know how to function well within this group. So if they're open to it, you can coach and help them through it.

Like website users who said they don't worry about deception on the sites because God is in control, John explained that people deserve the "benefit of the doubt" when using the message boards since becoming integrated into the online community requires complying to online "etiquette." This etiquette involves implicit social norms in addition to the explicit rules on the site. Website users can display etiquette without disclose identifying information—like their real name or hometown—rather, many maintain their anonymity but learn how to participate in Christian sexuality sites in ways that other users find credible and authentic.

Explicit rules for how to use Christian sexuality sites may carry over to informal rules that help users distinguish community insiders. Members on BTS, for example, can attach an image—called an avatar—to their profile. Examples of avatars—famous people/characters like Rambo, former presidents, Dungeon's and Dragon characters—help shape users' personalities that contribute to their online personas. Current site regulations require that members use an image that does not resemble a real-life personal photograph. This rule came after administrators

of the site decided that personal photographs used as avatars were likely to cause problems for other members. With a real-life photograph as an avatar, a member describing her sexual interests could prompt another member to fantasize by mentally mixing the avatar photograph with the description of sexual activity. This is sin, according to the site's administrators:

> While we recognize that no one is physically seeing one another here, we want to protect the minds of those that are reading. While there are pictures of actual people to go along with graphic descriptions, it may open up the imagination in ways that can be inappropriate. We want to protect the sanctity of marriage here, and we believe that it includes guarding the eyes and imaginations of our readers.

BTS administrators believe they reduce the risk of sin by requiring member avatars to be based purely on fantasy, rather than reality, reasoning that this makes members less likely to visualize other members engaging in sexual acts. This logic also influenced how organizers of the real-life BTS conference advertised the event, assuring people who were interested in attending that they wouldn't have to reveal their BTS username during the conference. It is important that website users reveal themselves to hold evangelical beliefs on Christian sexuality websites and related events, but not that they reveal identifying information. What is important are the ways in which users get to know one another through their online identities.

One BTS member Chloe, told me one of the ways in which users get to know one another: long-time members expect new posters to share a certain amount of personal or background information in their first few posts. New posters who do not do this breach online etiquette and encounter significant scrutiny. She told me about one post where a new user created a "poll" asking about frequency of oral sex:

> They [the original poster] asked their question, but left no information about themselves, didn't answer their own question. […] Almost too much anonymity. Like two 15-year old boys got on, though it would be cute to get all these married people to post about [oral sex]. […] Things like that give one pause on a new post.

Chloe was wary of a thread started for ambiguous purposes, where the motives of the original poster are unclear. Similarly, one BTS thread started by a new member asked bluntly: "men, what's the worst thing you've done and been forgiven by your wife?" One long-time member responded with a post answering the question and then immediately posted again: "sorry, I didn't notice that this was your first post. Welcome to the boards. Interesting first topic […] why are you curious about what we've done?" On this particular thread, the original poster never returned to better introduce himself, yet it served as an example to other new members, or lurkers on the site considering becoming members, on what *not to do* in a first post.

4.2.3   Insider/Evangelical

On the surface, Christian sexuality websites appear to accommodate persons from a variety of backgrounds and Christian faiths. One of the contributors to LCL told me, for example, readers make up "a vast demographic from men to women, liberal to conservative, feminist to submissive, Catholic to Protestant, young to old." The BTS message board instructs that members need only be "married […] and followers of Christ and His word." This is similar to the author of *Sheet Music* (2003:17), Kevin Leman, notes that his book is for any "committed couple" not "living together or sleeping together outside of marriage." Yet my findings show that website users become insiders in online communities when they conform to what are distinctly evangelical tenets.

BTS members gain respect on the site by creating personas that are compelling to an evangelical audience. One member, Jeremiah, described his approach on the site as a "zero tolerance policy" for sinful behavior like adultery or viewing pornography. His avatar is an image of Rambo—the fictional character known for his toughness and brutality—and he

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interacts with other members as an authority, with little sympathy, much advice, and a "tough love" attitude that he touts as being in the interest of other members. Another long-time member, ConstantComment, is known for the motherly advice she offers, especially to newer women members, and other members often ask for her advice specifically. Both members symbolize compelling evangelical stereotypes—the tough patriarch and the compassionate matriarch, or the Old-Testament God and the New-Testament Jesus Christ—that have helped them gain credibility on BTS and become well-respected on the site.

As the examples of ConstantComment and Jeremiah show, website users must find ways to integrate tropes of evangelicalism into their online content in order to gain credibility on the sites. Reflecting a broader trend within evangelicalism that gives unique authority to lay members (see Chapter One), users of Christian sexuality websites draw upon their individual convictions regarding their beliefs about sexuality. Becoming a respected member of BTS or a successful blogger, for example, doesn't require a formal training in divinity. Common phrases on blogs and message boards like, "after prayerful consideration, I've decided that," or "My personal conviction of that scripture is that," suggest that individual believers need only the word of God to make important decisions regarding their beliefs (and actions) about sex.

Website users also reference salvation, or being born again. One BTS member tells another: "if your husband isn't a Christian, that should be your FIRST priority. […] Right now, he's on his way to hell." On another BTS thread, a member consoles the original poster who fears that his wife, who isn't a Christian, is having an emotional affair: "Most of all (as if it isn't obvious), I'll be praying for your wife's salvation." Website users frequently incorporate their own conversion stories into their posts—tidbits of information about life before they were saved and life since. This language is unique to contemporary evangelicals: although conversion

narratives were typical of most Protestant Christians in the 19th century, mainstream Protestants today tend not to use conversion language and instead describe personal transformations that reflect secular, therapeutic culture (Brereton 1991; Wuthnow 1994). For evangelicals, conversion narratives are quite commonplace and highly formulaic: stories tell of transformation from sin to salvation (Brereton 1991; Stromberg 1993; also see Chapter Five). Website creators and users do not claim to have a perfect record when it comes to sexual morality, and in fact, disclosing former sexual sins, followed by redemption through Jesus Christ, is one way that website users create their online persona. Message board threads are frequently started by a member who is struggling with (or whose spouse is struggling with) a sexual problem, often involving sinful behavior. Responses from other members almost always start with an expression of sympathy, telling the original poster that they, too, were once in their shoes. In one thread where a member asks the group how to overcome an addiction to pornography, the first respondent comments: "You can win, Jesus can heal and overcome this. I spent 22 years as a Christian still in chains. […] It's God's grace that rescues us."

Users repeatedly mention Satan and the hold he has over the secular world, reflecting evangelicals' emphasis on the spiritual battle between Christians and the devil that they believe plays out in daily life (Ammerman 1987; Poole 2009). Satan is considered an active threat to Christians' sex lives. On the BTS message boards, "Satan" is mentioned over 1,000 times. As one LustyChristianLadies reader comments,

> [My husband and I] have both discovered some past sins & habits that were hindering us from really enjoying all that God has for us. We love each other very much […], but that is how crafty satan was in our lives. We both were not really aware of what we were missing by not really focusing on our sexuality in relationship to God.

This reader reveals evangelical beliefs in the ways in which she frames her sexual experiences—the problems her and her husband faced were caused by a "crafty Satan," and the solution to these problems was to incorporate God into their intimate relationship.

Website users talk about God in personal, casual and intimate ways, typical of contemporary evangelical discourse (Ammerman 1988; Luhrmann 2011). Bloggers often write about "conversations" they have with God, or times when they "talked" with God in reference to their prayer life. One blogger responds to a reader who struggles with her low sex drive: "make time to talk to Him [God] and see what He has to say about it." For evangelicals, God is an active participant in their lives. Their prayers are not simply messages they send out to a distant deity; rather God responds to prayers in ways that believers can recognize. By talking about God in this way, website users show others that they hold evangelical beliefs.

4.3   CONCLUSION

In his seminal work, *Virtual Community*, Howard Rheingold (1993) first argued that communities can exist beyond physical space. Today, when 65 percent of American adults use social networking sites (Madden and Zickuhr 2011), it may seem obvious that communities "emerge from the [Inter]Net when enough people carry on […] discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace" (Rheingold 1993). Rheingold emphasizes *feelings* as what connects individuals within a community—people may not share a physical space but have an emotional stake in what happens in particular online environments. For religious persons, who generally have a more optimistic outlook on their impact of their (physical) communities and think more highly of their (physical) communities

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than those without religious affiliations,[38] it should come as no surprise that online religious communities thrive (see, for examples, Campbell 2010; Helland 2004; Howard 2011; Lovheim and Linderman 2005).

For the respondents in this study, what began as an isolated, individual, and private attempt to find Christian information about sexuality often resulted in joining an online community of believers who share intimate details of their sexual lives. While interacting in settings that are mostly anonymous and virtual, website users get to know one another, comfort and offer advice to those who are going through hard times, and congratulate those who make positive changes in their lives. They support one another as users work to enhance their marriages, their sex lives, and their relationships with God.

Although online communities lack temporal and spatial boundaries that typically define "real-life" communities, they are similar in their need to preserve boundaries between insiders and outsiders (Lamont and Molnar 2002). Although some scholars have argued that the Internet provides equal access to users and therefore promotes diversity in unprecedented ways (see Brasher 2001), others have shown how the Internet can be used to bolster an exclusive community who share a strict set of beliefs. As Howard (2011) writes of a group of websites he calls vernacular Christian fundamentalism, "the radical certainty individuals in the movement value encourages them to migrate into self-regulated enclaves of like-minded believers." In other words, the shared beliefs of its members establish the identity of this group, making it difficult for those with differing beliefs to join the group, even though practically speaking they may have

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[38] According to the Pew Internet and American Life Project, 45 percent of religiously active Americans consider their community as an excellent place to live, compared with 34 percent of those not active with religious groups. Thirty-eight percent of religiously active Americans report that they can have a major impact on their communities, compared with 27 percent of those not religiously active (Jansen 2011).

access to it. What Paul Lichterman (2005:15) calls "group-building customs," this boundary making relies on implicit assumptions, not formal rules, that distinguish insiders from outsiders.

Religious persons who are part of virtual communities have unique opportunities to shape the meaning of religious expression. In this way, online religious communities are similar to how Kathleen Blee (2012:54) describes social movement groups whose "self definition is both accomplished and malleable." Individuals who prescribe to religions that are thousands of years old are, at least somewhat, limited in the kinds of beliefs they express and the kinds of rituals they practices. Yet, "online religion" allows website users to create new forms of participatory religious expression: to shape what religion looks like, how it is practiced, and how beliefs affect individuals' daily lives (Hadden and Cowand 2000). As Howard (2011:4-5) writes about widespread access to the Internet, "individuals have been granted even greater control over the ideas they access." This means that for creators and users of Christian sexuality websites, the Internet allows them to both draw from existing religious doctrine while also talking about God in personal and sometimes unorthodox ways.

These creators and users extend familiar evangelical beliefs and themes to apply to their online activity. Website creators justify Christian websites that include sexually explicit content by suggesting that (1) they were called by God to create the sites; (2) married couples have unique privileges when it comes to confronting sexual material; and (3) individuals who misuse the sites commit sins for which they are not responsible. Users of these sites justify anonymous online interaction by citing their belief that only God knows who someone "really is" and that everyone who finds the sites does so for a (God-led) purpose. Further, they establish themselves as insiders within these communities by creating online personas that resonate with other evangelicals. As the subsequent chapters show, using religious beliefs to make sense of sexual

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desires and practices makes Christian sexuality websites places of ambivalence: where users expand what it means to be evangelical and sexual, but also uphold beliefs that perpetuate male privilege and heteronormativity.

5.0   SEXUAL AWAKENING: PURSUING WOMEN'S PLEASURE(S)

In her interview, Ka-Hun, a reader of the LustyChristianLadies blog, shared her story of "sexual awakening." At the time, Ka-Hun was 27 and had been married a little over a year. She told about growing up in a Christian family that spoke very little about sex: "The way I grew up, one didn't talk about sex. You know, the old 'sex is bad' or taboo. […] I never got 'the talk.'" Ka-Hun didn't pursue information about sex on her own for fear that this information would offer ungodly advice: "if it weren't from a faith-based perspective, it'd lead to confusion." And so she entered her marriage knowing very little. "I didn't know zilch about how my body worked down there before I got married, well, not counting the cycle every month :P." When she started having sex with her husband, intercourse was "extremely painful." Ka-Hun knew it wasn't supposed to be like this, but she didn't know how to make sex pleasurable and fun. She decided to ask her sister: "While she's younger than me, she was more versed in certain areas, […] even sexuality." Her sister recommended that Ka-Hun check out a website, LustyChristianLadies.org.

Ka-Hun spent weeks after first finding the site carefully reading posts on how to make sex more pleasurable. LustyChristianLadies taught practical tips about clitoral stimulation that helped her climax with her husband and convinced Ka-Hun that she shouldn't feel embarrassed or ashamed about giving or receiving oral sex. In short, she learned that God wants her to enjoy sex, to "just have fun in my marriage bed."

> I remember one of the Monday missions [a weekly series where bloggers pose a
> challenge to readers to accomplish that day] was something along the lines of

> 'surprise your hubby with something,' and I timidly put in a comment that I wanted to have the courage to give my husband a BJ [blow job], and some of the comments were, 'You can do it, girl!' And after I did it and LOVED it, I went back to that [Monday mission post] and commented, 'it was WILD!'

LustyChristianLadies helped Ka-Hun realize her sexual potential, to come to know that she can be confident sexually and enjoy having sex with her husband. She told me that "it was encouraging knowing that I wasn't the only one having difficulty." She learned that "the biggest challenge was getting past the mental hurdles put in place through my upbringing." Learning to overcome cultural, religious, and physical obstacles allow Ka-Hun to experience sexual pleasure.

Ka-Hun says she overcame these obstacles with the support of bloggers and readers at LustyChristianLadies and with the help of God: "I would say it was 30% LCL, 70% doing [spiritual] battle and praying." LustyChristianLadies played a central role in Ka-Hun's awakening, as did her relationship with God—through prayer and "spiritual battle." Ka-Hun told about the improvement in her sexual life as a *spiritual* journey, aided by the support of a distinctly Christian community on LustyChristianLadies; her individual relationship with a God who has the power to intervene in her life; and her efforts, as a Christian, to "battle" forces that try to get in the way of her sexual fulfillment.

Women's sexual awakening stories are easily recognizable on Christian sexuality websites because they follow a distinct formula, similar to evangelical conversion narratives: a time of sin or suffering is overcome by a believer's decision to surrender to God's will, resulting in sexual and personal transformation. Evangelical conversion stories describe how individuals come to develop personal relationships with Jesus Christ. When made public, they have the potential to inform and inspire secular and religious audiences alike (Brereton 1991; Stromberg 1993). Importantly, conversion stories use active voice—believers "accept Christ," rather than "are accepted by Christ"—centralizing the responsibility of individuals when it comes to their

own eternal fate (Brereton 1991). Ka-Hun, for example, uses prayer, spiritual battle, and LustyChristianLadies to transform herself from feeling confused, ashamed, and isolated to feeling confident, excited, and fulfilled. She gives thanks to God, but also credits the bloggers and readers of LustyChristianLadies and her own efforts as helping to spark her transformation. As Virginia Brereton (1991:48) writes, evangelicals describe conversion as "psychological healing, when a divided unhappy personality could be integrated." Like secular women's groups that use lay psychology to discuss the self (see Taylor 1996; Wuthnow 1994), evangelical talk of conversion and sexual awakening emphasizes the emotional and mental wholeness that results from the power of Jesus Christ.

Sexual awakening stories are similar to stories told in secular women's self-help, recovery, and support groups. Like Alcoholics Anonymous, LGBT coming out groups, and La Leche League meetings, they reflect the "body-fixation" of Protestant and secular culture and integrate the physical body into accounts about spiritual transformation. Ka-Hun's experiences mirror classic "consciousness-raising" tactics of feminist women's groups, where women experience psychological change—becoming confident about their sexuality and "womanhood"—as well as physical change—becoming informed about and in touch with their sexual bodies (Nachescu 2006).

Scholars describe the "therapeutic movement" of the late 20th century, which sets the stage for the telling of sexual awakening stories, as both friend and foe of feminist efforts (McGee 2005; Whittier 2009). On the one hand, in the words of Verta Taylor (1996:7), self-help groups "have gained increasing importance as sources of emotional support and settings in which women seek to redefine the female self." These groups are examples of how the personal *is* political, what Anthony Giddens (1991) calls "life politics" (see also Plummer 1995). On the

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other hand, critics cite this therapeutic turn as emphasizing individual improvement and doing little to challenge inequalities at a structural level (Armstrong 1990; Brown 1995). For women who use Christian sexuality websites, telling sexual awakening stories has the potential to both disrupt and reinforce gender hegemony.

This chapter analyzes the narrative structure of sexual awakening stories, which contain two parts, what I call Obstacles and Pleasure. Narrators typically describe three types of obstacles—cultural, religious, and physical—that get in the way of experiencing sexual pleasure in marriage. Pleasure refers to the awakening itself, when believers overcome obstacles and realize God's plan for marital intimacy. This involves feeling simultaneously entitled and selfless, when believers make claim to experiencing personal pleasure but also pursue this pleasure for the good of the marriage relationship and one's relationship with God. I argue that for women, overcoming obstacles and experiencing pleasure leads to an "awakened" self that is still a subjugated self.

5.1   A NOTE ABOUT MEN'S STORIES

In this chapter I focus on women, although men also tell stories they call "sexual awakenings" on Christian sexuality sites. Like women, men talk about encountering many obstacles that get in the way of Godly sexuality and how God helps them to overcome these obstacles. They write of emotional and physical transformation that results from newfound sexual pleasure within their relationships. Yet, I do not include their stories in my analysis for two reasons. First, the vast majority of sexual awakening stories are told by women, and my data on men's stories are limited. Men make several references to their "awakening," but detailed narratives are few. For

example, in a thread asking BTS members to share their stories of sexual awakening, there are over 100 stories shared, and all but one of them are written by or about women. [39]

Second, and more important than the quantitative differences in the number of men and women's stories, men's stories are qualitatively different than women's. Gender hegemony, which is deeply embedded within evangelical and broader culture, frames sexual awakening stories, setting men and women on different and imbalanced trajectories. Secular and religious talk about sexuality recognizes men as sexual and encourages men's heterosexual desire for (and access to) women (Burkett and Hamilton 2012; Connell 1995). Even though evangelical messages condemn sexual activity outside of marriage unequivocally for men and women, these messages frame men's sexual desire as a natural and expected part of life and are relatively silent when it comes to women having desires of their own (see Chapter Three and Gardner 2011). Christian men are not removed from their sexual identities in the same way that Christian women are (as I discuss in the next section), making it more difficult for them to tell stories that contain the narrative components important to sexual awakening. In other words, men are already sexually "awake" when they become sexually active within marriage. Even if they never engaged in sexual acts, they likely have been exposed to positive sexual talk geared towards them.

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[39] One man posted to the thread to share the awakening he and his wife experienced simultaneously; other men's comments either congratulate previous posters on their stories or share their wives' stories.

5.2   PART ONE: OBSTACLES

Stories of "sexual awakening" tell of a journey to the understanding that God wants women to experience sexual pleasure in marriage. This does not happen automatically or inevitably. Instead, women describe several obstacles that make it difficult for them to experience pleasure as God intends it. These obstacles reflect quite different influences—secular culture, religious culture, and the physical body—but have similar effects, making evangelical women feel out of place when it comes to their own sexuality. As this section explains, women begin their sexual awakening stories by describing how these three factors make them feel like they are unable to experience sexual pleasure: the *over*emphasis of women's sexuality by *secular culture*; the *under*emphasis of women's sexuality by *religious culture*; and an *imperfect body*.

5.2.1   Secular Culture

The authors of *Red, Hot, Monogamy: Making Your Marriage Sizzle* (Farrel and Farrel 2006), state that sex is God's gift to all people, but secular culture (with Satan's urging) has abused it, just as God created medicine and doctors perverted it by performing abortions; God created music and rock stars perverted it by singing obscenities; and God created dancing and entrepreneurs perverted it by creating strip clubs. When it comes to sex, God created it as pleasurable to bring a married couple closer together, yet secular society does not uphold these values. As, Lorraine Pintus, co-author of *Intimate Issues: 21 Questions Christian Women Ask about Sex* (2000), told me, Christian women today are inundated by what she calls the "world's perspective" when it comes to sexuality: "when you turn on the TV, you don't see lifelong

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commitments, privacy, or even one man, one woman anymore. […] women aren't spending enough time in the word of God to know what God's word says."

According to the women who tell sexual awakening stories, secular messages about sex are particularly damaging to them. A speaker at the BTS conference puts it this way: "there are no good role models in society for women." Mirroring some feminist critiques of mainstream media for objectifying women's bodies and pressuring them to engage in casual sex, women's sexual awakening stories describe standards for succeeding as a woman by wearing revealing clothing, engaging in casual sex, and flirting with men. One blogger, Ruby, writes that growing up in a culture that sexualizes women's bodies made her feel like her only value to men was for sex. This caused her to refuse to have sex with her husband altogether.

Other women who tell their sexual awakening stories talk about the long-lasting guilt they experience because they decided to have sex before marriage. One BTS member says that she gave in to social pressure to sleep with her boyfriend: "I gave him [my first boyfriend] my virginity and […] was encouraged to do so by my 'friends.'" She says that this was the gateway to years of low self-esteem, promiscuity that included prostitution, and sexual abuse. After meeting her husband, she became born again, but her sex life continued to suffer:

> My poor husband was lucky if we had sex once every three months. I believe this was because when I was with my husband, I was plagued with memories I didn't want. I felt that if I ever felt sexual, my husband should lose respect for me. I knew God created sex for enjoyment between husband and wife, but I couldn't apply it to my life.

This member describes her emotional trauma, sparked by an adolescent decision to have sex with a boyfriend, as an obstacle to her marital relationship. She links her experiences of non-consensual sex to the unchristian lifestyle that she lived at the time.

Secular standards even affect women who do not commit sexual sins. Evangelical women who are "in the world" but not "of the world" are exposed to secular messages even if such messages shouldn't apply to them. One blogger, Maribel, told me that she created her blog because secular messages that sexualize women inadvertently make Christian women feel like they shouldn't be sexual:

> I think a lot of Christian women have a lot of guilt with sex. It's often referred to as the "good girl syndrome" where they don't think they're a good [Christian] girl if they're enjoying sex, because they've been told their whole life "no, no, no, no you shouldn't be doing this. Good girls don't have sex." And so I just felt a need to change in women's attitudes. That it's not dirty or wrong if they're enjoying this with their husbands.

According to Maribel, secular messages tell Christian women that enjoying sex makes them "bad girls." One woman I interviewed put it this way: Christian women know they don't want to be Carrie Bradshaw—the promiscuous New Yorker from hit TV show, *Sex and the City*, but they don't want to be prudes either. Finding space in between, to be sexual in the way that God approves, is often difficult for women who spend life before marriage rejecting the ways in which secular culture promotes women's sexuality.

5.2.2 Religious Culture

Women who tell sexual awakening stories also describe the impact of evangelical Christian culture; this variously includes the church in which they were raised, their family's religious identity, and their perception of salient Christian beliefs. Nearly all interview respondents (both men and women) lamented the lack of information they received about sex within the Christian community. One BTS member, ExodusGuy, put it bluntly: "I'm appalled at the lack of good

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teaching on sex and intimacy in marriage in the Christian Church."[40] Leia, a BTS member, expressed a similar sentiment when she shared with me what it was like to first recognize sexual feelings in the context of Christian life.

> I never learned much about sex from church […] I never felt like it would be okay for me to date or have sex ever. I mean intellectually I knew that my parents would be happy if I got married but it didn't seem to make sense in my head, […] so I was pretty internal about sexual feelings.

For Leia, the church did not provide support for sexuality, even within marriage, which made it difficult for her to openly acknowledge her sexuality as a Christian. Similarly, a woman telling her sexual awakening story on BTS tells how anti-sex religious messages got in the way of her sex life: "I knew when I got married that it [sex] wasn't dirty or sinful. At least I knew this in my head, but it just never worked its way through my subconscious. […] I talked to a spiritual mentor about it, and it made her feel uncomfortable. The conversation was shut down pretty quickly." Even after marriage, she received the message that her religious beliefs were irreconcilable with her sexual desires.

In telling their stories, website users often talk about a lack of Christian information geared specifically toward women. Xena, the owner of an online sex toy store, shared what it is like for her when she hears about sex in church,

> When sex is talked about in church, it's talked about like this: men have sexual needs and women have emotional needs. If women, you dole out the sexual needs, then men will dole out the emotional needs and everybody will be happy. And nobody talks about the fact that someone with ovaries may indeed have a sexual need EVER. And I want to raise my hand and go, 'excuse me!' It's just so not talked about. My heart hurts for the other women who are in touch with their sexual needs and if they don't have it talked about, if it's only talked about from the pulpit that men only have sexual needs then that means that their needs (a) don't exist or (b) aren't important to God. I just think that's a big mistake.

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[40] Although there is no single "church" for contemporary evangelicals, the respondents in this study frequency reference it to signal evangelical culture.

Xena criticizes evangelical culture for not recognizing that women, like men, have sexual thoughts and desires. Similarly, a LCL reader, XYZ, shared her impression of the messages her male peers received in church, compared with her own:

> I know the issue of masturbation is addressed with a lot of teen guys when they enter Jr. High in youth groups (It seems to be something that's not addressed often with teen girls). So I imagine the topic of sex comes up when the topic of masturbation does. I've met a lot of girls who struggle even after they're married about feeling guilty about sex. I don't tend to hear this come up a lot with guys […], so it might be that the negativity associated with sex is more of a message girls hear? Maybe because most guys have masturbated, so even if they know sex is wrong outside of marriage, they have experience of knowing it feels good. […] It think it's assumed that guys know sex is pleasurable, even though they're told to wait for marriage, where I don't know if that's always communicated well to girls.

XYZ recalled hearing a simple message about sex within a church context: before marriage it is bad, after marriage it is good. She contrasted this with the messages her male peers received, which recognized the presence of sexual feelings and the (likely) possibility of sexual activity (masturbation). XYZ points out that, in her experience, church leaders assumed that men were sexual and that women were not. This means that men are likely to enter marriages knowing that sex "feels good," whereas women may not.

5.2.3   The Imperfect Body

Beyond the church and the secular world—which website users recognize as social factors that impede Godly sexuality—evangelical women also cite individualized obstacles to realizing God's plan for sexuality. These are usually related to the physical body: website users mention hormone deficiencies, medications that decrease sex drive, stress that causes their bodies to shut down, complications caused by medical procedures, painful intercourse, and obesity. One reader

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of LustyChristianLadies comments on the physical difficulties she experienced after first getting married:

> I saved myself for marriage and was shocked to discover on my honeymoon that I was unable to have sex! I went through a lot of emotions and became very depressed. […] I had a hymenectomy, which was successful but did not solve our problems. […] I went on Zoloft [a prescription medicine used to treat depression… and] it has affected my ability to orgasm, as well as my libido.

For this reader, a combination of physical problems—depression and side effects from the medication used to treat it as well as problems with painful intercourse—got in the way of her sexual pleasure.

The body is often integrated into stories of past sexual abuse, as women website users describe the long lasting emotional and physical distress that hinder their sexuality. Co-author of the book, *Real Marriage* (2012), Grace Driscoll writes about her experience being abused and how this got in the way of living according to God's standards: "I was shaped by what others had done to me and what I had done, rather than who God created me in His image to be." She writes about how her past got in the way of intimacy with her husband. Many women website users talk openly about past sexual abuse and the prevalence of these discussions, in part, contributes to an online environment that is actually quite aware of men's power and women's vulnerability in sexual relationships. As speakers at the Intimate Issues conference tell their audience of women, "Perhaps things happened to you that you didn't choose. You can take comfort in Jesus Christ. God won't violate you."

Women describe even past experiences of consensual sex in sexual awakening stories as impacting the body. As many evangelicals who promote abstinence before marriage assert (see also Gardner 2011), these women believe that premarital sex literally alters the physical body in ways that affect future sexual encounters. Lorraine and Linda explain in their *Intimate Issues*

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conference, any sexual action (from manual stimulation to intercourse) creates "soul ties" that make women physically and emotionally connected to their sexual partners (see also Ethridge 2008). Sex should be reserved for marriage, they argue, since women should experience these connections only with their husbands. According to Lorraine, "Scripture says that there is one sin that is different than other sins—sexual sin. That is because it is done *to the body*, not outside the body. We women, we know that—that sexual sin *feels more stuck*." In other words, there are physical consequences of past sexual encounters that act as obstacles for women experiencing sexual pleasure within their marriages.

Talk of the body exists within a specific socio-religious culture. Women who tell sexual awakening stories usually describe external social factors as influencing how they interpret and respond to problems with their bodies. One BTS member I interviewed, Tara, discussed at length how she solved physical problems affecting her sex drive:

> I had severe medical hormone deficiencies that had been previously undiagnosed and of course it affected more than my libido, it affected everything, […] but once I started working with a really good endocrinologist and got my hormones balanced, I realized holy smokes, I've got a libido! And it was really quite something, you know, because I was already a mother and everything, but I never really, I mean I had enjoyed the closeness of sex and had experienced of some level of desire, but I had no idea that you could just want it like that, it's amazing when your blood levels are normal, life is very different.

Tara credits her normal "blood levels" as allowing her to want sex in ways that she had previously not experienced. Yet, her story reveals other factors that influenced life before her awakening: her marriage was unhappy, she did not feel physically connected to her husband, and she attended a church that disappointed her in how sexuality was discussed. She attributed a change in her physical condition for prompting her to change in other areas of her life. After correcting her hormonal problems, she decided to leave her husband and her church.

Implicitly, website users rely on familiar evangelical cues to interpret what they consider to be highly individualized, physical problems. For example, a blogger on LustyChristianLadies writes about how using birth control was Satan's way of keeping physical intimacy out of her marriage with her husband. She quit taking the pills and began using natural family planning methods, until one month, she missed her period. She wasn't pregnant but writes that she considered returning to artificial birth control because her irregular cycle was difficult to track using natural methods:

> That relief pitcher that Satan sent in….no menstrual cycle. [..] So here I am again, wondering…did I skip my period? […] How do I know if I've ovulated or not? […] So what are my options? I haven't made but one decision. I won't go back on hormonal birth control ever again. I will not let Satan get a foothold in my marriage bed.

This blogger blames the physical effects of birth control pills on her low libido, but recognizes a force beyond her physical body as influencing her decision to take the pills—Satan, who wants to disrupt God's plan for marital intimacy.

Just as evangelicals believe that Satan tries to keep individuals from accepting the salvation of Jesus Christ (see Chapter Four), evangelical website users say that the devil tries to thwart their sexual awakening. They describe this as a "spiritual battle" that continuously takes place between believers and Satan. Satan wants to get in the way of sexual pleasure as God designed it. He also contributes to the secular promotion of casual sex, objectification of women, and devaluation of women's sexuality. Satan creates other problems as well, such as convincing women to use birth control despite its negative effect on marriage or providing excuses for women avoid sex with their husbands. Overcoming these obstacles allows for evangelicals to achieve victory in the battle between Christians and the devil. They believe that satisfying sex is a way for good to win over evil.

5.3   PART TWO: DISCOVERING PLEASURE

Evangelical women often write that their bodies are unable to respond appropriately to marital intimacy. As blogger Judy tells me, "Not being able to climax is a huge issue for women. And men don't quite get it because obviously they climax nearly every single time." Evangelicals who write about sex describe women's sexuality as mysterious, elusive, and often just out of reach. Popular authors Ed and Gay Wheat ([1977] 2010:111) claim that many women are "pre-orgasmic," having never reached sexual climax (see also Ethridge 2008; Leman 2003; Penner and Penner [1973] 2003; Young and Young 2012). Instructions on a BTS message board for learning to orgasm using a vibrator have been viewed over 37,000 times, more than any other thread posted to the site. Before their awakening, many women express frustration about not knowing how to become aroused.

The process of sexual awakening involves a personal transformation where women experience, usually for the first time, sexual pleasure. Yet, sexual pleasure involves shifts in both women's attitudes and physical responses to sex, meaning that pleasure can take multiple forms for different women. In the words of Ethridge (2008, 13), women learn that, "Sexual confidence isn't just for the supermodel or porn star. It is the birthright of every woman." Ideally, they also come to experience sexual pleasure that involves orgasm, since this is what "God designed for every wife" (Wheat and Wheat [1977] 2010:111), yet women describe sexual pleasure in other ways, too, like the pleasure they get from pleasing their husbands. Their stories discuss sexual pleasure in ways that parallels a feminist sensibility about women's entitlement while reflecting an evangelical sensibility about the role of marriage and God in women's lives.

Website users draw from feminist tropes to discuss sexual pleasure. In recent decades, the topic of women's pleasure has gained cultural traction as a result of feminist efforts to prioritize

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women's agency within sexual relationships (Attwood 2005; Burkett and Hamilton 2012; Gill 2009; Montemurro 2003). This can be seen in women's magazines, the plethora of popular sex advice books on the topic of women's pleasure, and the sale of vibrators in mainstream stores like Walgreens. These trends contribute to a cultural expectation that women can and should experience pleasure within their sexual lives, what I call "sexual entitlement."

Evangelical women who express sexual entitlement must do so within the context of their religious beliefs. The evangelical emphasis of selflessness, especially for women, directs believers to prioritize relationships according to the Christian adage: first God, then spouse, then children. Thus women talk about sexual pleasure by focusing on the relational and spiritual effects of physical intimacy, or how sex enhances their relationships with God and their husbands. Evangelicals distinguish their beliefs from those promoted by the secular world by suggesting that the latter emphasizes sex only for personal gain. One LustyChristianLadies reader whom I interviewed, XYZ, called this the world's "worship of sex:" "For much of the unsaved world, sex has become a 'God.' They worship the creation of sex rather than the *creator* of sex." This implies that experiencing a sexual awakening is a way for women to worship God. As blogger Judy writes about women's orgasms, "Thank you God. Kudos to you for a job well done in the area of creative design." Similarly, one BTS member, QueenEsther, writes that women's ability to orgasm is important because of "the bond that it forms" between husband and wife. Evangelical talk online justifies women's sexual pleasure because of the closeness it creates between a believer and God and a wife and husband.

5.3.1   Pleasure and Closeness to God

A good sex life, according to evangelical website users, requires a strong relationship with God. As one BTS member writes of her sexual awakening, "it [the awakening] was indeed a work of God, though he used these circumstances in my life to do a work of freedom in me. He knew my heart was open to His work in my life and so He saw to it that these things were used to wake me up." Christian women must accept God's transformation in their lives. Women who tell these stories credit God with leading them to experience sexual pleasure, and in turn, suggest that their sexual pleasure actually enhances their relationships with God.

God's role in sexual awakening stories is central: it is His hand that guides the events and circumstances that lead website users to come to experience Godly sexuality. Many stories describe how God directs women to the resources necessary to improve their marriage. One LustyChristianLadies reader whom I interviewed, Ros, expressed gratitude to God for finding the site: "when I found LCL, I felt like God was giving me a birthday gift since it was my birthday when I found LCL." And one member of BTS similarly shares the importance of God in her awakening story:

> God proceeded to use the [message] boards [and a Christian book,] *Intimacy Ignited*, […] to begin to heal me. I began to understand that my own puritanical upbringing was holding me back in my MB [marriage bed] and that I was going to have to release those bad teachings if I was going to have a satisfying and successful marriage and sex life […]. He […] proceeded to remove the thorns in my heart that represented my wounds.

Although sexual awakenings are often helped by outside resources—like Christian sexuality websites or books—women who tell these stories credit God with leading them to the information they needed in order to improve their sex lives.

Website users describe sexual awakenings as not only improving their sex lives, but also improving their relationship with God. One BTS member says her awakening began when her adult children began getting engaged and married: "I started to get nostalgic for what I'd had with DH [dear husband] at first," she writes. She goes on to say how her openness to a sexual awakening helped her be obedient to God:

> I began to pray, 'God, restore my desire for my husband. […] God, change me!' Then, one day […] out of the blue, God gave me specific instructions that I was to follow as an expression of desire for DH [dear husband], even though I didn't feel desire. What God asked of me took me out of my comfort zone, but I followed His instructions as an act of faith. During the process of obedience […], I was suddenly overwhelmed with physical, mental, and emotional desire for my husband. It was so strong that I practically threw myself at him! From nothing to consuming desire in a matter of moments! Praise God!

This story positions a changing spiritual state—"I began to pray […] God, change me!"—as the factor that altered her physical body—"I was suddenly overwhelmed with […] desire for my husband." Evangelical believers understand God's presence in their lives as an active influence who can directly cause change if they are open to receiving His messages.

Because sexual pleasure is an important dimension of a strong relationship with God, some evangelical women, especially those who cannot climax during sex with their husbands, justify masturbation and self-pleasure.

Table 11. Masturbation frequency by gender for CSIS respondents

Frequency	Men		Women	
	Number of respondents	Percentage of sample	Number of respondents	Percentage of sample
Never	35	10.6	140	38
Less than once a month	71	21.5	88	23.9
About once a month	35	10.6	33	9
2-3 times per month	57	17.2	46	12.5
About once a week	49	14.8	36	9.8
2-3 times per week	72	21.8	22	6
Almost daily	12	3.4	3	0.8
Total	331	100	368	100

As Table 11 shows, CSIS women, in particular, report that they masturbate less frequently than do men (38 percent of women never masturbate, compared to 10.6 percent of men), but for those women who do masturbate, they report slightly lower levels of guilt than men (see Table 12). Sixty-seven percent of women report that they never or rarely feel guilt after they masturbate, compared with about 60 percent of men.

Table 12. Level of masturbation guilt by gender for CSIS respondents who masturbate

"Do you feel guilty after you masturbate?	Men		Women	
	Number of respondents	Percentage of sample	Number of respondents	Percentage of sample
Never	78	26.4	79	34.5
Rarely	93	31.5	75	32.8
Sometimes	86	29	47	20.5
Usually	24	8.1	17	7.4
Always	14	4.8	11	4.8
Total	281	100	229	100

Even though women masturbate less frequently than men, website users usually recommend self-pleasure as a first step for women who are unable to orgasm. A LustyChristianLadies reader puts it this way: "As a young bride, a bit of self-pleasuring just to find out what turns you on is not a bad thing." In other words, women being able to climax is important because of the relational benefits between a woman, her husband, and God.

One BTS member, QueenEsther, offers advice to other Christian women on how to orgasm for the first time using a vibrator. Her instructions merge practical tips with praise for God:

> First, tell yourself that this is your own, special time. […] Maybe drink a small glass of wine—but not enough to get buzzed… (leave that to the vibrator!) Give yourself permission to indulge yourself… […] I recommend using a hand mirror to give you a guided tour of your genitals…open your legs wide […] and look, touch, explore…look at how exquisitely God put you together…as beautiful as a rare orchid […] Thank Him audibly if you can for how He designed you, and ask Him to bless this time of self-exploration and discovery.

QueenEsther's instructions reflect sexual entitlement—"give yourself permission to indulge yourself"—and even resemble feminist consciousness-raising groups that urge women to get to know their bodies using a hand mirror. Yet, QueenEsther carefully incorporates God's role into women's sexual pleasure, telling women to thank God for the creation of their sexual bodies.

For some evangelical women, experiencing sexual pleasure through masturbation is a way to avoid sinful sexual behavior. This came up in my interview with Tara, who experienced a sexual awakening that prompted her divorce from her husband (recall, after she resolved physical problems affecting her sex life, she began to experience sexual desire that was incompatible with her husband). She told me that "being 30 and divorced is different than being 19 and having never been married." She considered masturbation within the boundaries of God's rules for sex, especially when it can help believers like her discover her sexuality: "I see self-pleasuring as your emergency life support [when you can't have sex but experience sexual desire]. When you're an older single, it keeps you from being promiscuous. I think imagining an awesome honeymoon is world's different than objectifying the guy you saw at the beauty salon." Tara prioritized her sexual pleasure, but did so in a way that stays in line with her religious beliefs about Godly sexuality, which allow sexual thoughts only within the context of heterosexual marriage.

Not all women who tell sexual awakening stories are successful in achieving sexual pleasure in the form of orgasm, either with or without partners. Yet they still call their stories awakenings and remain committed to their own pleasure within their sex lives. One interview respondent, Solomon'sBride, who has never experienced an orgasm tells me, "I never have tried it myself manually […] I really am not sure about even trying that on my own. It seems odd to do that to myself. I don't object, but really don't know how either." She continues to tell me

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about an article she found on LustyChristianLadies about techniques for husbands to manually stimulate their wives: "I suppose I could probably do the same thing […] not quite sure how that would work though, I am not sure reading printed information or on the computer would be awkward during that time." Solomon'sBride's resistance to masturbation may reflect what blogger Judy calls the struggle for women to be "uninhibited" when it comes to sex. Yet even though Solomon'sBride isn't eager to masturbate, she does believe that God wants her to prioritize her sexual pleasure. "I am still working toward that," she tells me, "The information on LustyChristianLadies was helpful in that I learned that this is what God wants [for me to enjoy sex]. There was information on positions and things that may help so I have used some of that […] I'm not giving up." Evangelical women who tell stories of sexual awakening, like Solomon'sBride, express sexual entitlement, but do so by referencing God.

5.3.2   Pleasure and Marital Closeness

Many women who tell stories of sexual awakening focus on their sexual pleasure as good for their marriage relationship. One BTS member shares that her sexual awakening saved her marriage: "God stirred something in my heart. […] I began to realize that I had been neglecting my DH [dear husband] terribly. […] The more I read [on Christian sexuality websites], the more I desired to have this wonderful relationship with my DH." This website user does not mention her own personal satisfaction as the motivator for an improvement in her sex life. Similarly, Ros, the LustyChristianLadies reader who describes her awakening as a "birthday present" from God, says that "it truly enhanced our [her and her husband's] intimacy." She does not mention the personal pleasure that resulted from her awakening.

Most website users who talk explicitly about their sexual pleasure do so within the context of strengthening the marriage relationship. One LustyChristianLadies blogger writes, for example, "it's a good idea for both you and your husband to be knowledgeable about your clitoris. Know where it is and how it helps you orgasm." She encourages women to take charge of their sexuality by finding out what gives them pleasure but she justifies this pursuit as being good for the marriage relationship overall. Similarly, blogger Judy writes on her website IntimacyInMarriage.com that women should consider stimulating themselves during intercourse: "let's say a wife stimulates her clitoris with her fingertips as she and her husband are making love—the goal here isn't to hinder intimacy, it's to enhance it. The wife's orgasm is important to *both of them*" (emphasis added). Because evangelical beliefs about marital sex emphasize mutual satisfaction (see Chapter Three), women prioritize their pleasure for the good of the relationship.

Some evangelical women, reflecting broader beliefs about men's headship and women's submission, believe that their husbands should lead their sexual activities and ultimately be responsible for their sexual climax. Yet, these women find ways to prioritize their pleasure in their awakening stories. When a BTS member complains about her husband's inability to help her climax during intercourse, other members suggest that she take control of the situation: "bring him to BTS;" "buy a vibrator!;" or "guide his hand to what feels good." Christian sex toy owner, Holly, tells me, "Some toys are used separately, you might give your husband an orgasm with one or vice versa, but the most popular toys provide stimulation during the act of intercourse." Women come up with multiple ways to experience sexual pleasure that remain within their beliefs about what is okay for them to do sexually.

In describing what an awakening feels like, women sometimes describe the pleasure of intimacy with their husbands as being more important than the pleasure of sexual climax. These women define pleasure differently than those who incorporate masturbation into their awakening narratives. For Heidi85, a LCL reader whom I interviewed, awakening happened as the result of changing sexual circumstances, specifically marrying her second husband. In her first marriage, she did not enjoy or desire sex, and when she entered premarital counseling before her second marriage, she discussed her concern about having a low sex drive: "we stated our sexual expectations, and he and I were both worried that he would want sex more than I would. Once we were married, though, that was not the case. I have so much enjoyed the intimacy and closeness and fun of our sexual encounters. I usually want it more than he does." Heidi85 reported a high sex drive, yet she confided in me that she rarely achieves orgasm during sex. She told me that she read on LustyChristianLadies advice that she should consider masturbation in order to get to know what kind of stimulation makes her climax: "I read that you can't be easily pleased if you don't know how to please yourself through masturbation. I have definitely given it a try and occasionally I achieve orgasm, but I do not enjoy it at all." I asked Heid85 why she doesn't enjoy masturbating and she responds, "There is nothing pleasurable or exciting about laying in bed touching myself. […] I get pleasure from my husband." Like Heidi85, many women website users discuss the joys of pleasing their husbands sexually; sexual pleasure for these women takes many forms beyond the ability to orgasm.

5.4 CONCLUSION

The topic of women's sexual pleasure has gained traction in recent decades both within evangelical culture and society at large. For evangelicals who write about sex, women's pleasure is an integral component of discussing marital intimacy. Because these evangelicals believe that God wants both husband and wife to experience sexual satisfaction (see Chapter Three), they spend much time discussing ways for women to experience pleasure. They describe women as facing unique obstacles that get in the way of their sexuality—cultural, religious, and physical and emotional constraints. Evangelicals who write about sex, both in print and online, attempt to help women overcome these obstacles and often offer practical tips on ways for their bodies to become aroused so that they may enjoy physical intimacy with their husbands. Women who learn to experience sexual pleasure describe this experience as a sexual awakening. Using the structure of classic evangelical conversion narratives, women website users tell tales of overcoming sin and suffering by turning to their relationship with Jesus Christ. Their religious commitment transforms their lives: their attitudes, emotions, even their bodies.

Website users' emphasis on bodies—how women must overcome physical imperfections to experience physical pleasure—also reflects evangelicals' engagement with the body to make claims about individuals' self-worth. Throughout the 20th century (and into the 21st century), evangelical obsession with thinness and sexual chastity has connected the "visible body" with the "invisible soul" (Griffith 2004:28). As feminist and queer scholars have long noted, bodies are not "natural" in that they exist amidst a system of discourse that interprets bodily acts in specific ways, often reinforcing exclusion and inequality (Butler 1993). This chapter has

identified the discursive effects of stories that discuss the awakening of the sexual body for evangelical women.

Sexual awakening stories show how women construct multiple meanings of physical pleasure. Despite messages about what women's sexuality should be—either from the Christian community that downplays women's sexual expression or from secular culture which website users perceive as promoting an over-sexualization of women—women website users construct alternative meanings of sexual pleasure. For some, this means that they justify masturbating so that they can enjoy the sexual pleasure that God wants them to enjoy. For others, it means that they accept their sexual limitations but still manage to express their sexuality—to feel desire and desired—within their intimate relationships. Taken together, these multiple expressions of pleasure made visible in online religious communities helps reshape our sense of how women's sexuality can be constructed in evangelical settings.

On the one hand, my study suggests that women who tell sexual awakening stories exhibit *sexual agency* by using their relationship with God to justify sexual entitlement. Like feminist scholars of religion show, religious women's agency takes many forms; religious women have the ability to make choices and act in unexpected ways (Burke 2012). Evangelical women can exhibit agency even while upholding beliefs about women's submission by using their direct relationship with God (see Brasher 1998; Griffith 1997). Since God is the ultimate authority in their lives, the authority of their husbands is secondary. For women who tell sexual awakening stories, they learn to prioritize their own desires and find ways to articulate them. As Brereton (1991:xxi) writes of conversion narratives in the 19th and 20th centuries, "within the confines of a very tightly defined—and male originated—narrative convention, women found

surprising scope for the expression of feelings and aspirations." While remaining within male-dominated evangelical culture, women website users are able to find a distinct voice.

On the other hand, these stories illustrate what Schippers (2007:94) calls *hegemonic femininity*: "the characteristics defined as womanly that establish and legitimate a hierarchical and complementary relationship to hegemonic masculinity and that, by doing so, guarantee the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (see also Pyke and Johnson 2003). Evangelical website users construct Godly sexuality for women akin to what Rosalind Gill (2009) calls "compulsory (sexual) agency"—the contradictory notion that women feel social pressure to *choose* to improve their sex lives. To be "sexually-awakened" for evangelical women means to be sexual within a very specific, male-dominated context. Sexual awakening stories describe women as failing at awakening if they are too sexual (giving into secular culture) or not sexual enough (giving into religious culture). In doing so, they designate subordinate forms of femininity, what Schippers calls "pariah femininities" that contaminate the proper relationship between men and women.

The narrative form of sexual awakening stories limits how women interpret their sexuality. These stories suggest that women's bodies and the pleasure they experience are deeply connected to others—God and their husbands—and that they must balance their own needs with selfless acts that prioritize their marital relationships and family. This maintains gender imbalances between men and women and restricts women's sexual expressions. As the next chapter shows, gender hegemony allows men, but not women, to justify a wide range of sex practices.

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6.0   WHAT MAKES A MAN: JUSTIFYING NON-NORMATIVE SEX ONLINE

AngelBoy, a member of BetweenTheSheets.com, solicits advice from other members on a message board thread:

> After my anal awakening (discovering prostate pleasure), DW [dear wife] and I have been more adventurous in our intimacy, anally speaking. I think we're going to take it to the next level and go with a strap-on. Does anyone have any experience with this? […] We're both really excited but it's a LOT of information to digest.

We might imagine that most evangelicals would respond to AngelBoy with disdain since many are outspoken opponents of anal sex when it comes to gay men. On this thread, however, members congratulate him on his "awakening" and offer reviews of dildos and harnesses that they have tried. They offer support and personal stories of anal play.

This chapter examines how Christian sexuality website users construct masculinity within through two non-normative sex practices—pegging (the anal penetration of a man by a woman) and erotic cross-dressing (wearing women's clothing, especially lingerie, during sex). Although what counts as good and normal sex includes a broader range of acts today than in decades past (Attwood 2006; Giddens 1992), sex acts that challenge cultural signifiers of masculinity or femininity are consistently labeled as deviant by religious, medical, and legal authorities (Fausto-Sterling 2000; Meadows 2010; Nixon 2008). Therefore, men who desire these acts within the hegemonic masculine culture of contemporary American evangelicalism must find ways to reconcile their sexual interests with their status as Christian patriarchs.

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Shifts in evangelical masculinity have made possible new conversations by men about intimate issues, including sex (Messner 1993). The evangelical men's movement, the Promise Keepers, for example, emphasizes traits like compassion, expressing emotions, and developing close friendships with other men (Bartkowski 2004; Heath 2008). This movement, as well as evangelical self-help literature and other organizations like the ex-gay group Exodus International, encourages men to share their sexual struggles with each other, whether related to promiscuity, pornography, or same-sex attraction (Gerber 2011). Yet the saliency of what W. Bradford Wilcox (2004) calls "soft patriarchy" within contemporary evangelicalism means that evangelicals remain committed to heterosexuality and gender distinctions between men and women (Bartkowski 2001).

As R.W. Connell (1995:77) argues, hegemonic masculinity—the collective embodiment of social practices that ensure domination of men over women—operates not only by subordinating the feminine, but also by subordinating other forms of masculinity (see also Hocquenghem 1993). Yet even men who do not perfectly embody hegemonic masculinity benefit from what Connell calls the "patriarchal dividend" (79). Gay men and men of color, for example, may find ways to exert masculinity through a variety of "manhood acts" even when they cannot embody hegemonic masculinity that is distinctly heterosexual and white (Schrock and Schwalbe 2009). Jane Ward (2008) reveals the complex relationship between race and sexuality in her study of "str8"-identified white men who have sex with men who use archetypes of white masculinity to associate themselves with heterosexual culture. Similarly, in a study on ex-gay Christian men and their wives, Michelle Wolkimir (2009) shows how her respondents rely on norms related to heterosexual culture (love and monogamy) in order to justify their "mixed-orientation marriages" as normal and good. These men emphasize their socially-

acceptable traits in order to mitigate their deviant ones, revealing how masculinities interact with other factors like sexuality, race, and religion to ensure male privilege despite hierarchies among men.

In this chapter, I show how evangelical men and women support pegging and erotic cross-dressing as masculine acts by constructing gender using the relationship between a believer, spouse, and God. This construction of gender, what I call *gender omniscience*, relies on a spouse and God's privileged knowledge about one's "true" gender to ensure that even non-normative sexual practices are quintessentially heterosexual and gender normal. By constructing gender as relational and spiritual, these website users uphold existing evangelical beliefs while simultaneously extending their beliefs to encompass the sex acts in which they engage. Online discussions about these practices create alternative meanings beyond the dominant reading that they are marginal, extreme, and inappropriate. While participating in the sex they desire, these evangelicals do not admit to participating in "bad" sex; instead, they discursively restore standards of masculinity that privilege men and exclude non-heterosexuals from "good" and Godly sex.

6.1   NON-NORMATIVE SEX IN CONTEXT

6.1.1   Prevalence of Online Discussions

Although most evangelical sources that discuss sex for pleasure, including books, websites, and face-to-face programs, do *not* explicitly talk about non-normative sex, some do. Most print manuals do not, and the ones that do mention only anal sex or broadly labeled "fetishes." For the

18 Christian-owned online sex toy stores in my study, ten sell products explicitly intended for anal play. For the 18 online message boards or blogs, 12 discuss (though do not necessarily endorse) anal sex.[41] However content about vanilla sex acts or non-specified sex where the act is assumed to be penile-vaginal intercourse is far more common than content related to anal sex, or other non-normative sex practices.

Threads about non-normative sex on BetweenTheSheets.com, for example, make up a small, though not insignificant, percentage of overall threads on the site. Forums on this site fall under one of three categories; some host threads related to specific sex acts (e.g. "Oral Sex" and "Masturbation in Marriage" forums); some host threads on non-specified sex (e.g. "Attitudes about Sex" and "Praying for Our Marriages" forums); and some host threads for what I call theoretical sex, where members discuss hypothetical scenarios and general beliefs about sex (e.g. "Science of Sex" and "Theology of Sex" forums). Figure 15 illustrates the distribution of these forum categories.

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[41] I performed in-depth content analysis on a sample of websites in my study (n=12), to examine discussions about non-normative sex including, but not limited to, anal sex. In order to gauge the content of the remainder of the sites in my study, I performed a content search using the word, "anal," since anal sex is the most frequently discussed (and most easily labeled) non-normative sex act on the sites. Anal sex, when discussed on Christian sexuality websites, almost always describes an act in which a man penetrates a woman.
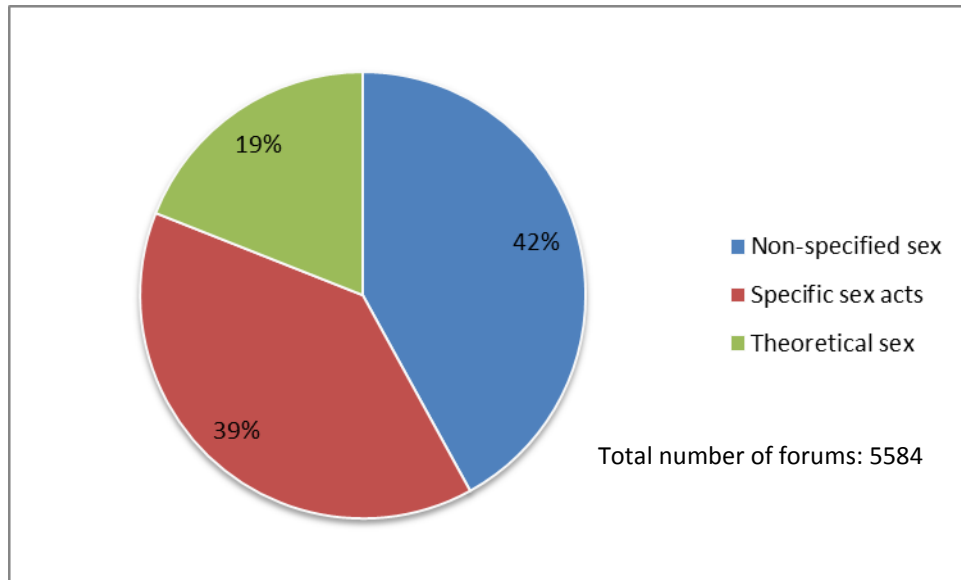
Figure 15. BetweenTheSheets.com distribution of married sexuality forum categories, October 2011

BetweenTheSheets.com users write about non-normative sex on several forums of the site, like on the "Activities and Games" forum (for users to discuss topics including sex toys, role-playing, and sex outdoors) and the "Good Idea/Bad Idea/Sin" forum (for users to debate whether or not sex acts or other behaviors within relationships are permissible in Christian marriages). Two forums are dedicated solely to discussing non-normative sex: the "All Things Anal" forum that discusses anal sex and the "Not the Norm" forum, where users can discuss activities like "adult nursing, foot jobs, breast sex, facials, bondage, [and] spanking." As Table 13 shows, threads that appear on the "Not the Norm" and "All Things Anal" forums comprise 12 percent of all threads that discuss specific sex acts. Discussions on these forums about a variety of sexual acts provide rich data for sociological analysis. For this chapter, I analyzed nine blog posts or threads that mention cross-dressing; 13 that mention pegging; and 30 that mention male anal play but do not explicitly use the word pegging.

Table 13. BetweenTheSheets.com distribution of threads in forums that discuss sex acts, October 2011

Forum title	Number of threads	Percentage of sample
Activities and Games	727	31
Intercourse and Positions	573	25
Masturbation in Marriage	268	12
Oral Sex	219	10
Not the Norm	153	7
Okay, Bad Idea, Sin?	128	6
All Things Anal	108	5
The G-Spot and Female Ejaculation	55	2
Hands On	46	2
Overall Sample	2277	100

BetweenTheSheets.com and the other websites in this study take great measures to moderate their sites, making it unlikely that I analyzed content posted by trolls (for an extended discussion on authenticity, see Chapter Four). Online discussions about non-normative sex acts take place among well-respected and frequent users of both BTS and LCL. For example, those who actively participate in the "All Things Anal" board on BTS, many of whom claim to engage in male anal play, are active elsewhere have good rapport with other members (indicated by joking and affirmative responses). The member introduced in the beginning of this chapter, AngelBoy, has posted over 1,000 comments on a variety of threads. One of the administrators of BTS writes sympathetically of men's cross-dressing in certain circumstances, and one LCL blogger writes supportively of pegging. Although these are minority views among evangelicals, my data reveal

that those who hold these beliefs are not described as marginal on the sites, nor are they simply flagged as provocateurs.

6.1.2 Prevalence of Non-Normative Practices

Although it is impossible to definitively gauge to what extent Christian sexuality website users engage in non-normative sex, CSIS data offer some insight into some of the non-normative sexual practices in which respondents engage. Over half of married respondents (51.8 percent) reported that they purchased at least one sex toy in the past 12 months, and Table 14 shows the types of sex toys they purchased.

Table 14. Types of sex toys purchased, CSIS married sample who purchased sex toys in past 12 months[42]

Sex toy type	Number of respondents	Percentage of sample
Vibrator	299	81.7
Penis ring	111	30.3
Erotic game	71	19.4
Dildo	70	19.1
Toy for anal play	40	10.9
Male masturbator	40	10.9
Blindfold	33	9.0
Handcuffs	28	7.7
Spanking toy	14	3.8

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[42] The percentage of sample was calculated based on the total number of respondents who purchased sex toys in the past 12 months (n=366), not the total number of types of sex toys purchased. This is because some respondents purchased more than one type of sex toy.

The vast majority (81.7 percent) purchased vibrators, perhaps indicating the acceptance and availability of vibrators in mainstream society (see Howard 2011). However, the use of manufactured objects during sex play is not necessarily sanctioned in contemporary society and may be considered non-normative (Rubin 1984; Segal 1994). Many evangelicals purchased toys other than vibrators as well, including penis rings, erotic games, and dildos.

CSIS married respondents report that they engage in anal sex less than other acts, but many respondents express interest in anal play. Figure 16 shows that the vast majority of respondents (94.1 percent) usually or always engage in penile-vaginal intercourse, compared to only 24.7 who usually or always engage in oral sex and only one percent who usually or always engage in anal sex.[43] About three out of four respondents report that they never engage in anal sex, yet as Table 15 shows, this does not necessarily mean that they are not at interested in it.
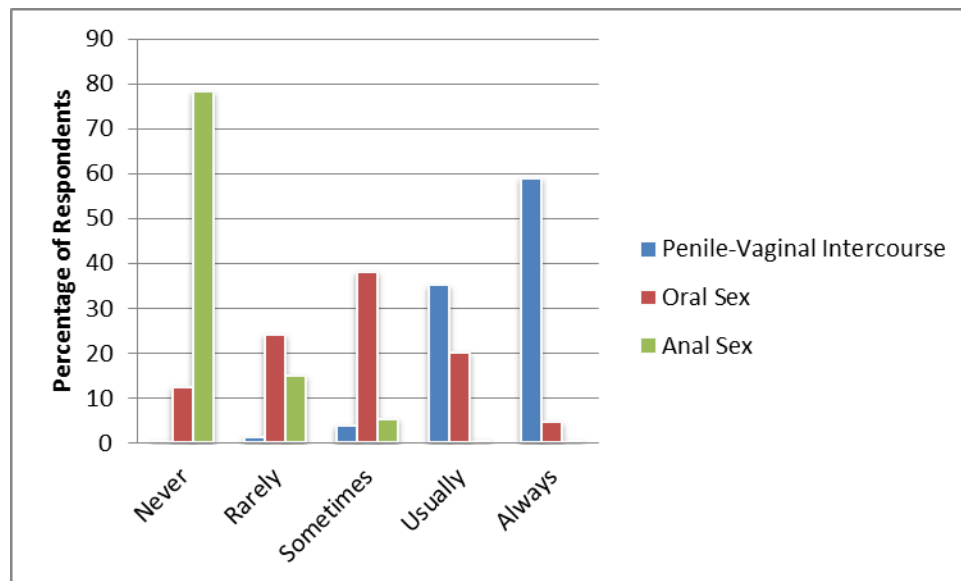
Figure 16. Frequency of sex acts, CSIS married sample

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[43] The CSIS asked respondents how often they perform and receive oral sex. Oral sex frequency for Figure 16 was calculated by taking the mean of both variables. There are not significant differences in the frequencies with which respondents perform and receive oral sex.

Table 15. Interest in active and passive anal sex by gender, CSIS married sample

Level of interest	Men		Women	
	Number of respondents	Percentage of sample	Number of respondents	Percentage of sample
Active anal sex				
Very appealing	66	19.70	11	2.96
Somewhat appealing	101	30.15	35	9.43
Not very appealing	63	18.81	50	13.48
Not at all appealing	105	31.34	275	74.12
Passive anal sex				
Very appealing	40	11.94	20	5.35
Somewhat appealing	87	25.97	55	14.71
Not very appealing	67	20.00	49	13.10
Not at all appealing	141	42.09	250	66.84
Total	335	100	375	100

Table 15 shows that about half of married male respondents (49.9 percent) report that active anal sex is at least somewhat appealing. However, far fewer women express interest in this act, with only 20.1 percent of female respondents indicating they find passive anal sex to be at least somewhat appealing. A smaller percentage of men and women express interest in anal sex in which a woman penetrates a man, or pegging (an act that, as I discuss below, is far more subversive than anal sex involving the man as penetrator).[44] Only 12.4 percent of female respondents find the act at least somewhat appealing, compared to a much larger percentage of

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[44] Although the CSIS did not include the word, "pegging," it did ask both male and female respondents about their interest in active and passive anal sex.

men (37.9 percent). In the following sections, I examine how Christian sexuality website users justify their interest in this act, as well as another controversial sex act, men's erotic cross-dressing.

6.2 GENDER-DEVIANT SEX: BENDING OR BREAKING THE RULES?

Both men and women who use Christian sexuality websites contribute to discourse about sex rules. Since evangelicals treat secular information about sex and sexuality with harsh skepticism, many have few standards by which to judge their own sexual interests. Therefore, the website users whom I interviewed and observed took evangelical advice about sex (found both online and in books) very seriously. At the same time, though, they applied the messages presented in books and on websites to their own unique sexual desires and experiences. As one reader of LustyChristianLadies.com, HiddenTreasure, told me in an interview, "I wasn't sure what was OK Biblically, but now I know." She goes on to say, "Some things are not Biblically defined and are left to us for prayer and figuring out what God would see as best in our own marriage beds." In other words, evangelical messages about sex are made meaningful in different ways for different couples.

Evangelicals categorize many sex acts as wrong without exception. For most CSIS questions about whether or not a sex act is wrong, most respondents selected either "always wrong" or "not wrong at all," indicating that their beliefs about many sex acts are inflexible. As reported in Chapter Three, a large majority of website users believe that sex is "always wrong" if between an unmarried man and woman (78.0 percent); two same-sex adults (87.7 percent); or if it involves pornography, even within marriage (64.1 percent). The vast majority of respondents

report that it is "not at all wrong" for married couples to engage in manual stimulation (98.6 percent), oral sex (96.2 percent), or to use a vibrator (92.1 percent).[45] And although many mainstream evangelical authors do not support anal sex (see Leman 2003; Rosenau [1994] 2002), a majority of survey respondents indicate that anal sex within marriage is "not at all wrong" (57.3 percent).

Yet website users confront a wide range of sexual experiences and desires for which boundaries of right or wrong are muddled. Pegging and cross-dressing are two sex acts that provoke mixed reactions from both male and female website users. One LCL reader, Lizzy99, brought up pegging when I asked her if she disagreed with anything posted by the LCL bloggers. She explains:

> Lizzy99: They're okay with pegging and although I'm not sure if it's [pegging] sinful or not, I'm not comfortable with it. They also have the philosophy that 'if the bible doesn't explicitly forbid something, then its ok' I think that works alot of the time, but don't think it's a blanket statement you can make about anything. God didn't forbid smoking pot, but I def[initely] don't think that he wants us there smoking pot.
>
> Kelsy: Can you elaborate on why you're not sure if pegging is sinful or not?
>
> Lizzy99: I just mean that it's such a controversial topic and I just don't know but I'm very uncomfortable doing it personally but I don't know that I think it would be wrong for others if it doesn't make them uncomfortable
>
> Kelsy: Why does it make you uncomfortable?
>
> Lizzy99: It seems too close to a homosexual act, but on the other hand, I know that oral sex is the main way that lesbians have sex so if I use that as the judge, then oral sex should seem wrong, which it isn't. I like to be feminine and my husband is very masculine and pegging seems to reverse those roles. I also think it would feel very weird wearing a strap on.[46]

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[45] The statistics reported for manual stimulation, oral sex, and vibrator use are for acts performed by a man and received by a woman. Results for questions about acts performed by a woman and received by a man are highly comparable, with the greatest difference reported for vibrator use where 87.9 percent report that it is "not at all wrong" when women perform this act.

[46] Exact online transcript except capitalization of I and word following a period.

Although difficult to interpret emotions in the online interview setting, Lizzy99 appears to express nervous ambivalence when it comes to pegging. When asked about her opinion of this sex act, she repeats "I don't know" and answers without punctuating her response (unlike her other responses where punctuation is used to reflect natural pauses and transitions in her thoughts). She opposes the act but cannot pinpoint exactly why, and so she tries out a few different reasons—it may signal homosexuality, it may reverse gender roles, and finally, it would "feel very weird" to wear a strap-on. Lizzy99, like many website users, struggle to fine clear boundaries of appropriate and inappropriate sex within marriage.

As Lizzy99 implies, the guidelines presented by most evangelicals who write or talk about sex leave open a vast space of permissible sex within Christian marriages (see Chapter Three for a complete discussion of evangelical rules about sex). As popular author, Kevin Leman (2003, 165) writes, "The Bible is amazingly free in what it allows and even encourages a married couple to do in bed." Put another way, one female LCL reader comments, "there are far more things that you *can* enjoy together, than those you cannot." That evangelicals can make decisions about their sexual lives that may differ from other couples draws upon the often-quoted Bible verse: "Marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled" (Hebrews 13:4, KJV). This logic allows couples to establish their own sexual interests as morally acceptable. Popular author, Shannon Ethridge (2008, 185), for example, explains, "as long as no harm is done and all is kept solely between consenting spouses, just about anything and everything in the bedroom can be considered perfectly normal." Reflecting this attitude that sexual "normalness" is subjective, one female LCL reader comments on a blog post about pegging, "I know for me, God has put a red flag on it" but then later says, "what is a 'sin' for one may not be a 'sin' for all." In other words, it is the responsibility of a married couple to choose appropriate sex acts for them.

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Despite the appearance of sexual permissiveness when it comes to marital sex, gender-subversive acts, like pegging and cross-dressing are highly questionable within evangelical culture. My findings suggest that website users (both men and women) are more likely to support pegging than erotic cross-dressing perhaps because prostate stimulation is gaining increasing visibility in mainstream culture through media that epitomize gender/(hetero)sexuality stereotypes like *Playboy* and *Cosmopolitan Magazine*. Erotic cross-dressing encounters more scrutiny on Christian sexuality websites than does pegging, in part because website users can use supposed "facts" of physical pleasure to justify pegging but must describe cross-dressing more subjectively. As one male BTS member asserts, "The prostate is wired into our orgasms and arousal centers." Statements like these imply that the physiology of sexual pleasure all but requires male anal play. Yet both the act of pegging and erotic cross-dressing violate gender expectations of sex because they remove men from their primary role as dominant penetrator (Segal 1994).

Some evangelicals use the argument that the marriage bed is "undefiled" to claim that non-normative sex is permissible within marriage. On the surface, these evangelicals justify non-normative sex by conflating married heterosexuality with gender normalcy. As one LCL reader puts it, even when it comes to pegging, "why assume a straight man having sex with his straight wife is doing something gay?" Similarly, a blogger on AffectionateMarriage.com responds to a reader's comment that anal sex sounds "too gay" to be performed by Christians: "Well this is just silly […]. The fact that homosexuals may (or may not) do something does not make it 'gay.' Having sex with someone of the same sex makes it gay." In other words, any sex act that takes place between a man and woman is heterosexual by default. Yet this oversimplifies the complex strategies that website users use to justify their gender normalcy to other users. Because gender

must be continually reproduced in social interactions (including sex), individuals must *do* gender in ways that make them intelligible as men or women so that the sex in which they engage is normative and heterosexual.

Evangelicals do this gender work because, despite the appearance of sexual permissiveness when it comes to marital sex, they view gender-subversive sex as highly questionable. As Pastor Mark Driscoll told a conference audience, "God created men and women to have different roles; it goes against God's design to have androgyny." An example of what Rubin (1984:163) calls the domino theory of sexual peril, sex acts that appear acceptable may be scrutinized if they can "'lead' to something ostensibly worse." Evangelicals are careful to maintain boundaries between themselves and any conduct that may signal homosexuality. Although authors of popular sex manuals tend not to discuss gender-deviant sex, implicitly nearly all would condemn it. For example, one of the earliest and most well-known sex manuals, Tim and Beverly LaHaye's *The Act of Marriage* ([1976] 1998:242), does not discuss non-normative sex, but firmly supports a traditional understanding of gender, listing "feminine dominance" as a possible cause of men's erectile dysfunction and instructing women to strive for "submissive grace." While website users do not uniformly support men's headship and women's submission, most believe that sex acts that violate gender norms are forbidden by God. As one member of BTS argues on a thread about pegging, "It would seem a potential danger for a man to take on a receptive role […] and one in which would be contrary to the parameters of […] which God created men to inhabit." Even evangelicals who are quite permissive when it comes to marital sex are wary of acts that challenge typical notions of femininity and masculinity.

6.3   WHAT MAKES A MAN: SPOUSE, GOD, AND GENDER OMNISCIENCE

To maintain their beliefs about gender, website users interested in non-normative sex associate alternative meanings with these acts. Although pegging and cross-dressing are quite different, website users construct what I call *gender omniscience*, or the knowledge of one's "true" gender based on a triangulated relationship between the self, spouse, and God, to prove their gender normalcy and justify these acts. Instead of basing gender on nature or science, as many evangelicals do (Burke and McDowell 2012; DeRogatis 2009), these evangelicals present the omniscience of spouse and God as the ultimate authority on gender. For example, website users downplay claims that naturalize penile-vaginal intercourse that other evangelicals may use to oppose homosexuality and emphasize the marital intimacy that results from a wide range of sex acts, including pegging and cross-dressing. This maintains the appearance of essentialism but actually constructs gender as subjective and based on believers' different experiences and understandings of God (see also Gerber 2008).

The privileged relationship among the self, spouse, and God draws from the triangular nature of erotic relationships as most notably described by Eve Sedgwick (1985) who notes that dyadic erotic relationships are typically mediated by a third party. For Sedgwick, who draws on the work of René Gerard and Sigmund Freud, this means that a man who desires a woman may desire her because of his rivalry with another man, thereby inadvertently strengthening a (quasi-erotic) bond between himself and that other man. The erotic triangle I present differs from these paradigms since God is a unique actor in the triangle—He is, at least theoretically for evangelicals, desired equally and with full awareness by both the self and the spouse. Additionally, the self's relationship with God exists simultaneously with his/her relationship with the spouse; it is neither a cause nor effect of the primary erotic relationship. Yet, like Sedgwick's

erotic triangle, the primary sexual relationship between a man and woman is deeply affected by their relationship to a third party—God. Although the relationship between the self and God is not explicitly sexual, it contains erotic elements (see DeRogatis 2009; Griffith 1997).

Using gender omniscience to justify non-normative sex upholds evangelical beliefs about gender and sexuality, thereby reifying heterosexuality and maintaining a power imbalance between husbands and wives. My analysis of Christian sexuality websites shows that the men who use the sites are much more likely to talk about their interests in non-normative sex than their female counterparts. Despite gender equal language when talking about sexual pleasure (see Chapter Three), men are much more likely to disclose a personal interest in these acts. While many women engage in discussions that talk frankly and explicitly about sex, they tend not to express personal interest in pegging, cross-dressing, or other gender-subversive acts. Inherent in website users' discussions of these practices is a gender imbalance that gives voice to men's, not women's, unusual sexual desires.

6.3.1   The Spouse's Omniscience

In discussing their interest in pegging and men's cross-dressing, website users assert a wife's gender omniscience: the extraordinary nature of a married relationship and the ability to know her husband's "true" gender identity. As one administrator of BTS writes on a thread about erotic cross-dressing, "there is a difference between sharing an odd fetish with one's spouse when it is part of their sexual relationship, and a man wearing women's clothing anywhere else." That is to say, a marriage is unlike other relationships. As a member of BTS writes to a woman questioning her husband's interest in pegging, "you know him best." One reader of LCL asserts her special knowledge about her husband when she adamantly states, "My DH [dear husband] is 100% man

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throughout, but he loves when I peg him." Similarly, a BTS member shares his experience with pegging using a well-rated dildo that "looks like a penis:" "My DW [dear wife] knows that what I wanted was my prostate massaged and had NOTHING to do with being homosexual." The spouse, like God, occupies a privileged space when it comes to knowing a person's sexual and gendered identity.

According to popular author, Kevin Leman (2003:45), "A fulfilling sex life is one of the most powerful marital glues a couple can have." Drawing from Leman and other popular authors who insist that pleasure is an integral part of a successful marriage as God created it, website users emphasize the intimacy that results from men's pleasure when justifying non-normative sex. One BTS member responds to a thread questioning the practice of pegging: "As for what the woman gets out of it I REALLY enjoying seeing the look on DH's [dear husband's] face and knowing I am able to give him that much pleasure." Women readers of LCL share similar comments: that pegging "has brought us closer than ever;" "our sex life is now so much more fun; " and "I do not need to be ashamed of pleasing my husband the way we both desire."

For these website users, fulfilling their husbands' deepest sexual desires is part of an extraordinary intimacy awarded to married couples. In a thread about cross-dressing on BTS, one member comments, "My dh [dear husband] enjoys wearing my underwear from time to time […]. I don't have a problem with it […]. It is an intimate act, drawing us together in another way." I asked one BTS member, Wagner, what he thought about sexual role-play involving a spouse taking on the role of the opposite gender (Wagner had mentioned his interest in learning more about what Christians thought about sexual role-playing). He responds,

> I think that would be a tough one that the individuals would have to decide. I guess it has to come down to motive. If you are doing it because you just want to try something kinky with your spouse because it would be exciting then I really think that's OK. But if the motivation is to satisfy a secret desire for homosexual

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activity then there would be a problem. The former would actually increase intimacy between a couple because it would require a lot of trust.
.

Like Wagner, another BTS member suggests that engaging in non-normative sex signals a strong marriage, not the opposite. He writes about pegging: "This is the sort of stuff for mature, open, other-focused relationships. I'd not see this working or being a good idea in relationships where there is a lot of stress, selfishness, fear, or legalism." This website user implies that being able to successfully engage in non-normative sex signals a relationship that reflects God's intent for marriage (that it be mature, open, and other-focused).

Although website users appear to emphasize consent equally for both men and women, evangelicals tend to value submissive qualities of wives and promote the belief that it is the responsibility of a spouse to sexually fulfill her partner. As popular authors, Ed Wheat and Gaye Wheat ([1977] 2010:39) write, "the husband delights in a loving wife who is submissive and responsive." This means that men who want to engage in pegging or cross-dressing already have substantial leverage over their wives. Evangelical culture, reflecting broader social norms when it comes to sex (see Burkett and Hamilton 2012) pressures women to accommodate their husbands' (sexual) interests but does not place similar expectations on men. Many women members of BTS who engage in active anal sex with their husbands express reservations about the practice, despite their participation. One member writes, "I am finally at the stage where I can willingly do this for him because I know how much he enjoys it, although I still struggle from time to time with the moral correctness of it." Another member expresses a similar sentiment, sharing how she eventually agreed to participate in pegging because it pleases her husband: "It's not my cup of tea, but over [the course of] our marriage, I've slowly opened up to a lot of things to bless [my husband]." Of course, many men who use Christian sexuality websites also make compromises and use the sites, in part, to find advice on ways to better

pleasure their wives. The difference between men and women who use these sites is that women are less likely to express sexual interests that challenge normative gender roles.

Paradoxically, then, using gender omniscience to justify non-normative sex simultaneously maintains men's privileged status within Christian marriages while at the same time gives some power to women over their sexual relationships. Website users question the motives of non-normative sex acts when a wife's consent is not obtained. They are especially wary of non-normative solo sex play, since lack of spousal participation could signal an unhealthy attachment to these acts. For acts that could be considered gender deviant, like pegging and cross-dressing, website users always question whether or not an individual has made his desire to participate in these acts apparent to his spouse. In discussing a man's secret fantasies to wear his wife's lingerie, BTS members respond with harsh concern: they question his heterosexuality and gender identity, advise him to avoid acting on his impulses without talking to his wife, and probe about why he has such a desire that he wants to remain hidden. One member instructs, "either talk to her [wife] about it, or let it go. But don't indulge in secret." A wife's approval, therefore, is necessary to confirm gender normalcy and justify non-normative sex.

Yet because gender omniscience relies on the triangulated relationships between a man, his wife, and God, website users often encourage men to turn to God rather than dismiss certain sex acts that their partners have refused. Using one's relationship with God to influence the marriage relationship, one BTS member shares, "one thing I've just recently started doing is praying for our sex life. I never thought it would have such an effect […]. We still haven't done it [pegging] but my wife has opened up a lot." Another member offers advice for a member whose wife refuses to peg: "Just give your DW [dear wife] some time and pray about it. […] My

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DW was a little hesitant but I do believe now she enjoys pleasing me." These stories do not take into account a wife's feelings of responsibility to participate in sex proposed by her husband, but rather assume that God has convinced a spouse to engage in these acts, masking male privilege.

6.3.2 God's Omniscience

Men who use Christian sexuality websites draw upon God's approval of sexual intimacy and pleasure to make decisions about the appropriateness of non-normative sex. As popular authors, Clifford and Joyce Penner ([1973] 2003:327) write, "God is in the bedroom—whether you invite him there are not." They instruct their readers to acknowledge God's role in their sexual lives: "offer a quiet inner prayer, thanking God for those pleasant, exciting, satisfying feelings. Recognize that God approves of these feelings." Evangelicals who believe that God is an active participant in their sexual lives believe that, as devout believers, God will tell them whether or not a sex act is sinful. As popular authors Farrell and Farrell (2006:164) suggest to couples who are questioning the appropriateness of any particular sex act, "If you are in doubt, pray it out. God will show you how to respond to your mate." If pious men or women have sex outside of God's design, they'll be able to sense it. Using feelings associated with their prayer life, website users make claims about God's gender omniscience in order to justify the sex they desire as being normal and good.

In threads about cross-dressing, posters set the tone by describing their relationships with God. On one BTS thread, for example, a member discloses his urge to wear women's lingerie and writes, "I have prayed over this a lot and I feel like God is working on me, showing me the ugly parts of my heart." Other members respond with encouragement in resisting his urges; none suggest that his desires may be acceptable. Even website users who may condone cross-dressing

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in some circumstances will not validate the practice if presented as disrupting the relationship between a believer and God. As one longtime BTS member writes in another thread about cross-dressing, "I have no clear Biblical stance that irrefutably tells you that wearing your bride's underwear is considered [sin], but I will also not talk you out of feeling guilty if God is the one poking at your spirit." As this user puts it, evangelicals should pay attention to anything "poking at the spirit," or making one question the sexual acts in which he engages.

On the other hand, website users are much more likely to approve of non-normative sex if a poster articulates his belief that God approves of this type of sex for him. A member of BTS puts it this way, writing to another member who is interested in but cautious about pursuing pegging, "God knows your heart and the real reasons that you want this." Similarly, one reader of LCL writes of the way he senses God approval of pegging through his prayer life: "I was talking [to] God about it AGAIN and I really felt the Lord say to me 'I love what you and [your] wife have together.'" In another thread, a member defends his interest in cross-dressing by showing that he has read the Bible for guidance:

> While it may be a bit naughty, I don't think I am violating any OT [Old Testament] passages. […] I am not rejecting my role as a man…and [I am] not wanting to be a woman. […] My conscience is clear here.

Website users rely on their intimate relationships with God to make decisions about appropriate or inappropriate sexual conduct.

Because they believe in a deeply personal relationship with God, some website users refrain from passing judgment about others' marginal sexual practices.[47] In response to one reader's negative comment about pegging on LCL—"That is a complete role reversal and I can't

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[47] The gender omniscience of God draws on a broader argument used by website creators to justify Christian websites that discuss sexually-explicit themes. They suggest that they are not responsible for the sins of others, and it is up to individual website users to use the sites in a way that upholds Christian principles (see Chapter Four).

imagine that God would be pleased with that!"—a site contributor responds, "I would caution any of you who presumes to know what God is thinking. Just because you are uncomfortable with a particular act, doesn't mean it's inherently wrong or sinful." When it comes to gender normalcy especially, evangelicals rely on God's omniscience in order to determine whether or not a couple may engage in pegging or cross-dressing and maintain their maleness or femaleness. As one member of BTS writes, "the Bible says that man looks to outward appearance; while God looks to the heart." Online discussions that discuss cross-dressing and pegging reveal that at stake in gender normalcy is not proving an objective truth related to gender appearances, but rather proving a piety aligned with God's authority.

6.4   CONCLUSION

This chapter shows how evangelicals use the Internet to make meaning of sex in ways different than what is presented in popular evangelical literature. Men who are interested in non-normative sex take their religious beliefs about sexuality to a logical extreme—extending evangelical discourse that emphasizes mutual pleasure and sexual permissiveness within marriage in order to justify sex acts that are seemingly inappropriate within an evangelical context. My findings show that men who are interested in pegging and cross-dressing justify their interest by relying on the gender omniscience of their spouse and God. In proving that both God and their spouse *know* that they are gender normal, these website users uphold standards of their faith related to gender and (hetero)sexuality and ensure their masculine status.

For religious persons, beliefs about gender and sexuality rely on more than nature and biology. Faith in the divine requires individual and collective interpretations about God's will.

To describe religions like conservative Protestantism, Catholicism, Mormonism, and some sects of Islam as supporting gender essentialism fails to capture the *super*natural dimension of religious beliefs. As anthropologist T.M. Luhrmann (2012:66) writes, "People learn to recognize God's voice through rules that are socially taught and collectively shared, but also in ways that are private, individual, and unique." She compares recognizing God's voice to learning to taste wine—there are guidelines for how to do it but individual experience and understanding matter greatly. This chapter shows that the dynamic and personal ways in which evangelicals relate to God influences how they make sense of their gender and sexual identities. Gender omniscience, like essentialism, perpetuates the belief that gender is natural and fixed (and by extension, so too is heterosexuality), but importantly, it reveals how this belief comes into being through the lived experiences of individuals' sexual lives.

I speculate that men discuss their interest in non-normative sex on Christian sexuality websites more frequently than women because there is more at stake for men to express interest in these acts. The validation of their sexual interests from other believers helps these men maintain their privileged status as straight and Godly men. Online discussions about non-normative sex reflect what Foucault ([1978] 1990) calls "the speaker's benefit," where those who are able to talk about sex within a repressed culture appear free from that repression. The very act of talking about topics that are marginalized and taboo within broader evangelical culture (male anal play, for example) is a way to gain hold over those subjects and imbue them with alternate meanings. The Internet allows its users to interactively reconstruct what it means to be an evangelical man—to collectively offer feedback and credibility for beliefs about gender and sexuality that accommodate both their religious framework and their unique sexual interests.

The logic presented in online evangelical discussions—that justification beyond heterosexuality is required for certain gender subversive acts—shows that gender, and specifically hegemonic masculinity, are not *inevitable* products of heterosexuality. Evangelical men who are interested in non-normative sex must actively work to achieve their gender status separate from, though closely related to, their heterosexuality in order to make the sex in which they engage "normal" and "masculine." This supports what many theorists have argued: that gender and sexuality are distinct categories of analysis (Rubin [1984] 1999). It pushes feminist and queer thinking further by urging us to examine the multiple ways in which gender and sexuality interact to both normalize and subvert identities. For the evangelicals in this study, asymmetrical and binary gender categories are used to justify sex play that may confuse these categories and level gender imbalances.

My findings reveal that justifying non-normative sex does not challenge male dominance within contemporary evangelical culture. Research shows that many evangelicals are symbolically traditional but pragmatically egalitarian (Smith 2000)—that is, their everyday lives appear gender-equal even when they support men's headship and women's submission. Influenced by feminist rhetoric and the practical demands of modern life like the need for a two-person income, many evangelicals adjust their expectations for gender so that women can work outside of the home and men can be loving caretakers (Stacey 1990; Wilcox 2004). In contrast, my study offers an example of beliefs that appear progressive but perpetuate gender hierarchies. Even though evangelicals use gender-equal language to discuss sexual pleasure (see Chapter Three), evangelical men are uniquely privileged to talk about, gain support for, and fulfill their sexual interests. Messages that suggest that women are as much in control of their sexual lives as

men mask how male privilege is reinforced (Burkett and Hamilton 2012; Gill 2009; Messner 1993).

Evangelicals who insist that non-normative sex can be normal *for them* illuminate the ways in which heteronormativity and male privilege are wrought with tensions and contradictions (O'Brien 2008). While participating in the sexual play they desire, these evangelicals do not admit to any deviance, queerness, or effeminacy; instead, they discursively restore standards of masculinity and femininity that privilege men and exclude non-heterosexuals from "good" and Godly sex. Yet, evangelicals who engage in discursive normalizing of non-normative acts inadvertently reveal the unstable ground on which an evangelical sexual logic stands. Turning to online communities to gain religious traction for their sexual interests, website users rely on subjective and collective experiences to make sense of their sexual lives. In this way, they undermine an anti-queer position based on supposedly objective "truth." My findings show how religious beliefs and practices may reproduce *and undermine* heteronormativity, masculinities, and other forms of "normal."

7.0   CONCLUSION

In this dissertation, I show how evangelicals use the Internet to shape, interpret and make meaning of sexual pleasure. I trace how website creators and users establish a sense of credibility on Christian sexuality websites by relying on familiar evangelical tropes that justify talk of sex within a religious setting. Along with popular evangelical authors who write about sex, they establish new guidelines for sexual behavior. This new evangelical sexual logic combines traditional and modern ideas: belief in an uncompromising truth about who can have sex (only married, monogamous, heterosexuals), and belief in subjective sexual experiences that depend upon individual choice and taste.

Lay evangelicals extend, reinterpret, and apply this sexual logic in online discussions on message board and blogs. Although some scholars assume that evangelical messages about sexuality simply reproduce gender inequality and homophobia, I argue that online discussions about evangelical sexuality both enable *and* limit women's agency and reinforce *and* challenge heteronormativity. Both women's discussions of sexual pleasure and men's interest in gender-deviant sex practices appear to be outside hegemonic understandings of men as dominant penetrators and women as submissive actors (Jackson and Scott 2007; Segal 1994). Yet, evangelicals who use Christian sexuality websites find ways to integrate women's multiple experiences of pleasure and men's interest in non-normative sex into an evangelical framework. They maintain religious beliefs that privilege men and heterosexuality while simultaneously

incorporating feminist and queer language into their talk of sexuality—encouraging sexual knowledge, emphasizing women's pleasure, and justifying marginal sexual practices within Christian marriages.

7.1   THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

My findings problematize distinctions between normal or subversive, empowered or oppressied, public or private; virtual or "real," and sacred or profane. In doing so, they join a growing body of theoretical and empirical scholarship that challenges social binaries (see Bender 2003; Hoyt 2007; Mack 2003; Plummer 2003). The ways in which religious persons use the Internet to make sense of their sexuality complicates binary categories analyzed in the study of sexuality, gender, and religion.

7.1.1   Theorizing Normal/Subversive

My dissertation complicates distinctions between normal and subversive in studies of sexuality. Scholars of critical heterosexuality have shown that individuals in a wide variety of circumstances construct their gendered and sexual lives as "normal" (Rosenfeld 2009; Ward 2008; Wolkimir 2009). Homonormativity, for example, describes gay and lesbians' pursuits of sexual decency by highlighting qualities of gender conformity, monogamy, and domesticity (Duggan 2002). Although normative sexuality is often taken-for-granted in contemporary society, it must actually be continually defined and defended in order to counter the existence of non-normative sexualities (Foucault [1978] 1990; Warner 1999). In other words, increased

visibility for sexual minorities requires that those who have a stake in maintaining what counts as normal and good come up with new ways to do so (Canaday 2011; Halley 1993). Evangelicals are well-known for engaging in this task, but evangelicals who insist that non-normative sex can be normal *for them* illuminate the ways in which heteronormativity specifically, and privilege more generally, is wrought with tensions and contradictions (O'Brien 2008).

My findings suggest that Christian sexuality website users who justify non-normative sex within their marriages rely on their identities as heterosexual (the relationship with their spouse) and pious (their relationship with God) to validate their gender normalcy—what I call gender omniscience. As Raine Dozier (2005:304) argues in her work on transgender men, establishing an essentially male or female self (what she calls sex) expands the boundaries of gendered behavior: "When sex is ambiguous or unconvincing, there is an increased reliance on highly gendered behavior, when sex is obvious, then there is considerably more freedom in behavior." Some evangelicals make obvious their gender normalcy—by constructing gender omniscience—in order to expand the types of sexual behaviors that are permissible for them. These evangelicals re-imagine what counts for permissible and forbidden sex, proper manhood and womanhood, and faithful or faithless behavior. They transform what is typically thought of as subversive, deviant, or "bad" into something that is normal and "good."

Critical scholarship on the center rather than the margins is compelling within queer studies because, as David Halperin (2003:343) writes about what makes a project queer, it has the ability "to startle, to surprise, to help us think what has not yet been thought" (see also Schilt and Westbrook 2009; Warner 1999). Because normal is naturalized and therefore supposedly unmarked by social processes, scholarship that captures the ways in which normal is constructed and contradicted helps to dismantle the privilege associated with it. Like the label Gerber (2008)

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gives to the practices of evangelical ex-gays, the construction of gender omniscience allows some evangelical website users to participate in sex acts that are best described as "queer-ish." Gerber uses this term to describe the ex-gay movement's use of a queer logic that dismantles gender and sexual binaries in order to make sexual change possible and in order to develop the slippery identity category of "ex-gay" (see also Erzen 2006; Wolkomir 2006). Similarly, these users appear quite queer: by insisting on gender's subjectivity, they challenge gender essentialism. They also engage in seemingly "queer" sex acts like pegging or men's cross-dressing. Yet like their ex-gay counterparts, they continue to reify heteronormativity and exclude those who identify as queer from receiving God's approval.

Not surprisingly, Christian sexuality website users consistently condemn sexual acts between two same-sexed bodies. Because gender omniscience requires heterosexuality, queers are automatically excluded from "good" sex since they cannot be gender normal. By relying on the relationship between a believer, his wife, and a God who is presumed to condemn homosexuality to make claims about who can engage in certain sexual acts and who cannot, evangelicals dismiss the idea that sex performed by queer bodies can be normal or good. Evangelicals who justify non-normative sex must uneasily separate sexual acts from sexual identities and gendered bodies in order to label some as deviant and sinful and others as normal and godly. By allowing discussions of non-normative sex to take place within an evangelical framework, these websites reveal the creative ways in which sexual norms are constructed, regulated, and expanded, and also reveal important fissures in evangelical logic about sexuality.

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7.1.2 Theorizing Women's Empowerment/Oppression

Talk of women's empowerment and oppression is commonplace in contemporary society, where mainstream media depict secular, western women as in control of their sexuality and free from gender inequality and non-western and/or religious women as victims of their religious and cultural circumstances (Burkett and Hamilton 2012; Constable 2003; Mahmood 2009). To counter characterizations of women as simply oppressed, a wide range of studies have shown how women in a variety of circumstances, from women living in developing countries (Rodriguez 1994) to American women who comply with beauty standards of thinness and femininity (Kwam & Trautner 2009), feel empowered. For women who participate in conservative religions like evangelicalism, Islam, and Mormonism, a large body of scholarship has shown how they interpret religious doctrine or practices in ways that make them feel empowered in their everyday life (Beaman 2001; Brasher 1998; Griffith 1997; Read & Bartkowski 2000).

While important in showing how women are agentic even when their experiences differ from modern understandings of gender equality, focusing too intently on women's empowerment may, in the words of Chad Bauman (2008:8), "blind us […] to the fact that 'agents' who act to combat one form of oppression may at the same time be preserving and validating another." Highlighting only the progressive results of women's efforts (empowerment) may mask the ways in which power and inequality continue to function in these women's lives (see also Chong 2008). Instead, feminist scholarship on American society today is posed with the task of examining how women's experiences are shaped by contradictory structural and cultural forces (indicative of *postfeminism*) that, on the one hand, may allow women to feel empowered in

various aspects of their everyday lives, but on the other hand, produce "implicit pressures" that influence their choices (Burkett and Hamilton 2012:817).

Christian sexuality websites make visible both women's empowerment and oppression. Women express gratitude, joy, and even "empowerment" upon finding Christian sexuality websites since they provide faith-based, sex-positive messages geared towards them. These websites accommodate their religious values alongside their sexual desires and interests, insisting that, contrary to popular stereotypes, conservative religious beliefs are compatible with sexual pleasure. In doing so, they draw upon feminist ideas about sexual entitlement: women who tell sexual awakening stories talk about how they learn to prioritize and achieve their own physical pleasure. Yet, in order for their sexual pleasure to be legitimate, it must connect to male authorities in their lives—God and their husbands—so that women must continually balance their own desires with their marital and spiritual relationships. In this way, Christian sexuality websites participate in what Attwood (2006:87) describes as efforts to "recuperate women's sexual pleasure in the service of heterosexual relationships" (see also Jackson and Scott 2007). For evangelical women, heterosexual marriage provides the means and end for women's pleasure.

The contradictory messages of sexual entitlement and selflessness that are implied in women's sexual awakening stories serve to situate women within an evangelical culture that continues to perpetuate gender hegemony. As Gill (2009:362, 348) writes about conflicting messages about women's sexuality that are presented in the popular magazine, *Glamour*,

> It is not simply a matter of *Glamour* containing a myriad of different discourses that 'happen' to be in conflict, but of the contradictions doing ideological work. […] The contradictoriness of women's magazines may in fact be a central part of the coherence of their ideological message.

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Reflecting a postfeminist sentiment that combines anti- and pro- feminist messages, *Glamour* encourages women to make choices about their sexuality that ultimately reflect traditional femininity, what Schippers (2007) calls *hegemonic femininity*. Similarly, Christian sexuality websites are places where women make sense of sexual pleasure in multiple ways without challenging male privilege within their sexual relationships. To portray these women as either empowered or oppressed fails to capture their complex realities, in which their sexualities exist within certain constraints.

7.1.3   Theorizing Public/Private, Virtual/Real, Sacred/Profane

Evangelicals who look to online forums in order to make sense of their sexual lives challenge binaries between public and private, virtual and real, and sacred and profane. Their doing so reveals the myth that sex acts are entirely private, excluded from the rest of the social world (Carpenter 2005; Foucault [1978] 1990; Gagnon and Simon [1973] 2005; Plummer 2003). Website users portray their marriage bed as a crowded one: their choices appear to be (or at least attempted to be) influenced by God (who celebrates sexual pleasure for married Christians), Satan (who thwarts sexual pleasure for married Christians), and the websites themselves, which act as what Goffman ([1959] 1990) calls "reference groups" in order to monitor these desires and behaviors through feedback and providing credibility for some sex acts while condemning others.

On the surface, websites appear to be places where evangelicals make public their sexual interests and pleasures. Yet, they also serve to shape what evangelical sex should be. As Marjo Kolehmainen (2012:979) writes about published sex advice columns, "while they are making different sexualities and sex practices public, they are simultaneously playing a significant role in

the regulatory system that opens up the subject of sex to discursive scrutiny." Such discursive scrutiny plays out in the ways in which men and women justify different sex practices as benefiting one's marital relationship and relationship with God. Women who use the sites tend not to discuss their interests in unusual, extreme, or marginal sex practices, but instead to talk extensively about ways to learn the logistics of orgasms through masturbation or intercourse. Men, on the other hand, do talk about non-normative sex and receive much support from other website users. This discrepancy between the content of men's and women's virtual talk has implications for what is possible or appropriate for evangelicals' real lives. These discussions make meaning of men and women's sexuality differently—portraying women as being "stuck" learning to try to orgasm while men experiment with multiple sexual interests.

Yet, the regulatory function of these websites does not diminish their benefits for men and women. Gerber (2011) connects Foucault's theories of discipline and surveillance with evangelical ex-gay ministries that, like Christian sexuality websites, regulate how individuals interpret bodily desires and actions. Importantly, she points out the *pleasures* involved in this kind of discipline—ex-gays in her study call it "closeness," "caring," "encouragement," and "accountability." So too do users of Christian sexuality websites consider these regulatory spaces to be ultimately for their own good and well-being. These website users strive to comply with their religious faith; with the help of these online communities, they learn how to live a Christian life when it comes to their sexuality. They insist that religion and sexuality are compatible, not in tension, and participate in the construction of what religious compliance means when it comes to evangelical sexuality, helping to direct, shape, and interpret online discussions.

While users of Christian sexuality websites continually emphasize their individual relationships with God, these online communities offer collective interpretations of this private

and personal God. For religious persons, the Internet has some unique parallels to believers'

sense of the divine. Like God, the Internet is "out there," difficult to definitively describe, and

impossible to capture in scope. And, like how evangelicals describe communicating with God

through prayer, the Internet is also extremely intimate and personalized—it is usually not shared

with those who are physically present and it relies on individual motivation and initiation. The

Internet is both elusive and personalized, uniquely situated for religious meaning-making.

7.2   DIRECTIONS OF FUTURE RESEARCH

In closing, I suggest three avenues for future research within religious, sexualities, and Internet

studies. The first is to consider how evangelicals engage in new debates about pornography. The

second is to examine how persons who practice conservative religions but do not use Christian

sexuality websites understand sexual pleasure. The third is to broadly interrogate the impact of

the Internet on religion and sexuality.

First, because my project excludes websites that focus on what evangelicals deem to be

negative aspects of sexuality, it misses those that seek to help believers avoid pornography. Anti-

porn online ministries, like *XXX Church*, help individuals "recover" from pornography addiction

and offer multiple resources to help prevent viewing pornography online. Like a number of

other evangelical-run sites, they offer Internet filters that individuals can download for free to

block access to sexually explicit content. While there are many non-religious Internet filters

available for individual use, Christian filters usually have the unique feature of sending reports to

"accountability partners," or individuals who help porn addicts with their urges to view

pornographic sites. Importantly, such filters exist so that Christian men and women can continue

to use the Internet, without the risk of sin. Although evangelicals' opposition to pornography is well-known (Bernstein 2010; West 1987), there are no studies of how evangelicals deal with unprecedented access to sexually-explicit material online. Research on the online resources for evangelicals to avoid pornography would provide further insight on the relationship between religion, gender, sexuality, and the Internet.

Second, many conservative faith groups allow sex intended for pleasure within heterosexual marriages. It would be instructive to examine how Muslims, Latter-day Saints, Catholics, and Orthodox Jews come to understand sex for pleasure within the confines of their religion's teachings. I find some Catholics and Mormons using Christian sexuality websites but I cannot speak to how their experiences differ from their evangelical counterparts. Further, my study lacks data on how evangelicals who do not use Christian sexuality websites understand the interaction of their religious faith and their sexual desires and practices. Additional research is necessary in order to learn how believers "offline" make sense of sexual pleasure.

Finally, there is a need for a greater general understanding of how the Internet affects the relationship between religion and sexuality. It is generally understood that today, more than ever before, digital media profoundly shapes how individuals make sense of their lives. There are burgeoning bodies of literature on digital religion—or how people use digital media, like the Internet, to construct religious practices in new, mediated ways (Campbell 2013)—and on the relationship between new technologies and sexuality—how digital practices like cybersex or sexting transform the very definition of sex (Attwood 2006). Yet, there is no scholarship on how the increasing ubiquity of the Internet impacts how religious persons make sense of sexuality. Future research could consider whether certain kinds of digital media influence people's attitudes about sexuality in particular ways; how religious groups regulate the kinds of sexual practices

made possible by digital media; and how online communities, even those seemingly unrelated to religion or sex, shape how people understand religious beliefs and sexuality. This dissertation engages in some of these questions, but more research is needed in order to adequately examine and theorize the complex relationship between religion, sexuality, and the Internet.

APPENDIX A

LIST OF WEBSITES

(The following list includes those Christian sexuality websites (names are pseudonyms) mentioned in this dissertation.)

AffectionateMarriage.com

BetweenTheSheets.com (BTS)

GardenFruit.com

GodOfLove.com

LovingBride.com (LB)

LovingGroom.com (LG)

LustyChristianLadies.com (LCL)

MaritalSex.com (MS)

MarriageOfMaribel.com (MOM)

SexyBride.com

StoreOfSolomon.com (SOS)

APPENDIX B

OBSERVATION TEMPLATE

Date of Event:

Name of Event:

Location:

Brief Description:

Number of Participants:

How did I hear about the event?

Any known sponsors of event?

Description of Venue:

First impression:

How are the topics being discussed?

→ What kind of sex-positive/sex-negative language is used?

→ Any noticeable hostility or dissent?

→ Other displays of emotions?

→ Personal stories or abstract statements:

→ Who is discussing the topics?

→ Are there any references to other websites, books, or other sources?

APPENDIX C

SURVEY AND INTERVIEW RECRUITMENT MESSAGE

(With the permission of website administrators, the following statement appeared on seven Christian sexuality websites: BetweenTheSheets.com, LovingBride.com, LovingGroom.com, LustyChristianLadies.com, MaritalSex.com, MarriageOfMaribel.com, StoreOfSolomon.com.)

Hello [WEBSITE NAME]:

My name is Kelsy Burke and I am a graduate student at the University of Pittsburgh. I am conducting research that explores how Christians use the Internet to talk about issues related to sexuality. If you are 18 years old or older, I'd like to ask you to participate in my study by completing an online questionnaire.

You don't need to disclose your real name, and no identifying information will be recorded. Your participation is completely confidential and after you submit your responses, they are stored securely in a password protected database. There are no risks or benefits for participating in this study.

Here are the details:
The questionnaire will take you about 15 minutes to complete and will ask you basic demographic questions (e.g. age, race, marital status, education). It will also ask you questions about your religious affiliation and participation, Internet use, sexual practices, and sexual attitudes.

To access the questionnaire, click HERE and enter the accesscode: [SITE-SPECIFIC PASSWORD]

Thank you for your help and I look forward to hearing from you!

Kelsy

This research study is being conducted by Kelsy Burke, Ph.D. candidate at the University of Pittsburgh. It has been approved by the University of Pittsburgh Institutional Review Board (IRB) and is being overseen by Distinguished Professor and Chair of Sociology at the University of Pittsburgh, Kathleen Blee. For more information about Kelsy, check out her website HERE.

(The following statement also appeared on BetweenTheSheets.com and LustyChristianLadies.com to recruit interview participants.)

I would also like to conduct one-on-one online interviews with participants who complete the questionnaire. If you participate in an online interview, you will be compensated with a $20 Amazon.com gift certificate.

The interview will last about two hours and will take place at a time that is convenient for you on a secure, instant messaging forum that is accessible with a password on my WEBSITE. I will ask you a series of open-ended questions about how you use the Internet to find resources about sexuality and a few questions about your beliefs about sexual and your religious faith.

If you are interested in participating in an online interview, please email me at kburke.research@gmail.com or contact me via my WEBSITE after completing the online questionnaire.

ONLINE INTERVIEW TEMPLATE

Introduction
Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview.

If either of us gets disconnected for any reason, let's wait a few minutes to see if the other person is able to log back on, and if not, we'll be in touch over email.

Before we begin, I have to remind you that participating in this interview is totally voluntary and you don't have to answer any questions you don't want to. You can also end the interview at any time.

I'm going to start by asking you some questions about your personal history related to faith and sexuality, and then I'll move on to questions about how you use the [NAME OF WEBSITE].

Personal history
Did you grow up in a Christian household and/or a Christian church?

Can you tell me about the first time you remember hearing about sex?

Can you describe what you learned?

How you responded to it?

Can you tell me about the first time you remember hearing about sex within a Christian context (maybe within a church or by talking with Christian family members or friends)?
　　→ Can you describe what you learned?
　　→ How you responded to it?

What positive messages have you heard about sex within a Christian context (within a church, or by talking to Christian family members or friends)?

What negative messages have you heard about sex within a Christian context?

Would you say that you've received more positive than negative messages about sex in a Christian context?

Present context
Does the church that you attend now ever talk about sex?
→ What kinds of messages?

Do you ever talk about sex with friends or family members other than your spouse?
→ What do you talk about?
→ How frequently does it come up?
→ Have you ever talked about [WEBSITE NAME]?
→ Do they know that you read/participate in [WEBSITE NAME] Do you know if any of them read/participate in [WEBSITE NAME]?

Do you talk about sex with your spouse?
→ Is there anything off-limits for you to talk about?
→ How frequently does it come up?

Does read/participating in [NAME OF WEBSITE] have any effects on your real-life? Please describe.

Have you attended any real-life event for Christians to learn about or discuss issues related to sexuality?

What websites (other than NAME OF WEBSITE) books, or other resources do you use for information about sex?

Site Reaction
What do you like about [NAME OF WEBSITE]?
→ Can you tell me why you continue to read the site?

What don't you like about [NAME OF WEBSITE]?
→ Do you disagree with any other members/readers/contributors about issues talked about on the site?

(If married) Questions about spouse:
→ Does s/he know that you read the site? What's his/her reaction?
→ Does s/he ever read the site? With you or alone?

Survey Follow-ups (as necessary)

Wrap-Up
I don't have any more questions for you. Do you have any questions for me before we wrap-up?

Initial Membership
How did you first find out about BTS?

How long ago was that?

Did you become a member right away?

Why did you decide to join?

How long after you joined did you first post a comment?

Frequency of use questions:
How often do you check the message boards?

How long do you spend checking them in a single sitting?

Do you usually post a comment every time you check the boards?

How many comments have you made total (approximately) or what member level are you?

About how many times have you been an OP?

What board topics do you typically spend the most time reading? The least?

Type of use questions:
What board topics do you typically spend the most time commenting on?

It's impossible to post on every thread: what types of threads are you likely to comment on? (ones that resonate with your personal experience, ones that make you mad, ones that make you sad?)

Member relationships
Do you have "friends" or "foes"? How do you decide who should be friends or foes?

Do you have private message conversations with any BTS members? How did those start? Or, why not?

Do you have any other interaction with BTS members? Facebook friends? Have you met IRL?

Is your husband/wife on BTS? More or less active than you?

Are any of your friends on BTS? How do you know that they are members?

D.2   LCL READERS ONLY

How did you first find out about LCL?
    → How long ago?

How often do you read the site?

Do you follow the new posts as they are added to the site?

Do you ever spend time searching for or browsing topics that interest you?
    → What are those topics?

Do you participate in the polls conducted on the sites?
    → How do you decide which polls to participate in?

Do you read the comments section or just the main post for a given topic?

Do you submit posts to the comments section ever?
    → For which topics?
    → How often?

Would you continue to follow the site if men were allowed to freely comment on the site?
    →Why or why not?

APPENDIX E

CHRISTIANITY, SEXUALITY, AND THE INTERNET SURVEY (CSIS)

Consent to Act as a Participant in a Research Study
Title: Christianity, Sexuality and the Internet
Principal Investigator: Kelsy Burke, University of Pittsburgh

You are being asked to participate in a research study in that explores how Christians use the Internet to talk about sexuality. This study helps researchers understand how people create online communities, and how virtual interactions enable or prohibit conversations about sexuality and sex practices. You are being invited to take part in this research study because you viewed a Christian website that allows its users to discuss sexuality.

People invited to participate in this study must be at least 18 years of age.

If you decide to take part in this research study, you will be asked to participate in two online questionnaires, and a one-on-one online interview using a secure, instant messaging forum.

Questionnaire:
This online questionnaire takes approximately 15 minutes to complete and includes basic demographic questions, questions about religious beliefs and Internet use, and questions about sexual background, preferences, and attitudes.

Interview:
A one-on-one online interview will take place on a secure, instant messaging forum. This interview will be scheduled at a convenient time for the participant sometime after the participant completes the online questionnaire. It will last between one and two hours. Participants will be asked questions about how their religious beliefs relate to sexuality.

There are no risks or benefits associated with participation in this study.

You will be compensated in the form of a $20 online gift certificate for your participation in all components of this study.

This research study will not disclose any identifying information. All responses are confidential and will be stored on the investigator's password protected computer. Only the investigator has access to your responses.

Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary. Whether or not you provide your consent for participation in this research study will have no effect on your current or future relationship with the University of Pittsburgh.

You may withdraw at any time your consent for participation in this research study. To formally withdraw your consent for participation in this research study you should send an email to the principal investigator of this research study at the email address listed at the top of this page.

Your decision to withdraw your consent for participation in this research study will have no effect on your current or future relationship with the University of Pittsburgh.

****

VOLUNTARY CONSENT
By checking, "I agree," in the box below, I acknowledge that the above information has been explained to me and all of my current questions have been answered.

I understand that I am encouraged to ask questions about any aspect of this research study during the course of this study, and that such future questions will be answered by the investigator listed on the top of this page at email address given.

I understand that I may always request that my questions, concerns or complaints be addressed by the investigator.

I understand that I may contact the Human Subjects Protection Advocate of the IRB Office, University of Pittsburgh (1-866-212-2668) to discuss problems, concerns, and questions; obtain information; offer input; or discuss situations that have occurred during my participation.

I understand that I may print this page if I would like a copy of this consent notice for my records.

1. I agree to participate in this research study.
I agree

2. I attest that I am at least 18 years of age.
Yes

3. In what year were you born?
_____

Select a username
Please select a username for your participation in this research study. This username does not need to resemble your real name or your email address.

4. Enter your username here.
_____

Basic Demographic Information
In this section, you will be asked a series of question about your age, race, gender, marital status, household and occupation.
5. If you live in the United States, in which state do you reside. If you don't live in the U.S., skip to question #6.
_____

6. If you live outside the United States, in what country do you live? If you live in the U.S., skip to question #7.
_____

7. What is your gender?
Male
Female

8. What is your race?
White/Caucasian
Black/African American
Latino/Hispanic
Asian
Native American or Pacific Islander
American Indian
Multiracial
Other

9. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
Did not complete high school
High school graduate
Some college
Associate's degree
Bachelor's degree
Graduate or professional degree

10. Are you employed? If no, skip to question #13.
Yes
No

11. Are you employed full-time or part-time?
Full-time
Part-time

12. What is your occupation?
_____

13. How many children do you have? (including biological, adopted, and step-children)
_____

14. Please list the number of people living in your household and specify their relationship to you.
_____ _____

15. What is your relationship status?
Married
Engaged
In long-term relationship
Single
Divorced
Widowed

If you are married, engaged, or in long-term relationship, your partner will be referred to as (P) throughout this survey.

Religious Affiliation and Activities

In this section, you will be asked a series of questions about your religious preferences and church-related activities.

16. What is your religious preference?
Protestant
Catholic
Jewish
Muslim
No religion
Some Other Religion_____

17. If your religious preference is Protestant, what is your specific denomination?
Nondenominational
Assemblies of God
Baptist
Methodist
Lutheran
Episcopal
Presbyterian
Pentecostal
Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)
Seventh Day Adventist
United Church of Christ
Other_____

18. How often do you attend religious services? (including services, sermons, bible studies at a church)
Never
Less than once a year
About once or twice a year
Several times a year
About once a month
2-3 times a month
Every week
Several times a week

19. How often does (P) attend religious services? (including services, sermons, bible studies at a church)
Never
Less than once a year
About once or twice a year
Several times a year
About once a month
2-3 times a month
Every week
Several times a week

20. How often do you participate in church-related activities? (including bible studies at a location other than a church, church sponsored events; church sponsored support groups)
Never
Less than once a year
About once or twice a year
Several times a year
About once a month
2-3 times a month
Every week
Several times a week

21. How often does (P) participate in church-related activities? (including bible studies at a location other than a church, church sponsored events; church sponsored support groups)
Never
Less than once a year
About once or twice a year
Several times a year
About once a month
2-3 times a month
Every week
Several times a week

22. Of the five people who are closest to you, how many of them are part of your church community? (skip if you do not consider yourself a part of a church community)
0
1
2
3
4
5

23. Compared to you, how similar in religious beliefs are your closest friends?
Very similar
Somewhat similar
Somewhat different
Very different

24. Compared to you, how similar in religious beliefs are your closest family?
Very similar
Somewhat similar
Somewhat different
Very different

Internet Use
In this section, you will be asked a series of questions about how frequently you use the Internet and the types of websites you typically view.

25. Not including time spent online for work or school, how do you usually access the Internet? (select all that apply)
Personal desktop
Personal laptop
Work desktop
Work laptop
Smart-phone

26. Excluding time spent on the Internet for your job or school, when you use the Web, where is the computer you use typically located?
Home
Work
Library
Coffee shop
Other _____

27. Not counting time spent e-mailing for your job or school, about how many hours per week do you spend sending and answering electronic mail (e-mail)?
_____

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28. Not counting e-mail or time spent on the Internet for your job or school, about how many hours per week do you use the Web? (Include time you spend visiting regular web sites and time spent using interactive Internet services like chat rooms, Usenet groups, discussion forums, bulletin boards, and the like.)
_____

29. Not counting email or time spent on the Internet for your job or school, what percentage of Internet use involves viewing pornographic websites?
0%
1-10%
11-20%
21-30%
31-40%
41-50%
51-60%
61-70%
71-80%
81-90%
91-100%

30. What percentage of Internet use, excluding e-mail and job or school related Internet use, involves viewing non-pornographic websites that allow for adults to discuss issues related to sexuality and sex practices or for adults to purchase erotic toys?
0%
1-10%
11-20%
21-30%
31-40%
41-50%
51-60%
61-70%
71-80%
81-90%
91-100%

31. Of those websites you view that allow for adults to discuss sexuality or for adults to purchase erotic toys, what percentage are explicitly Christian? If the answer is 0%, skip to the next page.
0%
1-10%
11-20%
21-30%
31-40%
41-50%
51-60%
61-70%
71-80%
81-90%
91-100%

32. Have you viewed any of the following Christian sexuality websites/online stores? (select all that apply)

33. If you view Christian sexuality websites or online stores that are not included in the previous question, what are those sites?
_____

34. Which of the following Christian sexuality websites/online stores do you view most frequently?

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35. Are you employed by or the owner of an online store that sells sex toys?
Yes
No

36. Are you the moderator, oversight group (OG) member, or responsible for the creation and/or maintenance of any website that allows for Christians to read about or discuss sexuality?
Yes
No

Sexual Behavior
In this section, you will be asked a series of questions about your sexual history; the kinds of sexual practices in which you engage, and any products you purchase to enhance those sexual practices.

37. About how often did you masturbate in the past 12 months? (if never, skip to question #39)
Never
Less than once a month
About once a month
2-3 times a month
About once a week
2-3 times a week

38. Do you feel guilty after you masturbate?
Always
Usually
Sometimes
Rarely
Never

39. How many sex partners have you had since your 18th birthday? (if 0, skip to question #49)
_____

40. Since your 18th birthday, if you had sex partners other than (P), indicate all categories that apply to them.
Boyfriend/girlfriend
Finance
Former spouse
Close friend
Coworker
Acquaintance
Casual date, including one night stand
Person you paid for sex
Person who paid you for sex

41. Since your 18th birthday, have your sex partners been…
Exclusively male
Exclusively female
Both male and female

42. How many sex partners have you had in the past 12 months? (if 0, skip to #49)
_____

43. About how often did you have sex during the past 12 months?
Less than once a month
About once a month
2-3 times a month
About once a week
2-3 times per week

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44. In the past 12 months, was one of your sex partners (P)? (if no, skip to #49)
Yes
No

45. When you have sex with (P), how often do you perform oral sex on him/her?
Always
Usually
Sometimes
Rarely
Never

46. When you have sex with (P), how often does he/she perform oral sex on you?
Always
Usually
Sometimes
Rarely
Never

47. When you have sex with (P), how often did you have vaginal intercourse?
Not applicable
Always
Usually
Sometimes
Rarely
Never

48. When you have sex with (P), how often do you have anal intercourse?
Always
Usually
Sometimes
Rarely
Never

49. In the past 12 months, did you buy any erotic toys? (if no skip to #53)
Yes
No

50. In the past 12 months, what kind of sex toys did you buy? (select all that apply)
Vibrator/Clitoris massager
Dildo
Strap-on dildo
Anal beads
Prostrate massager
Butt plug
Male masturbator
Penis ring
Blindfolds
BDSM (handcuffs, paddles, whips)
Other _____

51. In the past 12 months, did you buy sex toy(s) from websites that identify as Christian? (if no, skip to #53)
Yes
No

52. What percentage of sex toys purchased in the past 12 months came from an online store that is explicitly labeled as Christian?

Sexual Preferences
In this section, you will be asked a series of questions about your reaction to different sexual practices in which you are the primary actor.

All questions on this page assume consenting adults (over 18).

53. Do you consider vaginal intercourse to be…
Very appealing
Somewhat appealing
Not appealing
Not at all appealing

54. Do you consider using a dildo or vibrator to be…
Very appealing
Somewhat appealing
Not appealing
Not at all appealing

55. Do you consider performing oral sex on a partner to be…
Very appealing
Somewhat appealing
Not appealing
Not at all appealing

56. Do you consider passive anal intercourse (being penetrated with penis or erotic toy) to be…
Very appealing
Somewhat appealing
Not appealing
Not at all appealing

57. Do you consider active anal intercourse (penetrating your partner's anus with penis or erotic toy) to be…
Very appealing
Somewhat appealing
Not appealing
Not at all appealing

Sexual Behavior
In this section, you will be asked a series of questions about your reaction to different sexual scenarios between typical adult men or women.

All questions on this page assume consenting adults (over 18).

58. Do you consider sex between two unmarried adults to be…
Always wrong
Almost always wrong
Wrong only sometimes
Not wrong at all

59. Do you consider sex between two unmarried adults of the same-sex to be…
Always wrong
Almost always wrong
Wrong only sometimes
Not wrong at all

60. Do you consider an unmarried man or woman masturbating to be…
Always wrong
Almost always wrong
Wrong only sometimes
Not wrong at all

61. Do you consider a married man or woman masturbating to be…
Always wrong
Almost always wrong
Wrong only sometimes
Not wrong at all

62. Do you consider a married couple masturbating together to be…
Always wrong
Almost always wrong
Wrong only sometimes
Not wrong at all

63. Do you consider an unmarried man or woman viewing pornography to be…
Always wrong
Almost always wrong
Wrong only sometimes
Not wrong at all

64. Do you consider a married couple viewing pornography together to be…
Always wrong
Almost always wrong
Wrong only sometimes
Not wrong at all

65. Do you consider an unmarried man stimulating a woman's genitals with his hand(s) to be…
Always wrong
Almost always wrong
Wrong only sometimes
Not wrong at all

66. Do you consider an unmarried woman stimulating a man's genitals with her hand(s) to be…
Always wrong
Almost always wrong
Wrong only sometimes
Not wrong at all

67. Do you consider a married man stimulating his wife's genitals with his hand(s) to be…
Always wrong
Almost always wrong
Wrong only sometimes
Not wrong at all

68. Do you consider a married woman stimulating her husband's genitals with her hand(s) to be…
Always wrong
Almost always wrong
Wrong only sometimes
Not wrong at all

69. Do you consider an unmarried man performing oral sex on a woman to be…
Always wrong
Almost always wrong
Wrong only sometimes
Not wrong at all

70. Do you consider an unmarried woman performing oral sex on a man to be…
Always wrong
Almost always wrong
Wrong only sometimes
Not wrong at all

71. Do you consider a married adult man performing oral sex on his wife to be…
Always wrong
Almost always wrong
Wrong only sometimes
Not wrong at all

72. Do you consider a married adult woman performing oral sex on her husband to be…
Always wrong
Almost always wrong
Wrong only sometimes
Not wrong at all

73. Do you consider an unmarried man having anal sex with a woman to be…
Always wrong
Almost always wrong
Wrong only sometimes
Not wrong at all

74. Do you consider a married man having anal sex with his wife to be…
Always wrong
Almost always wrong
Wrong only sometimes
Not wrong at all

75. Do you consider a married man using a dildo/vibrator to pleasure his wife to be…
Always wrong
Almost always wrong
Wrong only sometimes
Not wrong at all

76. Do you consider a married woman using a dildo/vibrator to pleasure her husband to be…
Always wrong
Almost always wrong
Wrong only sometimes
Not wrong at all

77. Do you consider a married couple using artificial contraceptives (including birth control pills, condoms) to be…
Always wrong
Almost always wrong
Wrong only sometimes
Not wrong at all

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CSIS CODEBOOK

COLLECTOR

USERNAME
Enter your username here.

BIRTHYR
Please enter your year of birth.

AGE
2011-Birthyr

AGECAT
1   18-25
2   26-35
3   36-45
4   46-55
5   56+

GLOBAL[48]

If you live outside the US, in what country do you reside?

1 US
2 Canada
3 Caribbean and Latin America (Brazil, Jamaica, Trinidad, Belize, Mexico,   Dominican Republic, El Salvador)
4 Europe (UK, Netherlands, Germany, Ireland, Finland, Sweden, Holland, Croatia, Ise of Man, Norway)
5 Asia (China, Japan, Korea, Cambodia, Phillipines, Guam, Kuwait, Jordan)
6 Africa (Zimbabwe, South Africa, Zambia, Nigeria, Malawi)
7 Australia/New Zealand

US

0 Does not reside in US
1 Resides in US

STATE[49]

If you live in the United States, in which state do you reside?

0 Does not reside in US
1 West (WA, OR, CA, MT, ID, NV, WY, UT, CO, AZ, NM, AK, HI)
2 Midwest (ND, SD, NE, KS, MN, IA, MO, WI, IL, MI, OH, IN)
3 Northeast (PA, NY, NJ, ME, NH, VT, MA, CT, RI)
4 South (DE, OK, TX, AR, LA, KY, TN, MS, AL, FL, GA, NC, SC, WV, VA, MD, DC)

GENDER

What is your gender?

0 Female
1 Male

RACE

What is your race? (check all that apply)

1 White/Caucasian
2 Latino/Hispanic
3 Black/African American
4 Asian
5 Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
6 American Indian
7 Multiracial or multiple races selected
8 Other

---

[48] Region codes based on UN Statistics Division Regions Groupings.

[49] Region codes based on US Census.

WHITE
0   Non-white
1   White

EDU
What is the highest level of education you have achieved?
1   Did not complete high school
2   High school graduate
3   Some college
4   Associate's Degree
5   Bachelor's Degree
6   Graduate or professional degree

EMPL
Are you employed?
0   No
1   Yes

FTPT
If you are employed, are you employed full-time or part-time
0   Not employed
1   part-time
2   full-time

JOBTITLE
What is your occupation?
Open-ended

CHILD
How many children do you have? (Including biological, adopted, and step-children)
0
1
2
3
4
5
6   More than 5

MARSTAT
What is your current relationship status?
1   Married
2   Engaged
3   In long-term relationship
4   Single
5   Divorced
6   Widowed

MARRIED
0   Not married
1   Married

MARYEAR
If you are currently married, in what year did you marry your spouse?
2012   Not currently married

YRSMARRIED
2012-MARYEAR

MARRIEDCAT
0   Not married
1   Married 1-5 yrs
2   Married 6-15 yrs
3   Married 16-30 yrs
4   Married longer than 30 yrs

REL
What is your religious preference?
If you answered, "some other religion," please specifiy.
1   Evangelical Protestant
2   Mainstream Protestant
3   Catholic
4   LDS/Mormon
5   Jewish
6   Other Faiths
7   No religion

EVANG
0   Not evangelical
1   Evangelical

DENOM

For those who are affiliated with evangelical denominations.

0   Not evangelical
1   Nondenominational
2   Assemblies of God
3   Baptist
4   Pentecostal
5   7th Day Adventist
6   Write in/Other

OTHERDENOM

If you answered Other in the Previous Question (Protestant), please specify your denomination.

ATTEND1

How often do you attend religious services?

0   Never
1   Less than once a year
2   About once or twice a year
3   Several times a year
4   About once a month
5   2-3 Times per month
6   Every week
7   Several times a week

ATTEND2

How often do you participate in church-related activities?

0   Never
1   Less than once a year
2   About once or twice a year
3   Several times a year
4   About once a month
5   2-3 Times per month
6   Every week
7   Several times a week

PATTEND1

How often does your partner attend religious services?

0   Never
1   Less than once a year
2   About once or twice a year
3   Several times a year
4   About once a month
5   2-3 Times per month
6   Every week
7   Several times a week

PATTEND2

How often does your partner participate in church-related activities?

0   Never
1   Less than once a year
2   About once or twice a year
3   Several times a year
4   About once a month
5   2-3 Times per month
6   Every week
7   Several times a week

COMM

Of the five people who are closest to you, how many of them are a part of your church community?

FRIEND

Compared to you, how similar in religious beliefs are your closest friends?

1   Very different
2   Somewhat different
3   Somewhat similar
4   Very similar

FAM

Compared to you, how similar in religious beliefs are your closest family?

1   Very different
2   Somewhat different
3   Somewhat similar
4   Very similar

EMAIL

Not counting time spent e-mailing for your job or school, about how many hours per week do you spend sending and answering electronic mail (e-mail)?

1   Less than 1 hr
2   Between 1 and 6 hrs
3   Between 7 and 12 hrs
4   Between 13 and 18 hrs
5   Between 19 and 24 hrs
6   Between 25 and 30 hrs
7   More than 30 hhrs

WEBTIME
Not counting e-mail or time spent on the Internet for your job or school, about how many hours per week do you use the Web?
1   Less than 1 hr
2   Between 1 and 6 hrs
3   Between 7 and 12 hrs
4   Between 13 and 18 hrs
5   Between 19 and 24 hrs
6   Between 25 and 30 hrs
7   More than 30 hhrs

PORN
Not counting e-mail or time spent on the Internet for your job or school, what percentage of Internet use involves viewing pornographic websites?
0   0 %
1   1-10%
2   11-20%
3   21-30%
4   31-40%
5   41-50%
6   51-60%
7   61-70%
8   71-80%
9   81-90%
10   91-100%

PORN2
0   No porn
1   Some porn

SEXWEB
What percentage of Internet use, excluding e-mail and job or school related Internet use, involves viewing non-pornographic websites that allow for adults to discuss issues related to sexuality and sex practices or for adults to purchase erotic toys?
0   0 %
1   1-10%
2   11-20%
3   21-30%
4   31-40%
5   41-50%
6   51-60%
7   61-70%
8   71-80%
9   81-90%
10   91-100%

CHRISTIANWEB

Of those websites you view that allow for adults to discuss sexuality or for adults to purchase erotic toys, what percentage are explicitly Christian? If the answer is 0%, skip to the next page.

0	0 %
1	1-10%
2	11-20%
3	21-30%
4	31-40%
5	41-50%
6	51-60%
7	61-70%
8	71-80%
9	81-90%
10	91-100%

SITECOUNT

How many sites viewed (25 total, with option of Other)

(Have you viewed any of the following Christian sexuality websites/online stores?)

SITETYPE

(Have you viewed any of the following Christian sexuality websites/online stores?)

1	Only Message board/blog/other
2	Only Store
3	Message board/blog/other AND Store

OWNSTORE

Are you employed by or the owner of an online store that sells sex toys?

0	No
1	Yes

WEBADMIN

Are you a moderator, oversight group (OG) member, or responsible for the creation and/or maintenance of any website that allows for Christians to read about or discuss sexuality?

0	No
1	Yes

MBFREQ

About how often did you masturbate in the past 12 months?

0	Never
1	Less than once a month
2	About once a month
3	2-3 times a month
4	About once a week
5	2-3 times a week
6	Every day

MBGUILT
Do you feel guilty after you masturbate?
0   Does not masturbate
1   Never
2   Rarely
3   Sometimes
4   Usually
5   Always

TOTALNUMPTNR
How many consensual sex partners have you had since your 18th birthday?

SEXCAT
0   0 Partners
1   1 partner
2   2-4 partners
3   5-9 partners
4   10 +

TOTALCATPTNR
Indicate all categories that apply to the sex partners you've had since your 18th birthday.
0   Has not had sex
1   Someone(s) other than spouse
2   ONLY spouse(s) (including former spouse)
3   Both 1 and 2

SEXWORK
Has paid for sex
0   Has not paid for sex
1   Has paid for sex

GENDERPTNR
Since your 18th birthday, have your sex partners been...
0   Have not had sex
1   Exclusively male
2   Exclusively female
3   Both male and female

HETERO
0   Have not had sex
1   Partners have NOT been exclusively opposite-sexed
2   Partners have been exclusively opposite-sexed

YRNUMPTNR
How many sex partners have you had in the past 12 months?

SEXFREQ
About how often did you have sex during the past 12 months?
0   Did not have sex in past 12 months
1   Less than once a month
2   About once a month
3   2-3 times a month
4   About once a week
5   2-3 times a week
6   Almost daily

YRCATPTNR
In the past 12 months, was one of your sex partners your spouse, fiancé, or long-term partner (P)?
0   Did not have sex in past 12 months
1   No
2   Yes

ORALPERFORMFREQ
When you have sex with (P), how often do you perform oral sex on him/her?
0   Has not had sex with partner in past 12 months
1   Never
2   Rarely
3   Sometimes
4   Usually
5   Always

ORALRECEIVEFREQ
When you have sex with (P), how often does he/she perform oral sex on you?
0   Has not had sex with partner in past 12 months
1   Never
2   Rarely
3   Sometimes
4   Usually
5   Always

PIVFREQ
When you have sex with (P), how often do you have vaginal intercourse?
0   Has not had sex with partner in past 12 months
1   Never
2   Rarely
3   Sometimes
4   Usually
5   Always

ANALFREQ
When you have sex with (P), how often do you have anal intercourse?
0   Has not had sex with partner in past 12 months
1   Never
2   Rarely
3   Sometimes
4   Usually
5   Always

SEXTOYPURCH
In the past 12 months, did you buy any erotic toys?
0   No
1   Yes

VIB
Vibrator/clitoral massager
0   Did not purchase
1   Did purchase

DILDO
0   Did not purchase
1   Did purchase

ANAL
Anal beads/butt plug/prostate massager
0   Did not purchase
1   Did purchase

MLMB
Male Masturbator
0   Did not purchase
1   Did purchase

PRING
Penis Ring
0   Did not purchase
1   Did purchase

BLIND
Blindfold
0   Did not purchase
1   Did purchase

CUFF
Handcuff
0   Did not purchase
1   Did purchase

SPANK

Spanking toys (paddles, whips)

0   Did not purchase
1   Did purchase

GAME

Erotic games

0   Did not purchase
1   Did purchase

MISCTOY

Other toy not listed

0   Did not purchase
1   Did purchase

OTHERTOY

If you answered "other" in the previous question, please specify.

CHRISTIANTOY

What percentage of erotic toys purchased in the past 12 months came from website(s) that are explicitly Christian?

0   0 percent
1   Approximately 25 percent
2   Approximately 50 percent
3   Approximately 75 percent
4   100 percent

PIVAPPEAL

Do you consider vaginal intercourse to be...

1   Not at all appealing
2   Not very appealing
3   Somewhat appealing
4   Very appealing

VIBAPPEAL

Do you consider using a dildo or vibrator to be...

1   Not at all appealing
2   Not very appealing
3   Somewhat appealing
4   Very appealing

ORALPERFAPPEAL
Do you consider performing oral sex on a partner to be...
1   Not at all appealing
2   Not very appealing
3   Somewhat appealing
4   Very appealing

ORALRECAPPEAL
Do you consider receiving oral sex from a partner to be...
1   Not at all appealing
2   Not very appealing
3   Somewhat appealing
4   Very appealing

ANALPERFAPPEAL
Do you consider active anal intercourse (penetrating your partner's anus with penis or erotic toy) to be...
1   Not at all appealing
2   Not very appealing
3   Somewhat appealing
4   Very appealing

ANALRECAPPEAL
Do you consider passive anal intercourse (being penetrated with penis or erotic toy) to be...
1   Not at all appealing
2   Not very appealing
3   Somewhat appealing
4   Very appealing

UNMARRIED
Do you consider sex between two unmarried adults to be...
1   Not at all wrong
2   Wrong only sometimes
3   Almost always wrong
4   Always wrong

HOMO
Do you consider sex between two unmarried adults of the same-sex to be...
1   Not at all wrong
2   Wrong only sometimes
3   Almost always wrong
4   Always wrong

MBUNMARRIED

Do you consider an unmarried man or woman masturbating to be...

1   Not at all wrong
2   Wrong only sometimes
3   Almost always wrong
4   Always wrong

MBMARRIED

Do you consider a married man or woman masturbating to be...

1   Not at all wrong
2   Wrong only sometimes
3   Almost always wrong
4   Always wrong

MUTMB

Do you consider a married couple masturbating together to be...

1   Not at all wrong
2   Wrong only sometimes
3   Almost always wrong
4   Always wrong

PORNUNMARRIED

Do you consider an unmarried man or woman viewing pornography to be...

1   Not at all wrong
2   Wrong only sometimes
3   Almost always wrong
4   Always wrong

PORNMARRIED

Do you consider a married couple viewing pornography together to be...

1   Not at all wrong
2   Wrong only sometimes
3   Almost always wrong
4   Always wrong

HANDUNMARRIEDMF

Do you consider an unmarried man stimulating an unmarried woman's genitals with his hand(s) to be...

1   Not at all wrong
2   Wrong only sometimes
3   Almost always wrong
4   Always wrong

HANDUNMARRIEDFM
Do you consider an unmarried woman stimulating an unmarried man's genitals with her hand(s) to be...
1	Not at all wrong
2	Wrong only sometimes
3	Almost always wrong
4	Always wrong

HANDMARRIEDMF
Do you consider a married man stimulating his wife's genitals with his hand(s) to be...
1	Not at all wrong
2	Wrong only sometimes
3	Almost always wrong
4	Always wrong

HANDMARRIEDFM
Do you consider a married woman stimulating her husband's genitals with her hand(s) to be...
1	Not at all wrong
2	Wrong only sometimes
3	Almost always wrong
4	Always wrong

ORALUNMARRIEDMF
Do you consider an unmarried man performing oral sex on an unmarried woman to be...
1	Not at all wrong
2	Wrong only sometimes
3	Almost always wrong
4	Always wrong

ORALUNMARRIEDFM
Do you consider an unmarried woman performing oral sex on an unmarried man to be...
1	Not at all wrong
2	Wrong only sometimes
3	Almost always wrong
4	Always wrong

ORALMARRIEDMF
Do you consider a married man performing oral sex on his wife to be...
1	Not at all wrong
2	Wrong only sometimes
3	Almost always wrong
4	Always wrong

ORALMARRIEDFM
Do you consider a married woman performing oral sex on her husband to be...
1   Not at all wrong
2   Wrong only sometimes
3   Almost always wrong
4   Always wrong

ANALUNMARRIED
Do you consider an unmarried man having anal sex with an unmarried woman to be...
1   Not at all wrong
2   Wrong only sometimes
3   Almost always wrong
4   Always wrong

ANALUNMARRIED
Do you consider a married man having anal sex with his wife to be...
1   Not at all wrong
2   Wrong only sometimes
3   Almost always wrong
4   Always wrong

VIBMARRIEDMF
Do you consider a married man using a dildo/vibrator to pleasure his wife to be...
1   Not at all wrong
2   Wrong only sometimes
3   Almost always wrong
4   Always wrong

VIBMARRIEDFM
Do you consider a married woman using a dildo/vibrator to pleasure her husband to be...
1   Not at all wrong
2   Wrong only sometimes
3   Almost always wrong
4   Always wrong

BCMARRIED
Do you consider a married couple using artificial contraceptives (including birth control pills and condoms) to be...
1   Not at all wrong
2   Wrong only sometimes
3   Almost always wrong
4   Always wrong

NSFG CODEBOOK

(This is a partial codebook of National Survey of Family Growth 2006-2010 data for variables used for this project.)

WGTQ1Q16
Post-stratified, fully adjusted case weight

R_SEX
1   Female
2   Male

AGER
Age

AGECAT
1   18-25
2   26-35
3   36-45
4   46-55
5   56+

RACE
1   Black
2   White
3   Other

HIEDUC

Highest level of education achieved

5	9th grade or less
6	10th Grade
7	11th Grade
8	12th Grade, no diploma or GED
9	High school graduate
10	Some college but no degree
11	Associate degree
12	Bachelor's Degree
13	Master's Degree
14	Doctorate Degree
15	Professional Degree

NCHILDHH

0-2   Number of respondent's children 18 or younger in the household
3   3 or more of respondents children 18 or younger in the household

FMARITAL

1	Married
2	Widowed
3	Divorced
4	Separated
5	Never married

SEXEVER

1	Yes (R has had sex)
2	No (R has not had sex)

LIFPRTNR

R's number of sexual partners

0	None
1-49	
50	50 or more

RELTRAD

R's current religious affiliation

1	Evangelical Protestant
2	Mainline Protestant
3	Black Protestant
4	Catholic
5	Other religion
6	No religious affiliation
7	Refused
8	Don't know

ATTNDNOW
How often R attends religious services
1   More than once a week
2   Once a week
3   2-3 times a month
4   Once a month
5   3-11 times a year
6   Once or twice a year
7   Never
8   Refused
9   Don't know

SAMESEX
Sexual relations between two adults of the same sex are all right.
1   Strongly agree
2   Agree
3   Disagree
4   Strongly disagree
5   If R insists: neither agree nor disagree
8   Refused
9   Don't know

ANYACT
Any sexual act between two consenting adults is all right.
1   Strongly agree
2   Agree
3   Disagree
4   Strongly disagree
5   If R insists: neither agree nor disagree
8   Refused
9   Don't know

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