SHAKING THE WORLD FOR JESUS

MEDIA AND CONSERVATIVE EVANGELICAL CULTURE

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CHAPTER THREE

VIRGINS FOR JESUS: THE GENDER POLITICS OF THERAPEUTIC CHRISTIAN MEDIA

. . . Girls don't eat much when guys are around. I guess they assume we're going to think bad of them, or maybe they're too concerned about their appearance . . . many times a girl will look great, but she'll still say she's fat . . . When I go out to dinner with a girl, I want to enjoy the meal *with* her instead of just watching her pick at her food.
—Interview with *Breakaway* boys in *Brio* (April 1995)

Unlike crossover Christian music, which is toned down for mass consumption, the prochastity magazines, books, and videos examined in this chapter are narrowly targeted to an exclusively evangelical audience, which means they can have harder-hitting messages. Christian musicians like Sixpence None the Richer strive both to reinforce the beliefs of those within the fold and to reach out to those beyond the fold, but youth magazines like *Brio* and *Breakaway* are more like Carman, whose music speaks only to fellow born-agains.

Yet even as evangelical youth magazines speak only to believers, they are not immune to secular ideas. For example, there is nothing particularly Christian expressed in the epigraph above, in which boys describe frustration with the female obsession with dieting. This phenomenon would hardly be foreign to readers of mainstream teen magazines; if there is much in Christian magazines that seems strange to nonevangelicals, there is also much that is familiar. Indeed, except for the absence of advertisements, these magazines do not, on the surface, look very different from secular magazines. This is not to say that *Brio* and *Breakaway* are simply phony imitations of "real" youth magazines. In fact, they are slick, sophisticated productions in their own right, offering a Christian perspective on issues of interest to teenagers, especially issues of sexuality. Not surprisingly, their take on sexuality—and gender in general—is quite conservative. Boys in these magazines are represented as hard and strong, whereas girls are emotional and weak.

Such sexual polarities are consistently deployed in media advocat-

ing chastity. Through their representation of sexual abstinence, food consumption, eating disorders, and weightlifting, evangelical youth media define bodily control quite differently for girls and boys. On the surface, evangelical media's gender-specific definitions of bodily control seem to portray boys and girls similarly—as equally chaste—but, as we shall see, Christian bodily control may actually be more oppressive for girls than it is for boys. Chastity can be empowering for teens, a potent symbol of their commitment to God, and it would be unfair to imagine that teens are simply victims of chastity campaigns. At the same time, though, prochastity media call for feminist critique; in this chapter I will make that critique, considering the ways teens may resist the chastity directive while still acknowledging the fact that chastity has deep religious meaning for many teens.

Focus on the Family books, magazines, and videos are major promoters of chastity in the United States and increasingly abroad. Focus's monthly teen magazines, *Breakaway* for boys and *Brio* for girls, are the only nationally distributed evangelical youth magazines. They are sold in some Christian bookstores, but the vast majority of their distribution is subscription-based. There are over 180,000 *Brio* subscribers and 80,000 *Breakaway* subscribers. Parents offer the magazines to their twelve- to sixteen-year-old children as substitutes for secular magazines like *Seventeen*. Readers may have started off with other Focus on the Family publications, such as *Clubhouse Jr.* for four- to eight-year-olds and *Clubhouse* for eight- to twelve-year-olds. As one often finds in secular culture, the magazines for younger children are not targeted to a single sex, but as soon as readers reach puberty magazines start treating boys and girls like separate species. For girls, the transition from the nongender-coded *Highlights* or *Nickelodeon* magazine to the highly feminized *Seventeen* is comparable to the move from *Clubhouse* to *Brio*.

Examining such media cannot reveal all that youth do with them, but it does elucidate how adults—the producers of evangelical youth media—want teens to think about their bodies and how this conceptualization converges with and diverges from secular conceptions of male and female bodies. Evangelical media may promote conservative ideas, but as in the wider secular culture, they discuss sex and gender using therapeutic language. Secular therapeutic discourse "provides a ready-made and familiar narrative trajectory: the eruption of a problem leads to confession and diagnosis and then to a solution or cure."[1] Evangelical therapeutic discourse likewise involves problem resolution, but because of the nature of sin, cures are always precarious. *Brio*, *Breakaway*, and other evangelical youth products such as chastity videos, advice books, and music strive to cure teens of sexual desire and

other "problems," but since sin can never entirely be washed away, teens are not really cured of carnality. Rather, one might say that evangelical therapeutic media help teen desires go into remission.

Media that promote chastity are therapeutic in terms of seeking to help teens learn to manage their sexuality, but they are also part of a bigger picture, the wider context of the therapeutic role of contemporary religion. Although evangelicals often criticize narcissistic individualism—the New Age emphasis on "self-realization," for example—as egocentric and ungodly, evangelicals themselves are far from immune to the lure of the therapeutic.[2] David Watt contends that from the mid-twenties until the fifties "fundamentalists did not allow therapeutic ideas to shape their view of the world." Rather, they "mounted numerous direct attacks upon modern psychology."[3] In the 1950s, evangelicals began to lessen their opposition to psychology and to present Christian versions of it. By the 1960s and 1970s, many evangelicals seemed to have fully embraced Christianized psychology, and a significant body of popular evangelical therapeutic literature emerged.[4] James Davison Hunter has argued that this literature, with its "psychological Christocentrism," represents a major accommodation that evangelicals have made to modernity.[5] While sin is certainly not a concept that has been erased from evangelical culture, today one is likely to hear evangelical sermons that speak not only of sin but also of anxiety, sickness, and low self-esteem.[6] God "understands your feelings" and "boosts your self-esteem." He is "your best friend."[7] Hunter argues that such accommodation to modernity strengthens evangelicalism's position in the religious marketplace, where various religious groups compete for believers.[8] Clearly, I would add, such accommodations also enable evangelicals to compete in the market for religious books and media. It can hardly be a coincidence that one of the most successful purveyors of evangelical media, including chastity media, is James Dobson of Focus on the Family. Dobson is also a psychologist with a Ph.D. from the University of Southern California. If contemporary evangelical discourse is infused with therapeutic rhetoric, self-help chastity media should be understood as one piece of this larger picture.

While it is true that evangelicals often use the therapeutic language of health to discuss chastity, we mustn't jump the gun and assume that this shift in language is simply evidence of secularization, for if American religious language is infused with the therapeutic, the reverse is also increasingly true: therapeutic, "secular" self-help discourse is also infused with "spiritual" overtones. In their understandings of chastity, evangelicals may be mixing up the religious and the therapeutic, but these domains were hardly discreet entities before evangelicals began

promoting chastity. Evangelicals, thus, are not atypical in their mixing of the medical and the spiritual, but they do seem to have gravitated to the therapeutic with a particular intensity, consistently melding health and religious language when they discuss sex in videos, magazines, advice books, and other media. The teens represented in these media mix together words such as purity, sin, healthy, unhealthy, addiction, recovery, redemption, and temptation. The words chastity and abstinence are both used, the former term clearly having overt spiritual connotations. Abstinence, conversely, is a clinical, medical sounding word that fits unobtrusively into a discussion of how one "struggles" with sexual "issues."

In examining Focus magazines, books, and videos, my main concern will be to understand how these media speak to teens and tell them how to understand their bodies. There is, however, a wider political context to be noted: the national abstinence movement that evangelicals have been promoting since the early 1990s. This wider movement has in recent years been transformed. Chastity persists as a *moral* movement in much of the media addressed to evangelicals, but outside of that community evangelical politicians have transformed chastity into a *health* movement under the banner of "abstinence." Evangelicals have succeeded in bringing abstinence into the public sphere, in part at least, by obscuring the evangelical roots of their anti-sex (and anti-safe-sex) movement.

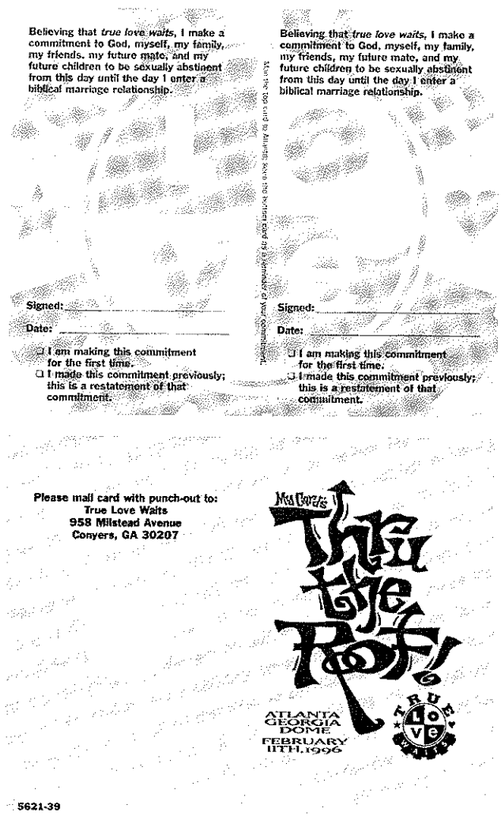
When Focus on the Family and other conservative Christian groups lobby for money for anti-sex campaigns, they speak not of chastity but rather of abstinence. And they have succeeded using this tactic. As *Focus on the Family* magazine reports, "The 1996 Welfare Reform Act included a $50 million-per-year appropriation for states to provide abstinence education under Title V. The federal Office of Adolescent Pregnancy Programs also awards grants under Title XX for demonstration projects aimed at preventing adolescent sexual activity."[9] The $50 million was given out each year for five years. The pro-abstinence Bush administration pushed for increased funding, and by 2002 annual federal spending on abstinence programs had mounted to $102 million.[10] *Focus on the Family* crows that "even the harshest critics of abstinence grudgingly concede that abstinence is 'mainstream'—so much so that many organizations, such as Planned Parenthood, have tried to co-opt abstinence language to fool the public, calling their programs 'abstinence-based.'"[11] The irony, of course, is that Focus and other groups are themselves guilty of trying to fool the public by pretending that abstinence campaigns do not have evangelical roots. These abstinence campaigns have received much press coverage, but chastity campaigns have received less media attention. In other words,

we know how evangelicals try to sell abstinence to outsiders, but how do they sell chastity within their ranks?

CHASTITY THROUGH THE ROOF

Evangelical teen advice books repeatedly state that feelings of sexual attraction are a gift from God. Yet God's gift is dangerous; left uncontrolled, it will lead to premarital sexual activity. To prevent such activity, evangelicals have undertaken a number of nationwide chastity campaigns, and these campaigns are promoted in *Brio* and *Breakaway*. When you open the magazines, chastity pledge cards tumble out instead of subscription cards. In July 1994, the True Love Waits campaign culminated with 25,000 teens planting 200,000 chastity pledge cards in the Mall area between the Capitol and the Washington Monument. These cards read: "Believing that true love waits, I make a commitment to God, myself, my family, my friends, my future mate, and my future children to be sexually abstinent from this date until the day I enter a Biblical marriage relationship." In 1996, thousands of teens filled out "True Love Waits" cards and assembled at the Atlanta Georgia Dome for a weekend-long chastity extravaganza, featuring various speakers and the hottest Christian bands. These cards had the same words on them as the 1994 cards but were designed slightly differently, with a hole in them so that they could be stacked on a pole soaring up to the ceiling of the arena. Further cementing the already bizarrely phallic connotations of the event, the ejaculatory motto of the gathering was "My card's through the roof!" (figs. 26–27).

Assuming that God makes "opposites" attract, evangelical abstinence campaigns address boys and girls as utterly dichotomous: boys are strong and stoic; girls, emotional and nurturing. But their faith and their commitment to chastity unite these opposites. That boys and girls can send their cards through the roof and gyrate to Christian rock to celebrate their shared dedication to chastity may seem strange. Yet chastity celebrations, like Christian youth music festivals, are the ultimate coed road trip. Boys and girls who usually aren't allowed to stay out late, go to wild parties, or even touch each other platonically (there is a three-inch separation rule at one evangelical junior high school in California), pile into buses with their adult youth group leaders and spend three or four days in a hotel or at a campground. Although conservative ideas about gender-appropriate behavior remain firmly in place, the commitment to chastity does bridge the metaphorical and literal sexual separateness of evangelical boys and girls. Chastity—and all the celebratory rallies, concerts, and parties it entails—is, ironically, the only risk-free activity that teen boys and girls can safely engage in together.



FIGS. 26–27 CHASTITY PLEDGE CARD

The conundrum is, how do you create a therapeutic discourse that explains and promotes chastity to teens who have been taught to think of boys and girls as sexual antagonists? How can essentialist notions of gender be maintained—the idea that certain behaviors are simply "natural"—if the "inherent" desires of boys and girls can be restructured? In other words, how can boys still be masculine while resisting their active sexual urges, and how can girls still be feminine while resisting the urge to passively submit? These questions represent the fault lines of evangelical notions of sexual control. To "cure" teens of sexual desire, evangelical adults must sanction the very behavioral traits (masculine aggression, feminine passivity) that supposedly compel unchaste behavior.

At the 1994 True Love Waits conference, girls and boys were taught about chastity in separate seminars. Girls were told a sentimental fairy tale about true, eternal love and the achievement of the feminine dream of romance through the preservation of virginity. Boys, conversely, were directed to loudly chant "We are real men! We are real men!" They were told that abstinence was not emasculating, that "Adam was a real man," and that the Garden of Eden housed "Adam and Eve," not "Adam and Steve."[12] The problem of how one could be a "real man" and a virgin was solved by asserting homophobic machismo. Ironically, in order to control the male body, to save it from its own heterosexual aggression, that body must be constructed as aggressively heterosexual and masculine. Thus, "natural" heterosexual gender roles are maintained in spite of a constant attempt to control and reconstruct "natural urges."

Susie Shellenberger and Greg Johnson, the editors of *Brio* and *Breakaway*, have written numerous teen advice books on how to maintain one's faith and virginity.[13] Their coauthored *258 Great Dates While You Wait* tells teens how to avoid sticky situations in which their hormones might carry them away. Like other adult chastity promoters, Shellenberger and Johnson assume that teenagers cannot control their desires. Heavy petting or even French kissing will almost inevitably lead down the slippery slope to sexual intercourse. Shellenberger rationalizes her argument by referring to the "law of diminishing returns": "each time you go a step further, you find that it takes *more* to fulfill your appetite. So you continually let down your barriers to become more and more fulfilled. The result? Two people have had sexual intercourse without planning on it."[14] By constructing a teen body utterly lacking self-control, a body that can only be controlled or cured by a spiritual commitment to chastity, evangelical books, magazines, and videos may not only be dangerous to teen self-image but also may encourage boys to be sexually violent and girls to see submission to sexual violence as natural. Boys and girls who are repeatedly told that at a certain point they are no longer in control may as a result feel less in control, and it may actually be more difficult to stop sexual activity if one conceives of one's body as a runaway train. Crudely put, when all bodily control is lost, boys give in to their urge to rape and girls give in to their urge to submit to rape.

Evangelical youth media are, in fact, contradictory in their conceptualization of rape. Sometimes it seems that rape per se does not exist for evangelicals. Instead, boys "lose control" or "force themselves" on girls. This is a scenario in one episode of *Family First*, an evangelical sitcom aired on the Trinity Broadcasting Network. A girl ignores her brother's warnings that the boy she is dating has a "bad reputation." The boy eventually forces himself on her, but she simply hits him and escapes. The word "rape" is avoided, and the girl is taught a valuable lesson about being led by the spirit, not the flesh. The unstated implication is that she was "asking for it." A teenager who wrote in to *Breakaway* was less fortunate than the sitcom girl. She explains that she and her boyfriend were sexually "wrestling," and she kept telling him to stop, but at a certain point she felt that she had "let him go so far" that it wouldn't be fair or possible to stop him. She says she should have pushed him off her and run away, but instead she had sex. Again, what sounds like rape is here defined as the victim's fault because she has been so thoroughly instructed in biologically compulsory fornication.[15] Notably, though, when girls write to *Brio* and explicitly say that they have been raped, the editors respond compassionately and do not blame the victims. Here, the evangelical understanding of rape mirrors that of most of the contemporary secular world—that "no means no" and that rape is a violent crime in which women are not complicit.

While *Brio* and other Focus magazines promote an idealized, nostalgic 1950s sexual morality, they cannot escape the fact that attitudes about rape have changed since then. As much as evangelicals criticize feminism, they have been affected by it. In fact, their ideas have been modified, and one might even say made more liberal, in response to changes wrought by feminism. We can see this change in both youth and adult culture. In her study of adult evangelicals in the Women's Aglow organization, Marie Griffith recounts how the group's conceptualization of female submission to men has shifted over time. In the 1970s, Women's Aglow literature emphasized a doctrine of wifely submission. Rather than "merely participating in their own victimization," Griffith explains, "the women themselves claim the doctrine of submission leads both to freedom and to transformation, as God rewards His obedient daughters by healing their sorrows and easing their pain. Thus interpreted, the doctrine of submission becomes a means of asserting power over bad situations, including circumstances over which one may otherwise have no control."[16] Since the mid-1980s, however, the doctrine of wifely submission has changed dramatically. Griffith observes that "as teachings on proper gender roles have fluctuated over time, the strictest interpretation has gradually given way to more lenient, flexible interpretations" of submission or surrender to God.[17]

Today, *mutual* submission of husband and wife is emphasized. This decreasing emphasis on wifely submission must surely be understood, at least in part, as a response to feminist ideas, and here we see a parallel in teen chastity literature and videos that speak of rape using a language that could not exist without feminism. In fact, the very idea that girls have "healthy" sexual feelings is a modern one that owes quite a debt to feminism.

Even if the official prochastity line is that sex is beautiful, natural, and healthy, Christian media have ways of making it seem rather unpleasant, even infusing it with Oedipal overtones. Magazines, videos, and advice books urge sexually aroused teens to stymie sexual feelings by picturing the faces of all their relatives, as well as Jesus. Although the intention may be simply to make kids feel guilty, there is also a creepy Oedipal dimension to picturing your mother's or father's face whenever you are sexually aroused. Boys and girls are encouraged to imagine dates as siblings and to "date" their parents.[18] Articles in *Focus on the Family* magazine even suggest that fathers "propose" to their daughters, offering them purity rings instead of engagement rings (fig. 28).[19] A cartoon in Shellenberger's advice book *Guys and a Whole Lot More* shows a car parked at Lover's Lane and explicitly places the male sexual aggressor in the paternal subject position. In the caption, the girl tells the boy, "Here's a quarter. Call my dad. Tell him what you want to do. If it's all right with him, it's okay with me."[20] Mothers are less often evoked, although one Christian music celebrity does say, "The best date I've ever had was with my mom!"

While this all sounds a bit perverse, evangelical media intend to construct chastity as empowering. One *Edge TV* video, however, illustrates the pressures wrought upon both boys and girls by a commitment to chastity. The first segment in the "Sexual Choices" episode features a dozen kids, many of whom have made sexual "mistakes" in the past. While some feel empowered by their current commitment to chastity, memories of their sexually active histories torture many of them. This video shows emotional, introspective teenage boys, a far cry from the "We are real men!" chanters. An athletic football player type explains that lust is dehumanizing. He is shot in soft focus, a style typically associated with feminine images. Another boy suffers desperately from the urge to masturbate. A third teen is horrified by his homosexual past and remarks that if only he had talked to someone about his homosexual feelings before he succumbed to them he could have properly dealt with his problem, and he would not have engaged in the sexual acts that led to his HIV-positive status.

The antilust football player, the suffering masturbator, and the repentant homosexual offer striking examples of evangelicals' simulta-

FIG. 28 ADVERTISEMENT FOR 14KT GOLD CHASTITY RING.

neous engagement with and distance from secular media. On the one hand, unlike evangelical media, most mainstream media does not vilify teen sex and even, in fact, encourages it. On the other hand, evangelical media parallel secular media in their emphasis on popularized versions of what Freud called "the talking cure."[21] Through externalizing their feelings, evangelical youth are promised they can cure themselves of their sexual problems. This is also the logic of secular

therapeutic media such as *The Oprah Winfrey Show* or mainstream self-help books, even if what constitutes a sexual "problem" is generally defined quite differently in such venues.

THERAPEUTIC SELF-EXPRESSION

Like most media promoting chastity, *Edge TV* videos teach viewers that they desperately need to *talk* about their sexual feelings. In fact, the evangelical invective to speak one's sex is evocative of the forced "infinite task of telling" sexuality that Michel Foucault speaks of in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality:* "[Y]ou will seek to transform your desire, your every desire, into discourse."[22] The organizing principle of much therapeutic evangelical youth media is that translating sexuality into language is liberating, and that if youth could express their sexual feelings to youth pastors or other mature elders, they would be able to control those feelings. Because of the intransigence of sin, the cure from sexuality is unstable, but it is nonetheless within the grasp of those teenagers who can translate their interior self into language.

Importantly, self-narration is a vital part of evangelical culture apart from the issue of chastity. The telling and retelling of conversion stories is a crucial aspect of evangelical identity. The typical witnessing narrative details how one has found salvation; it is a public display of the self that is simultaneously spiritually valuable to the evangelizer and, ideally, to listeners, who are potential converts. Such narratives also help maintain a sense of community, of shared experience. In his essay on the rhetoric of conversion narratives, Wayne Booth notes that "typical Protestant conversions" are "dramatic, sudden, shattering, moving from depravity to a sudden inflowing of grace."[23] Booth argues that the conversion narratives that have the most impact on listeners are those that emphasize the perilous journey between "before" and "after." The distance traveled to salvation must be dramatic, even exaggerated, to make a strong impact on listeners.[24]

Narratives of sin and salvation can be difficult to construct, however, for children raised in evangelical homes, many of whom were saved at the age of seven or eight and who only vaguely remember the moment of salvation. Teenagers who have no "before" to their conversion narratives have not experienced serious worldly transgression, but for many this changes with the arrival of puberty. Sexual desire opens the door to transgression, and even those who only gingerly cross the threshold, perhaps buying a pornographic magazine or watching a dirty movie, will find their conversion stories changing (or coalescing for the first time) as they fight temptation, stumble, and per-

haps end up "rededicating" themselves to God. Through rededicating one's self to the Lord one can, in effect, be saved over and over again, and conversion narratives will quite likely be stronger for those who have fallen and then returned to the fold than for those who have never succumbed to transgression and strayed from the flock.

As we saw in the figure of the sensitive football player, it is not only girls who are allowed the emotional, introspective discourse of therapeutic self-narration. Although both genders are expected to reveal their innermost selves through impassioned, public rhetorical displays, in the introspective teenage boy we find a new twist in the gender politics of Christian prochastity media. On the one hand, boys are told that they are driven by strong, even brutal, sexual impulses, and prochastity media provide tactics to harness such energies while maintaining that chaste boys are nonetheless masculine: they are big eaters, into sports, and aggressively heterosexual. On the other hand, evangelical videos also picture a soft and introspective teen boy. This boy is emotionally connected with others and very much in touch with his feelings. I would argue that the more macho boy is a bit old-fashioned. Although some videos mix images of the insensitive tough guy with the new emotionally attuned boy, the older type is most likely to turn up in the least cool youth group videos. These are videos with music and graphics that seem a few years out of date and with an adult rather than teen host. The hipper videos with teen hosts and the newest music, conversely, are more likely to picture the new-fangled boy.

Of course, the sensitive boy featured in chastity videos is not a character type created from scratch by evangelical media makers. To be in touch with one's feelings and to be familiar with the therapeutic language used to express those feelings is increasingly crucial to the contemporary definition of masculinity—at least as expressed in popular culture. To give only one example, the crux of much of the humor of the HBO hit series *The Sopranos* is that the hero is a murderous mobster who is also in therapy discussing his feelings. Even macho action films have increasingly focused on sensitive family men since the nineties.[25] Put simply, masculinity is being "feminized" in much popular secular media, and thus, a Christian youth video that wants to successfully speak to viewers will have to be aware of the recent entry of therapeutic, self-help language into masculine self-expression.

Evangelical teens may well avoid secular television shows such as *Felicity* and *Dawson's Creek,* since these programs picture sexual relationships outside of marriage, gay characters, and other elements that might trouble evangelical viewers. Yet evangelical youth group videos demonstrate familiarity with the kind of boy so often featured in these

programs, the hypersensitive, emotionally attuned young man. In one Christian video, a young man in college describes how he bonded with his male best friend: "We both struggled with the same thing—being, or trying to be, 'manly' or 'masculine' as the culture has defined it, to be tough and invincible. But we both connected because we realized that we weren't. We tried really hard to be, but we weren't [manly or masculine] inside." He adds, "I can remember the first time that I ever heard another guy say that he was struggling with sexual temptation, or pornography, and how freeing that felt to hear another man say that . . . The rewards of taking those uncomfortable, awkward steps toward someone to be real and be honest and to admit *feelings* far outweigh the scariness of taking those steps." He concludes that "my relationships have improved immensely because I've been vulnerable with my friends."[26]

In Christian youth videos, such vulnerability is a key issue for boys in support groups. The premise of such groups is that talking about sex with male friends functions as a prophylactic against the committing of sexual acts. The *Edge TV* masturbator, for example, ends his tale by explaining (somewhat unconvincingly) that he feels better now that he has found a support network of tormented fellow masturbators to whom he can confess his sinful feelings rather than acting upon them. Notably, a key premise of the all-male chastity support group is that this is a safe space to talk about sex, since no women are present. Clearly, however, for evangelical boys struggling with homosexuality, the support group will help isolated boys meet others who are gay, and the current evangelical trend toward speaking about homosexuality rather than hiding it may produce some unintended results.

Prophylactic Christian media hope to ease the pressures of the chaste Christian lifestyle by offering pleasurable alternatives to sinful secular culture,[27] and, in principle, prochastity songs ("I Don't Want It," "Ain't No Safe Way"), videos, books, and even nonmedia products such as jewelry (purity rings) and clothing ("Pet Your Dog, Not Your Date" T-shirts, "No Trespassing" underwear), are designed to help kids not think about having sex. But just when sex is ostensibly repressed, it is actually ubiquitous. Indeed, evangelical prochastity media provide a stunning illustration of Foucault's "repressive hypothesis." Evangelicals strive to eliminate sex outside the boundaries of marriage, yet it is precisely outside those boundaries that discourses of sexuality propagate with reckless abandon. Focus on the Family dispenses advice to improve the sex lives of married couples, but the amount of sex talk directed to those *not* allowed to copulate by far outweighs the amount of sex talk directed to those sanctioned to indulge. Prochastity teen media make ignoring sex impossible.

TEEN NEGOTIATION OF CHASTITY

Prochastity media will almost inevitably strike nonevangelicals as bizarre. Most will assume that such media damage their young consumers or, at the very least, that they constitute antisex propaganda. Prochastity media can indeed misfire, teaching teens to think about their bodies in potentially damaging ways. Most obviously, such media can be devastating for gay and lesbian teens. Still, it is simplistic to imagine that Christian teens simply swallow the sexual directives of evangelical media hook, line, and sinker. How might teens negotiate the advice they receive through such media?

Some of the advice dispensed in prochastity books, magazines, and videos is just plain bad and would be rejected out of hand by many teens. In their dating book, for example, Focus on the Family's Susie Shellenberger and Greg Johnson suggest odd food-centered and highly infantilizing group dates.[28] "Kid's day" requires crayoning in coloring books and playing Candy Land. Airport dates involve putting on strange costumes, pretending to meet each other getting off planes, and competing at guessing how many men will go into the restroom immediately after deplaning. Food dates include eating entire meals by taste-testing at a large grocery store, organizing fruit juice tastings (as opposed to wine tastings), making a giant popsicle in a trash can at the local ice plant, and eating all of the leftovers in the fridge. In sum, these adults suggest that one avoid sex by engaging in activities more appropriate for a prepubescent person and by displacing sexual desire onto desire for food. No doubt, many evangelical teens would find these suggestions insulting.

But what about more nuanced advice literature? Do Christian teens seriously question chastity directives that have been explained to them in Biblical terms? Interestingly, letters published in *Brio* indicate a constant negotiation of the idea of chastity among the magazine's subscribers; it seems that readers do indeed look for contradictions in the Biblical chastity mandate. The editors receive 1,000 letters each month, most of them asking questions about boys and sex.[29] *Brio* letters often focus on looking for loopholes in the chastity mandate. A girl from Ohio writes, "This is kind of an embarrassing question, but if the guy doesn't have a name or face, is it okay to fantasize about your wedding night and what sex will be like after you're married?" The answer is no, because you should "strive to fill your mind with things that won't leave you frustrated or wanting what you can't have,"[30] but it's hard to believe that teens who have signed chastity pledge cards don't have sexual fantasies made safe through a prefatory marriage fantasy. Although Shellenberger consistently tells girls that even French kissing is

off limits, they continue to ask, "How much fooling around is acceptable by God?"[31] One girl, who signs herself "Feeling Guilty," thinks she has found a potential loophole in her chastity pact with God: "I have pledged to remain sexually pure until marriage. But what if Jesus comes back before I get married? I want to know how it feels to have sex. Is this a horrible thing to want?"[32] Many evangelicals believe that the Bible predicts the end of the world and the Second Coming of Christ. These events will be preceded by the Rapture, when all saved Christians will be instantly removed from the earth. Those who have been raptured cannot have sex, and there is no sex allowed after the return of Jesus and the Final Judgment. This *Brio* reader thus voices a legitimate concern inspired by an evangelical interpretation of the Bible.

Occasionally, *Brio* girls write in to flaunt the fact that they engage in sexual activity without feeling guilty. One particularly outspoken girl writes:

> You're probably going to tell me that petting will lead to intercourse . . . [but me and] this guy . . . have done some things that you would probably consider wrong, but I don't think it is, and I don't feel a bit guilty about it. I don't think it will lead to us having sex, because I'm not ready until I'm married. He doesn't pressure me at all and says he respects me for not wanting to have sex. So my question is, what if—because of my own values and beliefs—I don't think it's wrong? And don't tell me to get out of the relationship because I don't want to and I won't.[33]

There's no telling how many such letters *Brio* receives, since it behooves their own agenda to print more letters from guilt-ridden girls than unrepentant ones, but it is clear from the letters that *Brio*'s adult editors choose to print that readers do not merely internalize the chastity directive without substantial questioning, negotiation, and varying degrees of resistance. On the other hand, it is also clear that such letters aid *Brio* in defining the chastity directive. From the editors' perspective, the letters prove that teen sexuality really is out of control; the existence of the fallen girl enables the therapeutic salvation narrative to exist.

Breakaway does not represent fallen boys and does not print letters from Christian boys asking if it's OK to make out as long as they don't "go too far." Because their desires are considered uncontrollable once unleashed, the boys given a voice in *Breakaway* avoid any contact, or even being alone with a female: "I prefer group dating because there's a lot less temptation. Because I'm a Christian, I want to stay away from *risky* situations . . . it's better to go out in groups. It's *safer* and it's more fun."[34] Group dates save boys from their own lustfulness and also

shield them from the occasional female temptress. When a boy writes that his girlfriend wants to have sex, *Breakaway* advises, "you ought to end this relationship pronto, ASAP, yesterday and real quick. I promise you that your girlfriend is much more likely to bring you down than you are to bring her up. You may think you're strong enough to stay with her without caving in. But be warned: Samson thought the same thing, and before it was all over he was blind, beaten, betrayed and bald (see Judges 16)."[35] This boy, like the girl who feared Jesus would come before she did, is negotiating the fact that his desires don't mesh with Biblical directives.

Teens writing to *Brio* or *Breakaway* often ask questions about Biblical interpretation. Christian parents put forth the Bible as a rule book for their children, but the rule book can backfire when teens study it and recognize the complicated or contradictory dimensions of the textual interpretations that adults put forth as straightforward and unquestionable, or when they notice the differences between isolated Scripture and the same Scripture in its context. Through their own Bible study, teens may end up rethinking, or at least complicating, the very rules that adults say the Bible teaches unequivocally. On the other hand, teens who don't know the Bible well enough will find themselves trumped by well-versed adults. At one Christian school, for example, some boys questioned the rule that their hair had to be short. Their teacher pointed to 1 Corinthians 11:14: "[I]f a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him." One student thought he had a winning counterargument: "'But didn't Jesus have long hair?' The teacher was indignant and cautioned the students that the pictures they see of Jesus are just representations painted by sinful men. The Bible teaches that long hair is a sin and also teaches that Jesus never sinned; Jesus, therefore, could not have had long hair. Case closed."[36] The boys lost because they countered with a commonsense assertion about Jesus' hair rather than a Biblically based argument for long hair. ("What about Samson and Delilah?" might have been a more productive line of questioning.)

Questioning rules is highly problematic for teens wishing to follow the fifth Commandment: honor thy father and mother. In fact, some teens may not question the chastity directive at all. Why would they want to tamper with their relationship with God and with their community? After all, many teens find great peace and joy through their faith. In addition, belief in a rule book (the Bible) offers believers a sense of stability and order and a place in a community of like-minded folks. Given the tortuous isolation and feelings of helplessness and despair that many teenagers endure, it is not difficult to see why an ordered belief system and a community of fellow believers would be

appealing. The evangelical belief system, which to outsiders may seem to be all rules and prohibition, offers structure, stability, and community to youth. Acknowledging the potentially positive aspects of evangelical youth culture, however, does not preclude also looking at the flip side. What are the potential consequences—both personal and political—of imagining male and female bodies as utterly opposite? What kinds of contradictions are bound up in evangelical conceptions of teen bodies?

FEMALE RETENTION AND MALE EXPULSION

The adult compilers of the *Teen Study Bible* tell readers unequivocally that "God is prolife."[37] Psalm 139 is one key text used to support the evangelical antiabortion stance. The New International Version of the psalm reads, in part,

> you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb . . . My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

While the Bible never explicitly condemns abortion—indeed, inducing miscarriage and killing pregnant women are advanced in the Old Testament as methods to smite one's enemies—Christian antiabortion advocates use Psalm 139 to prove the personhood of unborn life.[38] Evangelicals also use this passage to show how thoroughly God knows you and your body and, furthermore, to show that your body is not only his creation but also belongs to him. Another Biblical passage supporting this idea is 1 Corinthians 6:19–20 in which Paul says, "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body."[39] Crucially, this means that you cannot "choose" whether or not to have sex or to terminate a pregnancy in your body, because it is *not your body.* Your body is simply on loan from God.

Should the *Brio* girl falter in her commitment to chastity, it is assumed she will become pregnant. Like many adult chastity promoters, James Dobson presumes that birth control does not work.[40] He likes to joke, "What do you call a couple that uses condoms? Parents!" The properly containing (and contained) *Brio* body should retain, not abort, any fetuses that may grow inside her. This contained feminine body should not sweat or burp, either. Unlike *Breakaway* boys, whom

the magazine portrays as belchers who wear dirty socks and rarely shower, *Brio* girls express great concern about bodily containment: How do I tell a friend she has bad breath? How can I manage my sweaty hair after gym class? The same kinds of anxieties can be found in the letters section of mainstream female magazines, and both kinds of magazines function as public therapy spaces where problems erupt, confessions and diagnoses are made, and a solution or cure is offered. A crucial difference between secular and evangelical girls' magazines, however, is that whereas both tend to promote certain ideas about "proper" (odor-free, nonsweaty) femininity, the secular magazines promote a gendered body that is only implicitly politicized, while the contained body promoted in *Brio* has more explicitly politicized, prolife connotations. The message sent to teen girls is that God created "your" body, loves "your" body, and lent it to you, and His will is that you fill your borrowed flesh with progeny. Although the young female body is urged to be chaste, once married God has designed her body to be penetrated and filled.

The male teen, conversely, embodies the principle of expulsion and impenetrable hardness. *Breakaway* and other Focus publications endeavor to construct the controlled, chaste teen male body mainly by encouraging rigorous bodily activities *besides* sex. Boys maintain self-control through sports and bodybuilding; such vigorous, structured activity is necessary to cure or at least to stymie their lust. Inherently more reckless, boys must exert much more self-control than girls. But unlike girls, they are allowed to express their recklessness through their overflowing bodies. Boys are encouraged to expel spit, vomit, and sweat, but not semen, and *Breakaway* humor often centers on the very bodily humors disavowed in *Brio*. One reader mail column centered on "spew stories," where teen boys wrote about their most embarrassing vomiting experiences.

Breakaway boys' earthly bodies are metaphorically clean (chaste), yet they are literally filthy. One *Breakaway* cartoon shows a boy eating junk food and explaining, "Actually, Mom, potato chips are very good for you! The loud crunching scares away germs!"[41] Since boys are assumed to be insalubrious, scaring away germs is certainly in order. Interestingly, the dirty, spewing *Breakaway* boy never seems to fart; this boy is grotesque in carefully circumscribed ways, transgressing boundaries only from the waist up. The *Breakaway* boy exists somewhere between the "classical body—a refined, orifice-less, laminated surface" that *Brio* constructs, a body whose higher stratum is emphasized while the lower stratum is disavowed, and the vulgar "lower class"–coded body that Laura Kipnis has described as the *Hustler* hard-core porn body: "a gaseous, fluid-emitting, *embarrassing* body, one continually

defying the strictures of bourgeois manners and mores and instead governed by its lower intestinal tract—a body threatening to erupt at any moment. *Hustler*'s favorite joke is someone accidentally defecating in church."[42] The *Breakaway* body threatens to erupt at any moment, but only through the nose or mouth, and certainly not in church! This body thus violates what Kipnis, following anthropologist Mary Douglas, calls "'pollution' taboos and rituals—these being a society's set of beliefs, rituals, and practices having to do with dirt, order, and hygiene," but it only does so within circumscribed limits.[43] Both unhygienic and unscatalogical, the *Breakaway* body can have its cake and eat it, too, as long as the cake exits through an upper body cavity.

Obsession with the body is considered vain in the *Brio* world, but *Breakaway* encourages boys to build up buff physiques in order to enhance their masculine self-esteem. *Breakaway* never explicitly states that muscles may increase a boy's sex appeal, and while *Brio* advises girls not to unfairly arouse boys with "suggestive" clothing, *Breakaway* never warns boys to hide their sweaty muscles from their horny peers. Yet Christian sports, and bodybuilding in particular, are as erotic or masturbatory as secular sports and bodybuilding. A *Breakaway* feature on weightlifting describes a sexually charged male body that would be unthinkable in a evangelical coed environment:

> THE PUMP. It must be experienced firsthand because no sensation compares. Your shoulders throb, your chest aches, your skin tingles. Blood pulses through your veins like a pack of angry earthworms. Sweat streams down the rippled bands of sheer steel you once called your belly. When you stand on your toes, your calves threaten to pop out at the knees. You flex your biceps, and two bowling balls appear. You look at yourself in the mirror and grunt, "Hello, Hulk!"[44]

Although the magazine urges safety and moderation in workouts, here it also applauds (somewhat parodically) the bulging masculine body. Likewise, a youth group study guide on steroid use does not find bodybuilding problematic or vain. While advantages of a drug-free workout include "Your steady loves your new appearance" and "You look fantastic! Members of the opposite sex are keeping an eye on you," steroids are condemned as a "shortcut" that will make you "overly aggressive" and "cocky"—in other words, out of control.[45] By advocating bodybuilding, *Breakaway* and other prochastity media solve the problem of how virgin boys can be "real men." Weightlifting represents not a "feminine" obsession with one's looks but rather a business contract with God whereby if you don't cheat with steroids you will gain self-esteem through your muscles. Only through cheating will you become

cocky and aggressive—excessively masculine and therefore no longer self-controlled. Paradoxically, lifting should be a diversion from sexuality, yet onanistic weightlifting produces a more sexually alluring body.

To some extent, autoerotic weightlifting is hoped to function as a substitute for autoerotic genital activity.[46] Although it would be best if boys could avoid erections altogether, according to most evangelical experts erections in and of themselves are not sinful, as long as they are not accompanied by mental images of other bodies. This was the source of the *Edge TV* masturbator's agony. He could not masturbate without fantasizing about girls. If masturbation does occur, it must not be accompanied by lustful thoughts. Caught between a rock and a hard place, as it were, the teen boy is basically denied guilt-free penile tumescence. The weightlifter can at least increase the bulk of the rest of his body.

Girls apparently have less to feel guilty about, since they are generally assumed to be less interested than boys in sex. A cartoon in Shellenberger's *Guys and a Whole Lot More* illustrates a "humorous" reaction to the female's puberty-induced anxieties: a girl asks her pharmacist, "Do you have an antidote to hormone poisoning?"[47] Girls may be sexually curious (hormonally poisoned), but girls' books, magazines, and videos ignore masturbation, since it is considered a boy's problem. Needless to say, weightlifting is not an option for Christian girls wanting to rechannel their sexual energy into the quest for the ideal body.

CHASTE GIRLS AND EATING DISORDERS

As we have seen, evangelical media's messages about sexuality and teen bodies contain a number of contradictions. Sex is normal and healthy; sex is sinful and aberrant. Rape is wrong and not the victim's fault; sometimes girls are to blame for rape. Male bodies are aggressive and eruptive and so should not be sexually aroused; male bodies are aggressive and eruptive, and this is a natural aspect of masculinity to be encouraged. The contradictions of evangelical media offer particular challenges to adolescent girls, I would argue, because there is less space within evangelical culture for chaste girls to rebel against authority. To be sure, both boys and girls are encouraged to see the commitment to chastity as a means of rebelling against peer pressure and the prosex attitudes of mainstream society, but since conservative ideas about masculinity and femininity remain very much in place in evangelical culture, it may be harder for girls to see themselves as rebellious. Their bodies cannot erupt sexually or, unlike boys, athletically, and they are also less likely than boys to have access to the Christian hard rock, tattooing, skateboarding, and other "rebellious" activity that is increasingly part of Christian youth culture.[48] In other words, both boys and girls may be instructed to control their bodies, but boys have more opportunities to blow off steam. Girls, conversely, must remain contained. And while *Breakaway* encourages boys to ravenously consume—as a carnal alternative to sex—*Brio* is less likely to propose that girls stuff their faces with junk food. In other words, *Brio* and *Breakaway* assume boys and girls to have different appetites not only for sex but also for food. As in secular culture, the ways that evangelical girls perceive food and their bodies can have dire consequences, but are there aspects of Christian culture that may exacerbate these consequences?

Food and sensuality are certainly linked for many non-Christian women, but for evangelicals that linkage is more likely to be morally coded as sinful. Marie Griffith, for example, has documented the ways that food is described as an evil temptation in Christian dieting literature directed to adult women. Christian diet books liken love for food to idolatry and declare eating chocolate or fried foods to be sinful. There is an obvious carnal dimension to the Christian dieter's relationship to food. One diet book author writes, "This flesh of mine is like a hungry tiger, always ready to break out of the cage of discipline and gobble everything in sight. And I am the one who opens the door."[49] Gwen Shamblin, who wrote several bestselling Christian diet books in the 1990s, particularly emphasizes the sexual dimensions of food consumption. Griffith argues that for Shamblin food is "a devilish lover, tempting human beings to betray their covenant with God and enter a lascivious relationship with food."[50] Most Christian dieting literature is directed to white, middle-class married women with children. In fact, I would argue that part of the reason that relationships to food and dieting can be so overtly eroticized in Christian diet books is that the reader is assumed to be an adult who engages in marital sex. To speak of the illicit temptations of chocolate donuts and the need to submit to a higher authority would be a dangerous discourse if directed to chaste girls, for it would acknowledge too overtly that teen girls have carnal desires. To acknowledge this in an adult married woman is one thing, but to speak of teenage girls as tempted by sin would be to go too far.

While Christian dieting literature speaks of food in illicit terms, the opposite tact is taken in chastity advice books, which suggest food consumption as a means of sublimating sexual feelings, especially for boys. Of course, transferring desire from sex to food may be easier for the gluttonous *Breakaway* boy than for the abstemious *Brio* girl. Appropriating liberal feminist discourse, Christian books and cassettes on eating disorders argue that secular notions of the "ideal female body" have a

negative effect on girls' self-esteem. At the same time, these self-help media also tend to replicate secular culture's tendency to see excessive food consumption as normal for boys and abnormal for girls. One group date described in *258 Great Dates While You Wait* involves driving to various fast food restaurants and eating a little bit at a time until you're full: "Still hungry? Though the girls may not be, the guys are!"[51] A *Breakaway* cartoon illustrates the boy's insatiable appetite. As a happy cat enters the kitchen through a hinged cat door, an equally happy boy, licking his chops, exits the refrigerator via a hinged boy-door.[52]

Another cartoon in *Breakaway* shows a girl speaking to a boy whose mouth is obscenely crammed full of milkshakes, pizza slices, hot dogs, and fried chicken legs (fig. 29). It is unclear from the image whether he is consuming or expelling his lode. The cartoon was part of a contest where boys saw the image without the artist's caption and competed to come up with the best tag line. The artist's caption, printed with the contest winners', interpreted the image as referencing consumption rather than expulsion: "How much weight does Coach want you to put on for football?" Several contest winners interpreted the cartoon as picturing expulsion: "Biff attempts the world's first atomic burp"; "After hearing what goes into processed food, Hank coughed up every single burger, hot dog, and slice of pizza he had ever eaten." One winning caption reads the image as representing both consumption and expulsion: "Suddenly, Warren was forced to admit he had an eating disorder." The humor of this caption would be impossible were it not for the assumption that boys consume excessively, but that such consumption is not pathological. If boys really binged and purged, it would be un-Christian to laugh at Warren. This cartoon is symptomatic of how *Breakaway* approaches boys and food. While food articles in *Brio* focus on baking cookies for others or making low-fat milkshakes, in *Breakaway* one finds articles with titles like "More Thanksgiving Maggot, Anyone?"[53] The gendered attitudes toward food expressed by these two magazines could not be more opposite.

Of course, if one were to compare secular magazines like *Vogue* and *Maxim*, one would also find men and women treated as opposites with different sexual and culinary appetites. So while *Brio* and *Breakaway* are unique in promoting chastity, their approaches to food are hardly earth-shattering. What is interesting, then, is that by virtue of their religious focus these magazines seem to be far removed from the secular world, but that they nonetheless strongly mirror aspects of that world. Notwithstanding this fact, evangelical media maintain that eating disorders are problems that are induced by the *secular* world and that can be cured by spiritual means. Because of society's pressure on women to

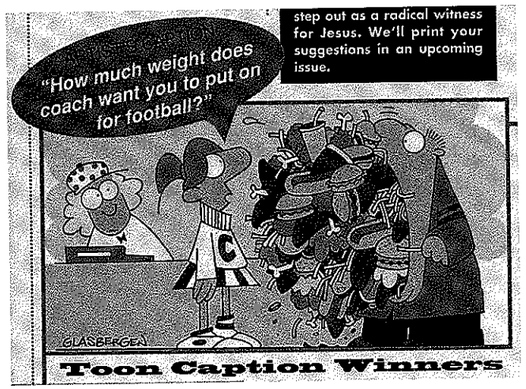


FIG. 29 BREAKAWAY CARTOON ILLUSTRATING BOYS' EXCESSIVE APPETITES.

have a certain kind of body, girls lack self-esteem; an improved relationship with Jesus is the key to solving this problem. By studying the Bible, eating disordered girls will come to see their bodies as "temples of the Holy Spirit." Thus, according to evangelical books, magazines, and videos, the cure for eating disorders is religious, but the causes are not. Evangelical youth media rarely portray girls' eating disorders as stemming from family pressures, an authoritarian home life, or the tremendous pressures that being a "good Christian" can entail.

Focus on the Family offers therapeutic media addressing virtually every difficulty of daily life, so it's not surprising that they've produced a cassette on eating disorders. On this tape, former bulimic Jackie Barrille offers some insight into evangelical perceptions of eating disorders and the female body. Barrille argues that eating disorders are primarily a matter of taking control of one's life. She says, "In eating huge amounts of food I felt a release, a freedom I had never felt in my life," and she explains that by surrendering control to the Holy Spirit, you won't need to binge and purge to seek control over your body.[54] (Interestingly, the same rhetoric can be used to describe both dieting and controlling compulsive dieting. A testimonial printed on an evangelical weight loss manual reads, "Thanks to First Place, I'm controlling my weight with a power greater than my own.") Barrille does not address how devout evangelicals who already have a personal relationship with God nonetheless develop eating disorders. Might resistance (conscious or unconscious) to giving all control to the Lord be one of many factors contributing to developing eating disorders in the first place? Or

might the imperative to surrender oneself spiritually actually contribute to a woman's desire to have total control over her earthly body?

Eating disorders are a way to assert control when faced with difficult and disempowering personal and familial situations. The surrendering of control to parents that is mandated by disciplinary child rearing, the typical evangelical parenting style, may thus play a pivotal role in the development of teen anorexia and bulimia. As we saw in discussing Dobson's theories in chapter 1, disciplinary child rearing demands the child submit both will and body to parents. For example, anorexic Cherry Boone O'Neill, daughter of Christian singer Pat Boone, recounts how her authoritarian parents made her feel bodily shame when they forced her to wear children's clothing at age twelve, even though she had the sexually mature body of a sixteen year old. At eighteen, when she resisted their directive not to vomit, they said she was acting like a child and spanked her. The drive to make her submit to parental control, a crucial principle of authoritarian child rearing, backfired when her resistance was bound up in the development of eating disorders. O'Neill asserted herself, but only at the expense of herself.

O'Neill begins her autobiography, *Starving for Attention*, by explaining how religious rituals helped her maintain her anorexic regime:

> Fasting on Thanksgiving Day had really saved me . . . when I was asked why I had not loaded up my plate like everyone else I just answered with spiritual overtones, "I'm fasting today," and that was that! . . . my mother called from the kitchen . . . "Daddy wants to have Communion together before we say the blessing, okay?" . . . my mind was computing feverishly: crackers are about twelve calories and I'll probably eat about one twelfth, so that's one calorie, and . . . how many calories does a six-ounce glass of grape juice have? . . . Too many. I'll just pretend to drink the grape juice . . . maybe I can pretend to eat the cracker, too![55]

Religion is uncannily woven throughout this family melodrama, as "fasting" sanctifies self-starvation, and Christ's blood and body become an impediment to weight loss. Boone's eating disorders continued long after she married and left home. Patriarchal evangelical doctrine, she explains, demanded that she submit to her husband in the same way she had submitted to her father, and she continued to resist such submission. Only by finding a more liberal way to live out her faith could Boone finally cure herself.

It would be foolish to valorize evangelical anorexics' resistance as a feminist tactic or to hold up Boone as emblematic of all evangelicals with eating disorders, but her story does help us to begin to think

through what eating disorders might mean for women and girls of strong faith. Across disciplines (medicine, psychology, feminist sociology), researchers tend to assume that eating disorders are nonreligious. One exception is Michelle M. Lelwica, who argues that the distinction between "secular" and "religious" behavior fades when one examines how "for many girls and women, creating a slender body has become a matter of all-pervading significance, an end whose achievement feels tantamount to ultimate salvation."[56] In other words, dieting itself has much in common with religion. Lelwica even suggests that "women's subordination within traditional religion makes them prime candidates for this 'secular' substitute [dieting]."[57] I would argue, however, that dieting might function not so much as a *substitute* for religion but as something that could meld with a girl's previously existing religious belief system.

Some researchers have argued, erroneously, that anorexia can be traced back to the fasting practices of medieval nuns and other religious women. The assumption is that eating disorders have always existed but that now they have been drained of their religious impetus and are a result of consumer culture's images of slender female bodies. Historian Joan Jacobs Brumberg has quite rightly argued that tracing eating disorders back to the tradition of medieval fasting women is highly problematic:

> To describe premodern women . . . as anorexic is to flatten differences in female experience across time and discredit the special quality of eucharistic fervor and penitential asceticism as it was lived and perceived. To insist that medieval holy women had anorexia nervosa is, ultimately, a reductionist argument because it converts a complex human behavior into a simple biomedical mechanism. (It certainly does not respect important differences in the route to anorexia.) To conflate the two is to ignore the cultural context and the distinction between sainthood and patienthood.[58]

Calling medieval saints anorexic certainly erases the complexity of their faithful practices.[59] But Brumberg's argument against reading modern anorexia in light of the history of fasting seems to assume that the contemporary faster lacks spirituality. As she further argues: "From the vantage point of the historian, anorexia nervosa appears to be a *secular* addiction to a new kind of perfectionism, one that links personal salvation to the achievement of an external body configuration rather than an internal spiritual state."[60]

There may be no transhistorical link between Catholic medieval fasters and contemporary evangelical Protestants like Cherry Boone O'Neill, but this does not mean that twentieth-century eating disorders

must be, by their very nature, "secular addictions." O'Neill is surely not the only evangelical for whom eating disorders have a spiritual dimension. Some evangelical anorexics may even see ridding themselves of the flesh as an act of spiritual purification. For example, Barille recounts how when one evangelical anorexic came close to dying her soul left her body and felt weightless as it headed toward the proverbial white light, but Jesus told her that it was not yet her time, and she returned to her body. In contrast to her freed spirit, her anorexic body seemed unbearably heavy. For her, the desire to lose her body was intricately bound up in the desire to be more spiritual: less body meant more spirit.

Of course, loss of flesh not only means less body, but also a transcendence of sexuality through the reduction or elimination of breasts, of menstruation, and of the wider hips that puberty brings to teens. For both secular and religious women, eating disorders are intricately bound up in feelings about sexuality. By not eating, a girl erases many of the bodily changes wrought by puberty, and for the evangelical girl under tremendous pressure to remain bodily and spiritually pure, the desire to erase sexuality may be particularly strong. The desire to drive out sin, to find "an antidote for hormone poisoning," may well be a motivating factor for some teen anorexics. After all, the strictures of eating disorders bear a strange resemblance to those of chastity: maintain bodily control, subdue carnal drives, attempt to displace desire for food/sex onto other activities. Teen consumers of therapeutic prochastity books, magazines, and videos may find in eating disorders their own cure for their sexuality.

WALKING THE STRAIGHT AND NARROW

Evangelical youth media are designed to straighten teens on already narrow paths, directing them toward God and away from sexual activity, liberalism, New Age religion, prochoice sentiments, and other dangerous territory. But these media are about much more than "indoctrination." Evangelical culture offers community and a sense of belonging, and evangelical media bolster the potency of that community.

It is easy for nonevangelicals to imagine that Christian teens are oppressed by their faith, but we must be careful not to conceptualize teen religious choices in the same way that much of evangelical media conceptualize teen sexuality. That is, we should not see teenagers as passive victims of religion, just as so many Christian magazines and videos portray them as victims of their own sexually maturing bodies. Many teens find that their faith helps them get through their difficult adolescent years, while others—gay and lesbian kids in particular—find

evangelical beliefs to be quite oppressive. What is crucial to remember is that evangelical teens are capable of making informed decisions. Some of these teens decide to follow in their parents' religious footsteps, while others may leave the church. Nancy Tatom Ammerman observes that "although few people who grow up as sectarians drop out of religion entirely, at least forty percent switch to other denominations by adulthood."[61] In her year-long participant observation study of an evangelical church, Ammerman found that many youth "drop out of church when they are old enough to say 'no' to their parents . . . Rather than leaving religion entirely, many 'convert' to other denominations and become among the most committed leaders of the same liberal churches they grew up disparaging."[62]

Gay and lesbian teens are those who are perhaps most likely to leave conservative evangelical Christianity. While evangelical media promise heterosexual teenagers that one day they will marry and have great sex, gays and lesbians do not have the option of delayed gratification. Rather, they are told that homosexuality is denounced by the Bible. Interestingly, however, in recent years Christian youth have shifted their approach to condemning homosexuality. If therapeutic discourse infuses chastity media in general, it is particularly central to media specifically addressing homosexuality, where being gay is increasingly understood not as a venal sin but as a kind of addiction. Thus, being gay is no worse than being an alcoholic. While hardly liberating, this is nonetheless a conceptual shift that allows gays and lesbians a place to exist as gays and lesbians (at an ontological level, if not at the level of lived sexual practice) in evangelical culture.

This shift in thinking is slowly spreading throughout evangelical culture, but why is it already so clearly in place in youth culture? I would argue that evangelical youth are more attuned to the wider culture's discourses of therapy, addiction, and healing than the generation before them. Further, as sociologist Richard W. Flory argues, evangelical GenXers are strongly committed to "inclusiveness."[63] Thus, magazines and youth group videos contend that as long as you are "struggling" with homosexuality, not accepting your sexual identity, there is a place for you in Christian youth culture. Here it is strikingly clear how the broader secular culture, in which ideas about homosexuality have shifted significantly over the past thirty years, has inflected evangelical culture. While evangelical gay and lesbian teens continue to see homosexuality as morally wrong, their approach is liberal compared with the uncompromising, punitive stance of the previous generation. In chapter 4, I will turn to the gay and lesbian "rejects" of this older generation.

65. Http://www.dctalk.com/about.htm, accessed 7 December 2000. The Web site also noted that the group met "while attending college in Virginia," neatly sidestepping their evangelical roots—they met at Jerry Falwell's Liberty University.

66. Interview with Richter.

67. Victoria E. Johnson, "Welcome Home?: CBS, PAX-TV, and 'Heartland' Values in a Neo-Network Era," *Velvet Light Trap* 46 (fall 2000): 40–55.

68. Interview with Deaton and Flanigan.

69. Interview with Brickell.

70. Interview with Montano.

71. Interview with Eddie DeGarmo, 2 November 2000.

72. Interview with Yake.

73. Interview with Richter.

74. Interview with Montano.

75. See http://www.carman.org.

76. Interview with Yake.

77. Welch, e-mail communication.

78. Interview with Deaton and Flanigan.

79. Of course, in the context of the Nashville music industry, it may be difficult to simply peg someone anxious to break into country as "not Christian." Not surprisingly, as both groups have their roots in the Bible belt, most people in both country music and Christian music grew up in Protestant evangelical churches. Flanigan explains, "We were never Christian filmmakers. We were filmmakers who happened to be Christians. There's a big difference . . . Our intent was never to become the top Christian producers" (interview with Deaton and Flanigan). Like Deaton and Flanigan, many people in the country industry identify as Christians, it just isn't their preferred market niche.

80. Sherry Milner, "Bargain Media," in *Roar! The Paper Tiger Television Guide to Media Activism*, ed. Daniel Marcus (New York: Paper Tiger Television, 1991), 17.

81. Interview with Montano.

CHAPTER THREE

1. Mimi White, *Tele-Advising: Therapeutic Discourse in American Television* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 177.

2. See "Religion," in Robert N. Bellah, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven M. Tipton, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

3. Watt, *A Transforming Faith*, 138.

4. Hunter, *American Evangelicalism*, 93; Watt, *A Transforming Faith*, 150.

5. Hunter, *American Evangelicalism*, 95.

6. As Sara Wuthnow observes, "for many today, 'sin' is an old-fashioned word that makes them uncomfortable." "Working the ACOA Program: A Spiritual Journey," in *"I Come Away Stronger": How Small Groups Are Shaping American Religion*, ed. Robert Wuthnow (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1994), 179–204, quotation on 184.

7. In her study of Southern Baptist and Presbyterian sermons, Marsha G. Witten notes an emphasis on "God's inner psychological states, especially on his feelings, which, in part, serve to render him familiarly human." God's love, Witten explains, has been "domesticated into human categories of usefulness." Witten identified several categories of speech in the sermons: God as daddy, God as sufferer, and God as extravagant lover. Witten, *All Is Forgiven*, 35, 48. On God as father and lover, see also Griffith, *God's Daughters*, and idem, *Born Again Bodies: Flesh and Spirit in American Christianity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, forthcoming).

8. Hunter, *American Evangelicalism*, 99.

9. Katherine G. Bond, "Abstinence Education: How Parents Are Making It Happen," *Focus on the Family*, September 1998, 12–13, quotation on 13.

10. Sharon Lerner, "Abstinence Scofflaws," *Village Voice*, 21–27 August 2002, 64.

11. Amy Stephens, "Trust Your Kids, Not Condoms," *Focus on the Family*, March 1998, 12–13, quotation on 13.

12. Kauffman, "220,000 Jesus Fans Can't Be Wrong."

13. Johnson left the *Breakaway* editorial staff in 1995 but continued to write Focus on the Family books.

14. "Dear Susie," *Brio*, April 1995, 5 (emphasis in the original). One of the most pessimistic books about dating and male-female relationships is Joshua Harris's *I Kissed Dating Goodbye* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 1997), which in 2001 had sold over 800,000 copies. Evangelical Jeramy Clark wrote *I Gave Dating a Chance* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook Press, 2000) as a rebuttal to Harris's book. See Laurie Goodstein, "New Christian Take on the Old Dating Ritual," *New York Times*, 9 September 2001, 1, 38.

15. *The Teen Study Bible: New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1993) says that girls are not at fault for being raped and refers readers to a passage from Deuteronomy (22:25–27) that confirms this. However, the passage directly preceding this one says that girls who are raped in the city should be stoned to death along with their rapists, since they did not cry out so that someone could rescue them. Only girls raped in the country, where no one is around, are not at fault.

16. Griffith, *God's Daughters*, 179.

17. Griffith, *God's Daughters*, 185.

18. This tactic is not restricted to Focus on the Family literature. See LaDawn Prieto, "An Urban Mosaic in Shangri-La," *GenX Religion*, ed. Richard W. Flory and Donald E. Miller (New York: Routledge, 2000), 57–73, in particular, 69–70. Evangelicals have taken to organizing father-daughter dances, where fathers "set a dating standard by showing the girls what being a real gentleman is like." See Jim Massery, "Finding Love in All the Right Places: Fathers and Daughters Dance the Night Away," *Focus on the Family Magazine*, February 2000, 22.

19. The purity ring first emerged in the late 1990s. The ring represents a holy pact with the girl's earthly father, her heavenly Father (God), and her future husband. See Michael Hayes and Judith Hayes, "The Purity Ring," *Focus on the Family Magazine*, May 2000, 16–17, quotation on 16. This object, which is intended simply as a *reminder* of a commitment to chastity, may become a potent sacred symbol in and of itself. On sacred images as memory aids, see Morgan, *Visual Piety*, chapter 6, "Memory and the Sacred."

20. Susie Shellenberger, *Guys and a Whole Lot More: Advice for Teen Girls on Almost Everything* (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell, 1994), 160.

21. See chapter 5, "Freud vs. Women: The Popularization of Therapy on Daytime Talk Shows," in Jane M. Shattuc, *The Talking Cure: TV, Talk Shows and Women* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

22. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: An Introduction* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), 21.

23. Wayne C. Booth, "The Rhetoric of Fundamentalist Conversion Narratives," *Fundamentalisms Comprehended* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 367–395, quotation on 390.

24. Booth, "The Rhetoric of Fundamentalist Conversion Narratives," 372–373.

25. Susan Jeffords, "The Big Switch: Hollywood Masculinity in the Nineties," *Film Theory Goes to the Movies*, ed. Jim Collins, Hilary Radner, and Ava Preacher Collins (New York: Routledge, 1993), 196–208.

26. *Good Sex*, videocassette, distributed by Zondervan, 2000.

27. Hendershot, "Shake, Rattle and Roll."

28. Susie Shellenberger and Greg Johnson, *258 Great Dates While You Wait* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1995).

29. Shellenberger, "What Is Sexual Purity?" *Brio*, October 1995, 26.

30. Shellenberger, *Guys and a Whole Lot More*, 154.

31. "Dear Susie," *Brio*, April 1995, 5.

32. "Dear Susie," *Brio*, March 1995, 6. Shellenberger responds, "No one knows the time or date of Christ's return. He may come back before you receive your next issue of *Brio*, and if He does, sex won't be the ONLY thing you'll miss out on. What about college life, grad school or giving birth? Heaven is going to be so TERRIFIC that none of the things of seeming importance *now* will matter when we're standing right next to Jesus Christ."

33. Shellenberger, *Guys and a Whole Lot More*, 155.

34. "Guys Gab about Going Out," *Breakaway*, February 1996, 28 (emphasis added).

35. "Yo Duffy!" *Breakaway*, February 1996, 16.

36. This incident is recounted in Nancy Tatom Ammerman, *Bible Believers: Fundamentalists in the Modern World* (1987; New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1993), 181.

37. *Teen Study Bible*, 816.

38. On the development of the evangelical antiabortion platform, see Susan Harding, "If I Should Die Before I Wake: Jerry Falwell's Pro-life Gospel," *Uncertain Terms: Negotiating Gender in American Culture* ed. Faye Ginsburg and Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing (Boston: Beacon, 1990), 76–97.

39. Cited in Joey O'Connor, "Eating Disorders: Starving for Attention," in *Hot Buttons II*, ed. Annette Parrish (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1987), 102. In this passage, Paul condemns fornication with prostitutes. O'Connor uses the passage to discourage eating disorders.

40. Federally funded abstinence programs share this point of view. "The law requires that programs that receive abstinence grants discuss contraception only in terms of its flaws." Lerner, "Abstinence Scofflaws."

41. *Breakaway*, June 1995, back cover.

42. Laura Kipnis, "(Male) Desire and (Female) Disgust: Reading *Hustler*," in *Cultural Studies*, ed. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula Treichler (New York: Routledge, 1992), 373–391, quotation on 375–376 (emphasis in the original).

43. Kipnis, "(Male) Desire and (Female) Disgust," 379.

44. Manny Koehler, "Don't Gag at the Bench Press," *Breakaway*, March 1995, 8.

45. Edward N. McNulty, *Hazardous to Your Health: AIDS, Steroids & Eating Disorders* (Loveland, CO: Group, 1994), 27.

46. There is a historical precedent for this use of sports to curb lustful activity in boys: the muscular Christianity movement of the turn of the century. With roots in the English public schools, the idea behind muscular Christianity was that "Christian virtues, morality, manliness, and patriotism can be engendered through physical activity, recreation, and sports." James A. Mathisen, "I'm Majoring in Sport Ministry: Religion and Sport in Christian Colleges," *Christianity Today*, May–June 1998, 24–28, quotation on 24. Muscular Christianity came to the U.S. in the 1860s, where it flowered in private high schools before being recognized by the YMCA as a way to evangelize to lower-class urban youth. Evangelist Dwight L. Moody should probably receive the greatest credit, however, for popularizing muscular Christianity in the 1880s. The movement had died out by the 1920s. For a contemporary example of the use of sports to evangelize, see Sharon Mazer, "The Power Team: Muscular Christianity and the Spectacle of Conversion," *Drama Review* 38, no. 4 (winter 1994): 162–188.

47. Shellenberger *Guys and a Whole Lot More* 156.

48. On Christian tattooing, see Lori Jensen, Richard W. Flory, and Donald E. Miller, "Marked for Jesus: Sacred Tattooing among Evangelical GenXers," in Flory and Miller, *GenX Religion*, 15–30.

49. Mab Graff Hoover, *God Even Likes My Pantry: Meditations for Munchers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1983), 95.

50. Griffith, *Born Again Bodies*.

51. Shellenberger and Johnson, *258 Great Dates While You Wait*, 83.

52. *Breakaway*, June 1995, back cover.

53. Andy Fletcher, "More Thanksgiving Maggot, Anyone?" *Breakaway*, November 1995, 22–23. This article marvels at "repulsive" non-American food traditions (fried scorpions, monkey brains), an insect dinner hosted by the New York Entomological society, and a World War II menu from a Paris restaurant that offered kabobs of dog's liver with herbed butter and cats garnished with rats.

54. Focus on the Family, *Eating Disorders*, narrated by Jackie Barrille, 1982.

55. Cherry Boone O'Neill, *Starving for Attention: A Young Woman's Struggle and Triumph over Anorexia Nervosa* (Minneapolis: CompCare, 1991), 5.

56. Michelle M. Lelwica, "Losing Their Way to Salvation: Women, Weight Loss, and the Salvation Myth of Culture Lite," in Forbes and Mahan, *Religion and Popular Culture in America*, 180–200, quotation on 181.

57. Lelwica, "Losing Their Way to Salvation," 195.

58. Joan Jacobs Brumberg, *Fasting Girls: The Emergence of Anorexia Nervosa as a Modern Disease* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 46.

59. Medieval religious fasters engaged in a number of practices that definitively distance them from modern sufferers from eating disorders: "Angela of Fogligno, for example, who drank pus from sores and ate scabs and lice from the bodies of the sick, spoke of the pus as being 'as sweet as the Eucharist.' . . . The bodies of women were also a source of food: mystical women exuded oil from their fingertips, lactated even though they were virgins, and cured disease with the touch of their saliva." Brumberg, *Fasting Girls*, 45.

60. Brumberg, *Fasting Girls*, 7 (emphasis added).

61. Ammerman, *Bible Believers*, 184. Ammerman notes that the General Social Survey—the source of her data—defines "sectarian" in a way that is "less-than-ideal." In the survey, "groups are categorized as 'sects' based on their small membership and deviance from the American norm, but this category may include everything from Jehovah's Witnesses to the Unification Church" (30).

62. Ammerman, *Bible Believers*, 186.

63. Richard W. Flory, "Conclusion: Toward a Theory of GenerationX Religion," in Flory and Miller, *GenX Religion*, 239.

CHAPTER FOUR

1. Interview with Rev. Dr. Mona West, 22 June 1998.

2. Founded in 1976, Exodus is the world's largest evangelical ex-gay ministry. The group has expanded to seventeen countries outside of North America. See http://www.exodus-international.org.

3. See Janet E. Halley, "The Construction of Heterosexuality," in *Fear of a Queer Planet*, ed. Michael Warner (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1993), 82–102.

4. Throughout I have avoided the term "fundamentalist,' which many conservative evangelicals see as an insult and which, further, is technically a word that is best used to describe separtist born-agains, not politically and/or culturally engaged born-agains. Throughout this chapter, though, Cathedral of Hope congregants generally refer to con-