Abstinence and Marriage in Contemporary Evangelical Protestantism:

An Analysis Using Bisexual Theory

by

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Abstract

This project uses bisexual theories of Majorie Garber and Clare Hemmings to look at the identity categories of “wife” and “virgin,” as employed by contemporary North American evangelical Protestant traditions. Through exploring evangelical Christian texts and teachings, as well as sociological data of evangelical women and youths, it is discovered that the two seemingly rigid categories are more permeable than evangelical traditionalists would believe. Instead of being victims of oppressive religious dogmas, many women and youths have in fact adopted identities of “wives” or “virgins” to directly challenge evangelical traditionalist understandings of femininity, virginity, sexuality, and gender.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, overt and implicit evangelical Christian agendas have been an influential part of many Canadian and American political discussions and education programmes. Debates on same-sex marriage in Canada and abstinence-only education in the United States are two examples in which those who espouse, albeit controversial, evangelical Protestant moral values often vocally participate in public discourses. At the same time as they are participating in secular, public discussions on marriage and abstinence, the North American evangelical Protestant tradition has also developed comprehensive, theologically grounded movements that regulate their own members’ own marital and non-marital identities and duties. In this study, I shall concentrate on the two identities of “wives” and “virgins,” and explore how they are discussed within the evangelical Christian tradition. I shall articulate also these identities’ assumed nature, and further deconstruct these identities’ seemingly stable and non-transgressable boundaries.

For this deconstructive project, I shall introduce bisexual theory, an area of queer theory, to help analyze the identity categories of “wives” and “virgins.” While the discipline of religious studies has welcomed research projects by queer studies scholars in the past decade, published materials such as Gary Comstock’s and Susan E. Henking’s Que(e)rying Religion mainly focus on heterosexist bias and non-heterosexual contents in the study of religion. The unique potential of queer theory in explaining religious

1 I use the term evangelical as an umbrella term for Protestants who affirm the necessity of a spiritual rebirth, a “born again” experience, during which one accepts personal sinfulness and that Christ’s atonement is essential for salvation.
doctrines and religious situations is largely unexplored. This study will attempt to address this void in religious studies by using bisexual theory. By critically appropriating early queer theoretical frameworks, bisexual theorists like Marjorie Garber and Clare Hemmings promote the necessity for more nuanced understandings of identity-formation. I believe that such theories, which explore relationships between individual agency and established authoritative ideals, are extremely useful to illuminate evangelical Christian justifications and explorations of “traditional” male-female marriage and youth abstinence culture. Also, since bisexual theorists rigorously question polarization of worldviews and these worldviews resulted in processes of binary identity constructions, bisexual theories are helpful to analyze evangelical Protestants’ dichotomized understanding of reality as good and evil as well.

Aside from demonstrating my efforts to address the academic significance in merging the two fields of religious studies and queer studies, this work also reflects deep personal interest and investments. In light of the deep divide between the religious right and equally vocal left, I am overwhelmed by the latter group’s seeming reluctance to understand further the cultural and religious arguments of their evangelical Protestant “enemy.” From street corners and conversations with friends to mainstream media broadcasts, I have noticed a significant absence of effort on the part of the anti-evangelical opposition to explore the historical, social, and theological factors that underlie evangelical Protestant moral agendas. Evangelical Christians who advocate traditional definitions of marriage and of women’s identities as “wives” and “virgins” are often painted as “bigots,” “prudes,” and “fear-mongers.”
While I recognize that many vocal evangelical Protestant leaders indeed might fit the aforementioned categories, these oversimplified labels do not and cannot fully explain their religiously justified social movements. More importantly, such accusations only further alienate the evangelical Protestant community from the secular public, and leave the problematic, yet highly influential, religious moral rhetoric unquestioned. For instance, in the contemporary American social climate where social programs advocated by the religious right are politically and financially supported by many institutions and privileged Americans, I believe that the social stakes are too high simply to ignore evangelical Protestant traditionalists or reduce them to mere villains. In this study, I would like to contribute to a growing field of religious studies scholars, sociologists, and political scientists who share my goal to investigate further the forces and beliefs that drive the ever strengthening evangelical Christian social agendas.

In the next chapter, I shall explore the bisexual theoretical framework that will inform the rest of this study. Tracing the emergence of bisexual epistemological theories from feminist philosophy and earlier queer theories, I shall explore the work of three bisexual theorists who have significantly informed this area of queer theoretical pursuits.

In the following two chapters, I shall investigate more closely evangelical Protestant discourses on marriage and on abstinence, and their articulations of the identities of “wives” and “virgins.” Along with presenting and analyzing theological justifications behind the evangelical traditionalist definitions of marriage and the identity of wives as submissive homemaker, Chapter Three also uses available sociological research to show many evangelical women’s own responses to these biblical and church mandates. By exploring evangelical female voices and by using various bisexual
epistemological frameworks, I shall show that the boundaries and duties prescribed to an evangelical wife are less stable and homogeneous than many feminists and religious traditionalists would believe. In fact, many contemporary conservative Christian women often destabilize and reimagine their religious roles as submissive homemakers by constantly negotiating with rules and implications of their identities as “wives.”

In Chapter Four, I shall turn to the discourse about sexual abstinence that is central to the contemporary North American evangelical Protestant abstinence movement. While the large collection of abstinence literature presents “virgin” identity as a highly regulated and nonnegotiable identity for all unmarried evangelical Protestant youths\(^2\), the chapter will demonstrate - again with the help of bisexual theories - that some youths, like evangelical wives in the previous chapter, do indeed explore, and even redefine, the boundaries of their “virgin” identity.

To conclude this study, I shall explore some of the concerns and paradoxes that arise from this project. I shall first evaluate the applicability of bisexual theory to a wider scope of evangelical Protestant moral beliefs. I shall then compare the two identities’ roles and positioning within the wider evangelical Christian tradition. At the same time, I shall pose various questions that have continually haunted both this study and the resource materials on marriage and abstinence. For instance, if the respective identities of wives and virgins for women and unmarried youths are indeed innate and God-given, why are there collections of literature and church doctrines that aim to educate and regulate these identities?

\(^2\) This paper borrows the evangelical Protestant use of “youths” to refer to individuals between the ages of 14 and 25.
While there is a certain irony in applying bisexual theories to analyze the conservative and mostly anti-queer tradition of evangelical Protestantism, I hope that this study will demonstrate the feasibility of such application. Also, I hope that this study will provide a glimpse of the vast potential of queer theories to illuminate identities, traditions, and social dynamics that are not queer-related, or even queer-positive. In exploring writings on and, to some extent, writings by evangelical wives and virgins, I hope to help demystify the stereotypes of these groups as homogeneous and uncritical individuals, and to highlight the importance of taking seriously their own voices, personal experiences, and religious contributions to their much cherished religious tradition.
Chapter Two: The Making of a Bisexual Trajectory

2.1. Introduction

Queer theory positions itself in the field of queer studies as a philosophical and often feminist approach to queer individuals. “Queer” reflects “a zone of possibilities” that, according to queer theorist Annamarie Jagose, “dramatiz[es] incoherences in the allegedly stable relations between chromosomal sex, gender and sexual desire” (Jagose 2). Queer theories take on a postmodern nature to decypher, deconstruct, and reinvent intersecting struggles that sociological and historical approaches in queer studies have often viewed as either as monolithic or independent of each other (see Chauncey 1994; Kennedy and Davis 1993).

First introduced by feminist film theorist Teresa de Lauretis in the early 1990s, “queer theory” is a collection of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, and inter-sexed lenses through which to examine critically existing identity categories. In this chapter, I will first introduce theories by Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick to expose their intimate theoretical connections with bisexual epistemology – the focus of this chapter. Three dominant bisexual trajectories presented by theorists Maria Pramaggiore, Brian Loftus, and Clare Hemmings will then be explored and simultaneously examined for their contributions in developing an effective and generally applicable epistemological approach. While Clare Hemmings delivers critical and persuasive critiques of other bisexual epistemological principles, her own bisexual,
poststructuralist, feminist trajectory requires further elaboration to complete the deconstructive goal that she describes as the essence of bisexual epistemologies.

2.2.1. Reimagining Identities: Canons in Queer Theory

To comprehend bisexual epistemology and its position in the field of queer theory, queer theory as a deconstructive enterprise must be examined. Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick are three of the most prominent queer theorists. Through their individual works and mutual dialogues, they firmly establish queer theory’s ability to contest effectively ontological and epistemological assumptions, and implications of queer identities and trajectories. Due to the limited space available in this study, this chapter will concentrate on the arguments that are most influential to bisexual epistemology. It is imperative to recognize the following discussions of Foucault, Butler, and Sedgwick not merely as a means to trace the genealogy of bisexual epistemology. Their revolutionary ideas on sex, body, gender, and desire allow for the very possibility for the emergence of an effective bisexual epistemological trajectory. While Foucault’s, Butler’s, and Sedgwick’s arguments form the core premises of bisexual epistemology, this chapter will later demonstrate that these theorists’ concepts also became some of queer theory’s legacies that bisexual trajectories wish to deconstruct and re-imagine.

2.2.2. Redistributing Power: Foucault’s Hegemony and Resistance

Foucault defines identity-formation as a universal means to attain power. He identifies the concept of identity as a strategic cultural category that is the product of
“discourse.” “Discourse,” to Foucault, is a “series of discontinuous segments” that relate to a particular concept whose “tactical function is neither uniform nor stable” (“Power and Sex” 100). By intentionally and strategically presenting collections of utterances, individuals thereby constitute and contest the meanings of particular concepts. He argues that discourses are and have been present in every aspect of society, and they solidify the meanings of both normative and anti-normative social categories. Foucault describes the emergence of the category “homosexuality” in the 19th century as a “reverse discourse.” Homosexuality became an identity category when it “began to speak in its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or ‘naturality’ be acknowledged” (“Power and Sex” 101). The construction of the category of “homosexuality” was achieved, explains Foucault, “often in the same vocabulary, [and] using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified” (“Power and Sex” 101). Like other reverse discourses, the “homosexual” category was imperative for the homosexual discourse to become a strategic and effective mode of resistance.

According to Foucault, homosexuality was and is still resisting the hegemonic category of heterosexuality. Hegemony denotes power, yet this power “is not primarily a repressive force” (“Truth and Power” 36). Rather than attributing a “purely judicial conception [to] power,” Foucault insists that power “must be considered as a productive network which runs through the entire social body much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression” (“Truth and Power” 36). Thus, one should not consider “homosexual” identity merely as default alternative of heterosexuality nor is it originated from a coherent, essential, and personal attribute.3 For Foucault, a “homosexual” identity

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3 The assumption of homosexuality as a personal attribute is unchallenged by many works of gay theorists. This assumption is present most prominently in gay history. Texts such as Gay New York by George Chauncey and “Gay
is a strategically adopted cultural category that is by nature counter-hegemonic. Consequently, Foucault argues that monolithic categories of identity do not in any way reflect heterogeneous human experiences of the self. In other words, there is no congruence between categories of representation and reality of experiences.

This directly challenges the liberationist nature of a “homosexual” identity in queer activism. The gay liberationist concept of a common gay identity assumes that it inevitably implies a shared reality of homophobic oppression (Jagose 39). By rejecting the positivist nature of human understanding and experiences as the primary origin of identity-formation, Foucault calls into question the value of “modernity”. As a postmodernist, Foucault offers an alternative approach to identity politics in queer theory.

Yet many critics have targeted Foucault’s arguments for fluid power relations within existing practices and categories. Critic William Turner challenges the Foucaultian theory of identity for its lack of consideration for racial, gender, and class inequalities, and the resultant power differences. Turner argues that by not placing gender, class, and race as “axes of analysis” (Turner 45), Foucault fails to recognize their ramifications “for practices of order” (Turner 45). Turner believes that without a nuanced analysis of order, one cannot develop a convincing study of society. Consequently, Turner renders Foucault’s arguments of hegemony and discourses as the bases of society and identity formation incomprehensible.

Still, Foucault successfully revolutionized queer theory in the 1990s. Queer theorists began to reconceptualize power as a marker of identity, and focused on the incoherence within the “homosexual” identity. As a result, bisexual identity began to

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Identity and Capitalism” by John D’Emilio are extremely influential in charting the origin of homosexual gender and sexed identities. Yet their arguments are predicated on the assumption that the categories of homosexuality
gain visibility as a legitimate sexual identity informed by unique and multiple individual experiences that are different from homosexual and heterosexual identities.

2.2.3. Rewriting the Gendered Body: Butler’s Gender Performativity

While Foucault explores identity, in particular heterosexuality and homosexuality, as a regulatory construct, Judith Butler joins Foucault’s critics to question the effectiveness of his discussion in dismantling the “hegemonic power” of heteronormativity. Butler argues that since patriarchy preserves heteronormativity, it is imperative for Foucaultian theorists to implement feminist deconstruction of patriarchy to challenge a compulsory heterosexual trajectory. Such dismantling requires a critique of gender identity as naturally and inevitably coherent with the sexed body. Thus, to deconstruct heteropatriarchy, Butler argues that gender identity, in addition to identity itself, must be examined.

In the “cultural matrix,” Butler believes that gender identity is only intelligible because “certain kinds of ‘identities’ cannot ‘exist’” (“Gender Trouble” 17). These assumed non-existent identities are “those in which gender does not follow from sex and those in which the practices of desire do not follow from either sex or gender” (“Gender Trouble” 17). That is, a feminine gender identity is only comprehensible and deemed normative when it inhabits a female body, and a male-oriented desire is associated with this female. If femininity is not demonstrated in a female body or if this female feminine

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historically evolved from individual orientations to a collective community of personal identities.

4 The term “compulsory heterosexuality” is borrowed from Adrienne Rich’s influential article in radical lesbian theory “Compulsory Heterosexuality and the Lesbian Existence.”
body desires another female body or femininity, this gender identity becomes fragmented. The society then renders such disunity in gender, body, and desire unnatural and would further coerce its invisibility. As a result, Butler argues that this regulatory nature of gender identity inadvertently reproduces and naturalizes heterosexual relations. Accordingly, so long as heterosexuality is compulsory, women with their normative feminine gender identities are confined in patriarchal relations. This in turn perpetuates and secures male privilege. To deconstruct male privilege that is guaranteed through heterosexual relations, Butler performs an ontological investigation into the essence of gender identity.

Butler contends that identity is ultimately performative (“Gender Trouble” 25). Gender identity, for Butler, is “the repeated stylization of the body, [and] a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being” (“Gender Trouble” 33). To contest the fiction of any normative gender identity and any natural congruence between gender and body, and between body and desire, Butler proposes displacement of this repetition. Such displacement can then draw attention to the processes that consolidate sexual identities. This demystification of normative gender performance can be done through their parodic repetitions. Rather than constantly reaffirming the dualistic organization of gender and sexuality as originals and imitations, Butler emphasizes that regular and constrained performances become ritualistic productions that inevitably expose the endless possibilities of gender expressions (Jagose 85). In expressing gender as a parody, individuals are then able to confirm autonomy and agency. They are no longer dictated by normative behaviour of gender, and restricted to an essential and unchanging gender
identity. When gender is no longer naturalized, the congruence among gender, sex, and desire is dismantled, and these elements no longer become compulsory markers of heterosexuality or patriarchy. To Butler, this mode of resistance is epitomized in drag performances. While Foucault argues that to claim identity categories that are informed by reverse discourse is to resist heteronormativity, Butler believes that parodic gender performance is to undermine strategically heteropatriarchy.

It is necessary, cautions Butler, that one not understand all gender performances as free play or theatrical self-representations. Such beliefs would undermine gender’s pervasive impact in the existing culture. Rather, performances of gender are results of an individual’s “compulsion to repeat the same theme over and over [and] the compulsion to repeat variation on a theme” (Creet 181). With the liberation of gender, body, and desire from compulsory correspondence, the roles of sex and body in identity formation needs to be reexamined. As gender can be performed, it is no longer the cultural representations that necessarily correspond to a biological sexed male or female body. That is, the biological sexed traits on a body only function as markers of male and female when they correlate to masculine and feminine gender identities. With no inherent gender identities, Butler’s argument implies that genitalia cease to be primary markers and distinguishing elements of bodies. She exposes sex and the dualistic organization of bodies in relation to sex, like gender identities, as cultural regulations as well (“Gender Trouble” 7).

Critiques of Butler, especially by recent transgendered theorists, have argued that Butler’s postmodern definitions of gender and sex as socio-historical constructions deny the lived experiences of transgendered persons (see Macdonald 1998; Namaste 1996). By
describing drag performances as the epitome of gender parodies, transgendered theorist Ki Namaste believes that Butler “fails to account for the context in which these gender performances occur” (Namaste 186). While “transsexual women, and males in drag are permitted entry into gay male establishments,” Namaste explains, “they remain peripheral to the activities at hand” (Namaste 186). Contrary to Butler’s claim that drag performances are liberatory activities, Namaste argues that drag representations perpetuate transsexuals’ status as entertainers and spectacles in a sexed and gendered popular culture. Since queer studies and theory seeks to include, rather than exclude, sexual minorities, Namaste’s critique directly challenges Butler’s contributions to the studies of sexuality and gender.

Nevertheless, having argued that sex is not a natural categorization of bodies, Butler successfully demonstrates that bodies can effectively function as transferers of knowledge and power. It is from this very understanding that queer, and later bisexual, epistemology emerges. That is, when the body is freed from the dictation of hegemonic forces, and has the capacity to perform various identities, subjects are free to adopt different epistemological vantage points. With no encumbered and necessary traits, queer epistemology, and especially bisexual epistemology, can use the body as both the object and subject of inquiry.

2.2.4. Redefining Inequality: Sedgwick’s Closet of Knowledge and Power

Queer epistemology is the core of queer theory. As earlier discussed, queer theory aims to deconstruct existing discourses from a queer trajectory, and this trajectory requires a queer epistemological point of view. Through deconstruction and
reimagination, an individual can then develop a collection of principles and theories that becomes queer theory. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick is among the most influential scholars in developing this queer epistemological approach. Her article “Epistemology of the Closet” uses the journey of coming out as queer to discuss the relation between power and knowledge in the non-queer setting of the Jewish story of Esther. Sedgwick demonstrates the effectiveness of a queer trajectory and that this vantage point does not actually require the presence of any queer individual.

To articulate her queer epistemological lens, Sedgwick uses the metaphor of a closet. She argues that the formation of homosexual identity in coming out of the closet “fundamentally informs our entire culture” as it explains the knowledge and power regime that shapes society (Sedgwick 46). In the existing culture, Sedgwick argues that knowledge is power. While the closet represents “unequivocal privacy,” to come out delivers “a salvational epistemologic certainty” to queer individuals (Sedgwick 48). She furthers Foucault and Butler’s arguments of individuals as autonomous agents. To Sedgwick, this voluntary act of coming out is to restore agency. To come out is to consciously abandon ignorance, and to acquire power through the control and delivery of knowledge. This forms a process of transference of power from the heterosexist culture that forces queer persons into the closet to those who resist such oppressive and violent acts of silencing. Hence, Sedgwick identifies the closet as the metaphoric threshold of empowerment, and knowledge as the successful marker of this passage.

Instead of the existing polarized debate of homosexuality as either essential or socially constructed, Sedgwick proposes the minoritizing and universalizing binary. She indicates that the origin of the anxiety around homosexual identity emerges from a
paradoxical social position. On the one hand, the dominant culture holds “the minoritizing view that there is a distinct population of persons who ‘really’ are ‘gay’” (Sedgwick 56). At the same time, she claims that society adopts the “universalizing views that sexual desire is an unpredictably powerful solvent of sexual identities; that apparently heterosexual persons and object choices are strongly marked by same-sex influences and desires and vice versa for apparently homosexual ones” (Sedgwick 56). With a queer epistemological trajectory, Sedgwick argues that this paradox can be resolved. Applying a queer lens to understand identity and regime formations in the wider society, the minoritizing status of a homosexual identity can be proven universally applicable and beneficial. Her use of the closet to explain the forces of knowledge and power in the society is simply one of the many examples of how such a simultaneously minoritizing and universalizing view can be reinvented to contribute to a wider understanding of heterosexual culture.

By advocating a minoritizing and universalizing binary and a queer epistemological view, Sedgwick provides a model for bisexual epistemologists who emerged later in the 1990s. Many bisexual epistemologists appropriate her argument to justify the benefits of a bisexual epistemological approach for all bisexual and non-bisexual persons. Many bisexual theorists argue that bisexuality, like homosexuality, is positioned in a similar paradox in gay, lesbian, and early bisexual studies. Clare Hemmings, a theorist whose arguments will be discussed later on, best explains this position. She states that “on the one hand, bisexual is cast as the pernicious glue maintaining heterosexist gendered, and sexed complementarity” (Hemmings 2). Yet

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5 As queer theory before the 1990s comprises mostly of gay and lesbian theory, “gay and lesbian theory” is used hereon to refer to early collections of queer theory.
“[o]n the other, within much contemporary bisexual theorizing, that same middle ground represents the great ‘bisexual escape’ from rigid sexed, gendered, and sexual oppositions” (Hemmings 2). Bisexual identity and trajectory as both a traitor and saviour of queer theorizing of gender and desire is heavily discussed in gay, lesbian, and early bisexual studies. The next section of the chapter will first position bisexual identity in the greater context of gay, lesbian, and bisexual theory, and then discuss how three bisexual epistemologists attempt to resolve this very paradox in their epistemological principles.

2.3.1. Quest for a Bisexual Trajectory

As emphasized prior to the discussions of Foucault, Butler, and Sedgwick, their theories are not mere background to the emergence of bisexual epistemology. Foucault’s arguments about identity formation, Butler’s disturbance of a gender, sex, and desire congruence, and Sedgwick’s justification for queer epistemology as a universalizable framework all significantly contribute to the very understanding of a bisexual agent in bisexual epistemology. However, their theories are also grounds for bisexual epistemological critiques.

One of the most obvious challenges against Foucault, Butler, Sedgwick and other dominant queer theorists is their neglect of bisexuality as a valid trajectory (see Adrienne Rich 1981; de Lauretis 1984; Ingram 1997). From the beginning of queer theory in 1980s, bisexuality is usually deemed heteronormative. This is because bisexual

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6 See Majorie Garber’s *Vice Versa: Bisexuality and the Eroticism of Everyday Life* and Ruby Rowan’s “Sleeping with the Enemy and Liking it: Confession of a Bisexual Feminist” in *Turbo Chicks: Talking Young Feminism.*
individuals’ desire for persons of a different sex\textsuperscript{7} deviates from the homosexual desire, and thus must be heterosexual. As queer theory aims to undermine compulsory heterosexuality, many queer theorists, according to Clare Hemmings, believe that “the opposition to heterosexual normativity should remain the privilege of a distinctly gendered lesbian or gay male subject” (Hemmings 11). As a result, Hemmings argues that “anxiety about any lingering sexual and gendered oppositions that could compromise queer transgression can thus be displaced onto a hypothetical and abstracted bisexuality” (Hemmings 11). Other queer theorists have even severely critiqued bisexuality as “supporting or even generating fixed oppositional structures of sexuality and gender” (Hemmings 1). These abstract and sometimes demonized positions overlook bisexuality’s potential to be examined and applied as a different but nevertheless valid trajectory in the study of gender, sex, and desire. More importantly, these stereotypes and accusations of bisexuality negate the very possibility that a bisexual subject position can benefit individuals who do not identify as bisexuals.

While large volumes of work and anthologies in bisexual theory emerged in 1990s, many authors are not able to negotiate effectively a concrete and coherent bisexual position (see Garber 1996; Tucker 1995; George 1993). One of the main problems that bisexual theorists face is the definition of a bisexual identity that is neither stereotyped nor marginalized. Again, Clare Hemmings elaborates on this problem. She identifies the source of the problem to be the very premise of sexual identity formation. She states that the “formulation of sexual identity requires not only that one make a particular gendered and sexed object choice but that one continues to make that choice” (Hemmings 26).

\textsuperscript{7} In this chapter, what is traditionally termed as the “opposite sex” is replaced by “different sex.” This is because the emergence of transgendered and intersexed visibility proves that there are more than two sexes.
Hence, Hemmings argues that “the present can only be validated by the anticipated future, which can only be validated by a past that is retrospectively given meaning according to the present” (Hemmings 26). She continues to explain that “[f]or bisexuals, the different sexual object choices they have made are precisely what allow them to occupy bisexual subject positions, and to imagine themselves continuing to do so” (Hemmings 26). The sexual identity of bisexuality cannot be determined simply by indicating the sex of the agents’ object choice. In another words, the essence of a bisexual identity is independent of the sex of bisexuals’ desired objects. As a result, bisexual theorists have difficulties in indicating the core of bisexuality and in describing desire, body, and sexual activities as bisexual.

While developing a coherent understanding of bisexuality, one of the goals of bisexual epistemological approaches is to deconstruct the understandings of existing homosexual and heterosexual identity formations. In doing so, these epistemologists can define bisexuality and a bisexual epistemological view. More importantly, they wish to expose flaws inherent in any conclusive and coherent claims of knowledge of identity and categories. This chapter introduces three bisexual epistemologists who attempt to identify bisexuality, while at the same time undoing existing, including their own, definitions of identity. In challenging weaknesses in gay, lesbian, and bisexual theories, the three theorists, Maria Pramaggiore, Brian Loftus, and Clare Hemmings, ultimately each develops their own collection of bisexual epistemological trajectories.

2.3.2. Critical Outside: Maria Pramaggiore’s Epistemology of the Fence
In her article “Epistemology of the Fence,” Maria Pramaggiore critiques Sedgwick’s metaphor of the closet. By describing it as “continually dissolv[ing] and reproduc[ing] itself,” Pramaggiore challenges the definitive nature of the closet as an epistemological vantage point. A closet, Pramaggiore argues, is a wall that “divides and demarcates binaries including gender, object choice, and sexual practices” (Pramaggiore 3). That is, when Sedgwick proposes the closet as a space for homosexual identities, she equates sexual practices with identity and the association of gender and sexuality with singular desired objects (Pramaggiore 3).

Pramaggiore reimagines the closet as a fence. The gap in the fence then “opens up spaces through which to view, through which to pass, and through which to encounter and enact fluid desires” (Pramaggiore 3). Pramaggiore believes that while “fence-sitting,” bisexuals attain “the superiority of a temporally based single sexual relationship,” such relationships allow the agents to recognize both sides – the heterosexual and homosexual, and situate bisexuals in a third position (Pramaggiore 3). Challenging Sedgwick’s use of the closet as exclusionary, Pramaggiore also critiques Foucault’s argument for identities. While she agrees with Foucault that identities are strategically adopted cultural categories, Pramaggiore believes that apprehension and performances of ‘other’ sexualities “puncture gaps” in Foucaultian conceptions of identity categories (Pramaggiore 3). Unlike Foucaultian identities that are ontologically mutually exclusive, she proposes bisexuality as a third identity that simultaneously encompasses heterosexual and homosexual elements.

As a trajectory from the outside of hetero/homo binaries, Pramaggiore defines bisexual epistemologies as “ways of apprehending, organizing, and intervening in the
world that refuse one-to-one correspondences between sex acts and identity, between erotic objects and sexualities, between identification and desire” (Pramaggiore 3). From this vantage point, bisexual epistemological approaches can “restrict and redistribute desire” through “acknowledg[ing] fluid desires and their continual construction and deconstruction of the desiring subject” (Pramaggiore 3). She describes bisexual subjects as in a “place of in-betweenness and indecision” (Pramaggiore 3). However, this individual’s “indecision” is not the uncertainty in claiming an identity of heterosexuality or homosexuality. Rather it is the continual need to decide between men and women, male and female that defines the bisexual’s desire as never finite, consistent, and predictable.

Pramaggiore’s view is controversial among bisexual epistemologists. For example, Hemmings challenges the ability of bisexuality as a third identity as means to critically evaluate heterosexuality and homosexuality from the outside. Hemmings argues that “the very ability to think about bisexuality as a critical outside is facilitated by existing structures of sexual identity” (Hemmings 33). To position bisexuality as independent of and unaffected by existing categories of heterosexuality and homosexuality perpetuates heterosexual and homosexual behaviours as normative (Hemmings 33). While Pramaggiore views the bisexual body as a vehicle to transfer knowledge between heterosexuals and homosexuals, Hemmings critiques such positions’ inability to challenge these transferred knowledge and to problematize the existing binaries. More importantly, by defining bisexual identity against heterosexual and homosexual identities, bisexuality is rendered marginal and “has no enduring context of its own” (Hemmings 4). Hemmings believes that the creation of this abstract and self-
assured identity is ineffective in critiquing the category of identity itself. This construction then directly obstructs the very deconstructive epistemological ability that Pramaggiore advocates (Hemmings 6).

2.3.3. Critical Inside: Brian Loftus’s Bisexual Body as Visual Crisis

Pramaggiore’s bisexual trajectory emphasizes bisexuality as an identity situated outside the heterosexual and homosexual binary. Theorist Brian Loftus argues that, instead, bisexuality must be within the polar identities to deconstruct heteronormativity effectively. Loftus is heavily influenced by Butler’s argument that heteropatriarchy’s deconstruction is imperative to dismantling existing binaries. As a visual culture theorist, he centres his argument for a bisexual trajectory on bisexual agents’ bodies and sexual activities. Loftus states that “‘to have sex’ precludes bisexual plural acts” (Loftus 208). As a result, bisexual identity becomes “fragmented and dispersed between these two [heterosexual and homosexual] categories of identity” (Loftus 208). This creates a discrepancy in the heteropatriarchal understanding of identity as monolithic and a “conflation of biological sex, cultural gender, and sexual practice” (Loftus 207). When a bisexual body is a product of the binding of plural and fluid desire, it creates “semiotic tension” in the traditional study of sexuality that immediately identifies subjects by their bodies and the bodies’ consistency with gender (Loftus 207). According to Loftus, to label an individual bisexual is problematic, as it “replicate[s] the very ideological mechanisms” that heteropatriarchy produces to repress the multiplicity of desire (Loftus 210). In other words, the evaluation of bisexuality according to bodies and sexual acts
and desire perpetuates the normative yet extremely problematic markers of polarized sexual identities.

Loftus explains his theory with the human sensory ability of seeing. He believes that the existing category of bisexuality is invented by a heteropatriarchal sight. Pure sight “never allows pure access to a single object [and] vision is always multiple, adjacent to and overlapping with other objects, desires, and vectors” (Loftus 210). Yet to adopt a heteropatriarchal sight is to “[render] differences equivalent,” and non-heterosexual practices invisible (Loftus 210). Thus for one to view “bisexually,” this conditioned trajectory must be reinvented. Rather than viewing the bisexual body as both heterosexual and homosexual, and its plural desire as dualistic, a bisexual position should be viewed as paradoxical. Loftus believes that this paradox is produced when bisexuality “functions to augment heterosexuality.” This augmentation “invariably suppress[es] homosexuality by a strict reading of the body within a homosexual script ordered by the parameters of gender” (Loftus 211). Yet at the same time, the bisexual agent’s desire for the same sexed body poses “a crisis of visible distinction” (Loftus 211). Loftus believes that it is in this paradoxical position when a bisexual trajectory can frustrate hegemonic categories of “inside/outside, same/different, and hetero/homosexual” (Loftus 211). Rather than reinforcing dualities as a third identity, he proposes the introduction of bisexual sight as one that indicates possibilities and suppresses compulsory heterosexuality. Adopting Butler’s conclusion, Loftus believes that this epistemological deconstruction of polarities then dissolves heteropatriarchy. Unlike Pramaggiore, Loftus adopts bisexual identity as a vantage point from the critical inside between binaries of heterosexual and homosexual identities, sex, and gender.
While Loftus’ position avoids Pramaggiore’s creation of an abstract and marginal identity, his understanding of bisexual identity is also often critiqued. As Loftus attacks the categories of sex, gender, and body that homogenize sexual identities, he is in fact creating a monolithic bisexuality. In constructing a bisexual identity inside the binary, Loftus’ argument implies that bisexual experiences from this vantage point are identical. He assumes that bisexual experiences can be effectively and completely formed once positioned inside the homosexual and heterosexual binary. Again, theorist Clare Hemmings and other poststructuralist theorists argue that since experiences can never be complete, and sameness can only be reached upon completion, bisexual experiences can never be monolithic (see Scott 1992; Harraway 1991). Thus Loftus’ reinvention of a bisexual trajectory simply replaces a singular and finite identity with another.

2.3.4. Partial Entrance: Clare Hemmings’s Postructuralist Experience

Deeming Pramaggiore’s bisexual identity abstract and Loftus’ trajectory unrealistic, Hemmings adopts poststructuralist feminist arguments to create a bisexual epistemological view that is positioned neither inside nor outside existing binaries. She aims “to focus on the bisexual knowledges produced in the margins of dominant discourse […] and to connect those to one another through something other than an assumed bisexual universal” (Hemmings 36). She believes that the key in creating an effective bisexual trajectory is to deconstruct feminist, gay, lesbian, and other bisexual theorists’ understanding of experience. Hemmings challenges the assumption of
gendered or sexual experiences as *a priori*. While Pramaggiore, Loftus, and other bisexual theorists premise their arguments on a unified and finite bisexual experience grounded on the body, Hemmings wishes to challenge the body as a marker and maker of sexuality. She argues that bodies only develop “models of experience [that are] partial, fragmented, and contradictory” (Hemmings 36). She argues that bisexuals, like all individuals, are informed by multiple contexts. They include political, sexual, gendered, geographical, and intellectual environments. According to Hemmings, Loftus’ construction of a bisexual identity that focuses on the body and Pramaggiore’s presentation of bisexuality as a metaphor are simply unrepresentative of real bisexual experiences. She insists that contexts and partiality must be restored to the development of bisexual epistemologies.

Hemmings appropriates feminist poststructuralist theories to facilitate her project. Feminist poststructuralist epistemologists, such as Elspeth Probyn, challenge the very notion of bodily grounded desire. Probyn encourages feminists to “subject ‘experience’ to particularly rigorous analysis” (qtd. in Hemmings 40). Experiences of desire must be ontologically and epistemologically distinguished. At an ontological level, the gendered, sexed, and racially marked bodies must be recognized. The epistemological self is then “revealed in its conditions of possibilities” (qtd. in Hemmings 40). The body and its experiences become “more obviously discursive and can be used overtly to politicize the ontological” (qtd. in Hemmings 40). For Probyn, “the productive self […] emerges as an effect of the tension between these [ontological and epistemological] levels,” and becomes “a reflexive subject cognizant of the differences that constitute herself” (qtd. in Hemmings 40). Exposing the ontological characteristics that are embodied in
epistemological experiences, Probyn argues that individuals’ knowledge is derived from the “partiality and transitory nature of experience that cannot be known in advance” (qtd. in Hemmings 40). In the context of bisexual epistemology, Hemmings argues that feminist poststructuralist arguments offer a drastically different interpretation of the formation of bisexual identity.

Instead of a fixed identity that is situated permanently against the monosexual categories of heterosexuality and homosexuality, bisexual epistemology’s appropriation of feminist poststructuralist thought emphasizes the “consistent partiality of bisexual experience, and its consistent presence in the formation of ‘other’ sexual and gendered subjectivities” (Hemmings 42). As bisexual identity is formed through bisexual desires and experiences of these desires, this sexual identity is always partial, transitive, and continually self-reforming (Hemmings 42). Consequently, there is no single experience of bisexuality.

This understanding of the partial nature of bisexual identity directly challenges the assumptions of the aforementioned bisexual epistemologies. Pramaggiore and Loftus view bisexuality as an outside and inside trajectory that is a fixed vantage point from which the bisexual individual examines and deconstruct categories such as heterosexuality and homosexuality. Instead, feminist poststructuralism interprets bisexuality as a constant project to deconstruct and reconstruct itself. It also continually positions and repositions identities that form “the other” without deeming heterosexual or homosexual identities as primary categories.

Rather than claiming bisexuality as a unique source of partial experience, this form of bisexual epistemology exposes the fluid nature of heterosexual and homosexual
desires as well. As earlier demonstrated, poststructuralist feminist epistemologists claim that identities are formed by experiences, and experiences are dependent on a “productive self.” As a result, experiences are always partial, and identities are subjective and never fully formed. Since heterosexual and homosexual identities are also based on experiences of the body and desires, they are also constantly evolving and self-reforming. Thus, heterosexual and homosexual categories of identities should not be regarded as definitive and static. Similar to the partial bisexual identity that critically evaluates itself and others, Hemmings claims that poststructuralist feminist bisexual epistemologies demonstrate also heterosexual and homosexual identities’ potential to self-examine and reconstruct.

In developing a bisexual poststructuralist feminist epistemological approach, Hemmings parallels Sedgwick’s goal to extract completely bisexual presence from the bisexual trajectory. Rather than asking “who bisexuals are and where they might be located,” Hemmings proposes an epistemological view that questions “how bisexuality generates or is given meaning in particular contexts” (Hemmings 31). Unlike Primaggiore and Loftus who define bisexual identity and bisexual positioning to deconstruct discourses on gender, sex, and desire, Hemmings appropriates a form of feminist epistemology to challenge the limits in existing dialogues of sexuality and gender. In critiquing the premise of the acquisition of knowledge pertaining to sexual identity, she creates a bisexual trajectory that continually deconstructs both its own and other categories.

One obvious critique of Hemming’s theory is her appropriation of poststructuralist feminist epistemological approaches. While such epistemological theory
allows an accurate portrayal of experience, its ability to function as an effective trajectory is dubious. As earlier explained, poststructuralism emphasizes the contexts and locations of experiences and their uniqueness. When functioning as a trajectory, poststructuralist epistemological approaches are then applied to challenge existing categories of identities. However, when such theories are appropriated as deconstructive tools, they undermine Foucault’s argument against experience-based identities. As illustrated in the first half of the chapter, Foucault believes that the primary impetus to identity formation is strategic. Foucault argues that identities originate from individuals’ desire to attain cultural authority or to resist existing hegemonic forces. Yet Hemmings and other poststructuralist feminist epistemologists deem experience central to identity formation. While Hemmings may insist that the above critique is irrelevant as bisexual epistemologies are most effective when bisexual presence is unnecessary, concrete understandings of bisexual and other identities are still required to ground a trajectory firmly. As existing discourses on identity categories have validated many of Foucault’s arguments, and their formations have often internalized Foucault’s premises, one needs further justifications from Hemmings to adopt a poststructuralist trajectory that posits personal, rather than cultural, reasons for identity formations.

Also, even if one were to render Hemmings’ poststructuralist proposal valid, its contextual emphasis remains problematic in examining identity categories. That is, according to Hemmings, identity categories are primarily defined by a collection of individual experiences. For example, individuals with homosexual identities possess homosexual desires, and persons with feminine identities inhabit and demonstrate feminine traits. To deconstruct these categories using poststructuralist epistemologies,
one must examine the partiality and contexts of these experiences. Hence, one needs to consider every contextual yet incomplete model of experiencing to determine the revolutionary potential of these categories fully. This creates a paradox. That is, when experiences and reality are never determined and ever-transformational, one cannot conclusively render them problematic. However, the underlying premise of Hemmings’ approach is that, like bisexual identities, all categories are problematic and in need of re-imagining. How then can one apply bisexual poststructuralist feminist epistemologies to categories that are inherently questionable, and at the same time never static? To champion her epistemological approaches persuasively over other bisexual epistemologies, it is imperative for Hemmings to address these possible critiques.

2.4. Conclusion

While this chapter provides only limited space to explore the development of a bisexual trajectory, illustrations of Foucaultian identity formations, Butler’s gender performativity, and Sedgwick’s queer trajectory construct a foundational understanding of sex, gender, body, and desire - the very premises of bisexual epistemology. Adopting queer epistemological principles and deconstructive ambitions, bisexual epistemologists Pramaggiore, Loftus, and Hemmings provide three distinct bisexual trajectories. Pramaggiore and Loftus define bisexual identity from outside and within homosexuality and heterosexuality respectively, while Hemmings undermines their arguments by emphasizing experience in poststructuralist feminist approaches. Yet as Hemmings’ focus on the centrality of experiences contradicts Foucaultian discourses that have significantly shaped queer theorizing of identity, Hemmings remains ineffective in
problematizing existing identity categories. Also, the primacy of partial experience in formulating identities creates a paradox when used to critique categories that Hemmings claims to be inherently flawed. To apply her principles in deconstructing identities further, they must be critically examined and re-imagined. However, despite the flaws in bisexual epistemological approaches, such a trajectory is extremely effective in demystifying Butler’s convincing portrayal of hegemonic heteropatriarchal regulations on sex, gender, and body.

The regulatory categories of sex, gender, and sexual identity operate not only in the wider secular culture, they form the core of many beliefs and taboos in dominant religious discourses in the contemporary society as well. In the following chapters, I will use bisexual theories to illuminate “wife” and “virgin” identity formations within the contemporary evangelical Protestant tradition. Since negotiations and reimagination of categorical boundaries are central to these two evangelical Christian identities, the bisexual frameworks and the feminist and early queer theoretical contributions as explored in this chapter will be highly effective to analyze these discussions in the following chapters.
Chapter Three: Evangelical Wives: Negotiating Identity

3.1. Introduction

In secular feminist and evangelical discourses, evangelical Protestant wives are often described as a homogeneous and complacent collective lacking both agency and autonomy. Since these women’s voices are often absent in the aforementioned discussions, their contributions in the evangelical Christian community are thus trivialized, and their existence rendered marginal. Contrary to these stereotypes, recent sociological research conducted on evangelical married women has revealed that they are in fact active participants in the formations of their identities and responsibilities. Evangelical wives, in this study, are married evangelical women who accept the basic tenets of their wifely identity, as prescribed by their conservative Protestant authorities and community.8

Exploring secular feminist, evangelical feminist, and evangelical traditionalist discussions of conservative Christian wives, I shall first investigate the three groups’ positioning of these women in their various discourses. I shall then draw on interviews and analysis by sociologists Sally Gallagher, Marie Griffith, and Christel Manning to explore evangelical wives’ interpretations and reimagination of their own experiences
and identities. Using the frameworks and vocabulary developed by bisexual theorists such as Clare Hemmings and Majorie Garber, this chapter will further investigate the subjects’ positioning and identity-formations. Rather than being passive followers of doctrinal rules and biblical authority, many evangelical Christian wives reinterpret the Christian calling for submission and homemaking. Demonstrating diverse understandings of the “wife” identity and wifely duties, many evangelical women negotiate with predetermined religious and secular boundaries, and perceive themselves as members of a heterogeneous community integral to the contemporary evangelical Protestant movement.

3.2. Marriage in evangelical Protestantism

To analyze evangelical wives’ roles in the North American Christian community, it is imperative to articulate the definition and social significance of their marriages, as prescribed by their denominations. Such understandings provide background for this discussion. They also provide the boundaries within which the study’s subjects negotiate their spousal roles, while the subjects, at the same time, maintain the traditional forms and contributions of evangelical marriages. This argument will be further explored in the next sections of the analysis. In contemporary North America, the largest and most influential evangelical Protestant denominations share a common definition of marriage, currently identified as “traditional marriage.”\(^9\) This definition is candidly presented by the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (EFC), a Canadian evangelical organization that

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\(^8\) While some religious scholars establish nuanced differences between “conservative” and “evangelical” Protestant beliefs, I shall use these terms interchangeability in this study (see Ammerman 1991; Schultze 1990; Frankl 1998).

\(^9\) This chapter will heretofore also refer to the evangelical Protestant model of marriage as “traditional marriage.”
represents and propagates marital values shared by the majority of the conservative Christian ministries and denominations in both Canada and the United States. According to the EFC, marriage is “a publicly recognized covenanting together for life between a woman and a man who live together in a relationship characterized by love and faithfulness, for the purpose of lifelong, companionship, mutual interdependence and responsibility for each other, with the potential for procreation” (“When Two Become One” 8).

The EFC believes that the divinely sanctioned definition of marriage is apparent in the creation of Adam and Eve in the Book of Genesis. According to the EFC, the creation of Eve as Adam’s female counterpart in Genesis 2 reveals God’s desire for a male-female union. The role of Eve as a partner and not subordinate to Adam also demonstrates God’s will for men and women to be mutual complements. Moreover, quoting God’s mandate for beings to “be fruitful and increase in number” in Genesis 1:28, the EFC believes that “God created this husband-wife union with the potential to be fruitful in procreation” (“When Two Become One” 9).

Citing statistics, psychologists, and theologians, the EFC also illustrates the social benefits they perceive in the traditional marriage model. By comparing married men and women to adults in single-parent families, civil unions, blended families, and same-sex partnerships, the EFC concludes that the former enjoy higher emotional stability, financial security, and longer life spans than adults who are single or in any other form of unions. As a result, the EFC endorses the evangelical model of marriage as the form of

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10 The EFC is officially affiliated with more than 140 Canadian ministries and denominations, and also with the Christian organization “Focus on the Family,” the most outspoken proponent of traditional marriage in North America.
social organization that most facilitates an economically stable, emotionally healthy, and widely populated society (“When Two Become One” 18-22).

The EFC’s advocacy of an evangelical model of marriage not only attempts to appeal to both Christian and non-Christian support for monogamous, male-female unions, but also carries significant implications for men and women within the evangelical community. While evangelical Protestant denominations acknowledge that believers are not compelled to marry, and some are called to celibacy, the denominations’ descriptions of marriage as a divinely-sanctioned, biologically-determined, and socially beneficial institution implicitly endorses marriage as normative Christian behaviour. Such normativity is further justified when groups, such as the EFC, emphasize marriage as the ideal exemplification of the covenantal relationship between God and believers, and between Christ and the Christian church (“When Two Become One” 10). Thus, unless believers are otherwise called to be single, evangelical Protestant communities widely expect their members to marry.

Although identified as two halves of a single union, the identities of “husband” and “wife” are discussed and positioned very differently among North American evangelical Protestant communities. Evangelical Protestant communities often prescribe for husbands clearly demarcated religious and secular responsibilities. In the church, men are called to be spiritual leaders while they are mandated to be authority figures, decision-makers, and primary breadwinners in the home. In contrast, wives’ position in these spheres is more ambiguous; in both the church and the home, women are called to be submissive congregants, wives, and mothers, without clear explanations of the

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11 It is crucial to recognize that while procreation is not a necessary requirement for marriage, the EFC deems the potential for procreation essential to a life-long marital partnership.
meaning of “submission,” biblical or otherwise. Also in contemporary North America where Christian women increasingly participate in the workforce, evangelical insistence on homemaking, as well as domestic and religious submission as female ideals demonstrate apparent discrepancies between social realities and religious preaching (Gallagher 11). Churches’ ambiguous and often out-dated approach to Christian wives often also results in confusion and disorientation among this female Christian population. Although there are many historical, social, and theological reasons for such differences in prescribed male and female religious and social roles, the limited space of this work does not allow for such extended discussion. Instead, I shall concentrate on the present positioning of evangelical wives, and the women’s own negotiations with their submissive identities.

3.3. Evangelical Positioning of the Wife

Evangelical women’s own voices are often absent in many contemporary North American discussions about evangelical wives. These women’s presence is especially prominent in secular and evangelical feminist arguments. By “secular feminists,” this study refers to non-religious individuals who subscribe to one of the most influential areas of feminist thought that arose from the Women’s Movement in the 1960s. While some secular feminists believe that men and women possess biological differences, the secular feminist arguments referenced in this study are predicated on the idea that such differences do not justify any form of female subordination and male domination.¹²

¹² These feminist arguments are evident in some of the most influential works of the Women’s Movement. See Betty Friedan’s Feminine Mystique, and Miriam Schneir’s Feminism in Our Time: The Essential Writings, World War II to the Present.
Evangelical feminists, like their secular counterparts, believe in male-female equality in all aspects of the society; yet unlike secular feminists who justify their beliefs on the ground of human equality, evangelical feminists argue that the bible supports male-female equality. That is, they believe that when the bible is read in its historical and social contexts, God mandates men and women to be equal partners both in the public realm of the society, and the private realms of the church and home. Although many evangelical feminists such as Letha Scanzoni and Nancy Hardesty identify with the conservative Christian tradition, neither the majority of evangelical traditionalists nor the evangelical wives in this study recognize these feminists’ evangelical membership. Hence, despite their potential claim to be “evangelical wives,” evangelical feminists are not considered subjects in this study.

Secular feminists often consider evangelical wives misfits in the wider secular feminist community. Not only do many secular feminists view religious faith as a tool that encourages female dependency on institutions, they believe this dependency hinders women’s independence from existing social structures that secular feminists deem largely patriarchal. Many secular feminists view the population of evangelical wives as especially problematic. They often perceive the wives’ compliance in domestic and spiritual submission to male headship as tacit anti-feminist perpetuation of biblically endorsed sexism and self-inflicting oppression (see Griffith 1997; Friedan 1973; Litfin 2004).

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13 Evangelical feminism began in the late 1960s and was inspired by the Women’s Movement. Central arguments of evangelical feminism are illustrated in many works by American feminist theologians in the 1970s and 1980s, such as Nancy Hardesty and Letha Scanzoni’s All We’re Meant to Be, Virginia Ramey Mollenkott’s Women, Men & the Bible, and Paul Jewitt’s Man as Male and Female.

14 In evangelical traditionalist literature and teachings, the definition of “male headship” can be summed up as men taking primary responsibility in decision-making both at home and in the church.
Evangelical feminists also share many of secular feminists’ accusations against evangelical wives. Drawing a parallel between evangelical marriages and dictatorships, with husbands in the role of dictators, many evangelical feminists consider the wives’ mandated role as submissive homemakers inherently oppressive and anti-feminist. More significantly, as evangelical feminists argue that the bible promotes male-female equality, they consider the ideals of male headship and female subordination betrayals of the biblical truths. While many evangelical feminists consider the wives victims of a male-dominated and abusive interpretations of the Christian faith, evangelical feminists often share the secular arguments and consider the wives’ perceived passivity as ignorance of their own welfare (see Hardesty and Scanzoni 1974; Mollenkott 1977; Horner 2002). It is evident that both secular and evangelical feminists usually consider evangelical wives to be a homogeneous, passive group of women who, through subordination to the male spiritual and domestic authorities, voluntarily reaffirm their own victimization.

Similarly, many evangelical traditionalists also perceive the wives as a collective group who willingly subscribe to identical faith-based values. By “evangelical traditionalists,” this study refers to evangelicals who endorse the aforementioned model of traditional marriage where men are delegated to be domestic and spiritual heads over their wives. Appealing to biblical scriptures, evangelical traditionalists mandate married women’s roles as helpers in both the domestic and religious spheres (see Piper and Grudem 1991; Evangelical Fellowship of Canada 1991). This traditionalist stance is best expressed by the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, a self-identified anti-feminist international evangelical Christian organization.15 The Council argues that God

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15 The Council of Biblical Manhood and Womanhood was established in the late 1980s explicitly to respond to the growing influence of evangelical feminism in the past two decades.
reveals the complementary nature of male-female relationships in the Book of Genesis, and thus patriarchy metaphysically underlies human nature. Hence, it believes that women at church must recognize that “some governing and teaching roles […] are restricted to men.” Similarly at home, “wives should forsake resistance to their husbands’ authority and grow in willing, joyful submission to their husbands’ leadership” (“Danvers Statement” 1).

Portraying the wives as voiceless subjects whose roles are solely described in negation to those of their male spouses, evangelical feminists, secular feminists, and evangelical traditionalists have long rendered these women invisible. That is, the aforementioned groups recognize evangelical wives only as shadow subordinates in the larger contexts of their husbands’ patriarchal authority, and ascribe to these women vague yet blanket attributes, such as submissiveness and complacency. As a result, these third-party discussions have mostly erased the wives’ communal significance and either undermined or completely ignored women’s social, domestic, and religious contributions.

Recognizing the unarticulated and abstract nature of female roles as prescribed by the church, some conservative Christian scholars and pastors have attempted to utilize epistemological tools to establish firm and nuanced understandings of this identity. Many evangelical scholars, such as Elisabeth Elliot, and the famous Christian couple Tim and Beverly LaHaye, refute completely the evangelical feminist notion of husband-wife equality, and align wifely nature to an inherent and universal idea of femininity (see Elliot 1992; LaHaye 1998; Piper 1992). To these scholars, this femininity is epistemologically accessible through biblical scriptures as well as women’s everyday
experiences. According to these writers, this innate femininity is most fully manifested in the wifely duty of submission and homemaking.

Referencing biblical sources, they argue that as God made Eve from Adam and for Adam, God bestows femininity, and thus passivity, on Eve to complement the masculine nature of Adam. Since God also ordains Eve to be Adam’s helper in Creation, these scholars argue that femininity is embodied in female subordination to male authority. As Eve is the first female human, they believe that this notion of female as a passive helper is then universally inherited by all of womankind, and is reaffirmed by current male-dominant and female-subordinate societies. Additionally, referencing female biblical figures such as Sarah and Esther, and simultaneously pointing to the socially normative female role as mothers and caregivers, many Christian scholars identify the instinct to nurture and care for others as an essential feminine characteristic (see Weber 1993; B. LaHaye 1976; T. LaHaye 1968). They argue that unlike the male-dominated church and the workforce, the domestic sphere allows women maximum liberty to care for their husbands and children. Thus women should naturally embrace the home as the most ideal female space. Consequently, many contemporary North American evangelical denominations share the definition of an ideal evangelical wife who is a passive, helpful, and perfectly feminine mother-homemaker.

However, in trying better to articulate the identity and role of the evangelical wife, many Christian scholars still fail to include these women’s own voices. As a result, the writers negate the possibility of heterogeneity, self-reflections, and criticisms in these women’s experiences. This emphasis on a homogeneous female experience and women’s inherent role as submissive homemakers further denies any room where the
wives may themselves problematize this prescribed identity. Also, in assuming the meaning of submission to be self-evident in the bible, and the duties of a homemaker and mother to be unambiguous, evangelical writers such as the aforementioned LaHaye and Elliot often oversimplify the epistemological processes of contemporary Christian wives. That is, the scholars fail to consider the women’s own experiences as a component that informs their identity as “wives.” More significantly, by reinforcing femininity as inherent among women, and the feminine as essentially submissive and subordinate to the masculine, such attempts to justify and clarify wifely duties ultimately render a wifely identity marginal in evangelical Protestant discourses.

These evangelical traditionalist attempts to articulate a wife identity yet consequently render it marginal parallels many feminist, queer and bisexual theorists who describe bisexual identity with the absence of bisexual voices. Queer theoretical frameworks can be used to illuminate wives’ peripheral and ambiguous positioning in the evangelical tradition. In the discourses of feminist theory, queer theory, and queer activism, bisexual identity has been reproduced as what bisexual theorist Clare Hemmings labels “as an abstract and curiously lifeless middle ground” (Hemmings 1). Within this middle ground, bisexual identification is often viewed as a “slippage between sexual identities and desires,” where the bisexual individuals should be either homosexual or heterosexual, but simply “do not know their ‘true’ gay or lesbian” or heterosexual selves (James 222). Under the assumption that one’s own sexual self and identity are determined by a particular sexed object choice, many queer theorists often degrade a non-uni-directional bisexual desire as confusion, indecision, and ultimately
abstract (James 221). As a result, bisexual individuals are frequently deemed untrustworthy, promiscuous “fence-sitters.”¹⁶

This erasure of bisexual desire directly led to bisexuality’s invisibility in many contemporary works of queer theorists and queer activists. Influential queer theorists such as Judith Butler, Adrienne Rich, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick have either ignored bisexuality as a valid and existing sexual desire, or they have simply attributed it to a temporary mental state of limbo between monosexual dichotomies (see Butler 1990; Sedgwick 1993; Rich 1993). Such dismissal of bisexual identity further perpetuates heterosexual and homosexual hostility against bisexuals, and at the same time confirms the “abstract” and “lifeless” nature of bisexual desire and identity.¹⁷

Similar to bisexuality, in many of the aforementioned evangelical illustrations of the wife identity, Christian women also inhabit what Hemmings labels a “lifeless middle ground” between two disparate communities – the secular and evangelical feminist community on the one hand, and their own evangelical traditionalist denominations on the other. Many secular and evangelical feminists at best consider evangelical wives misfits among the female population, and at worst, regard them as traitors to the feminist cause. At the same time, when evangelical traditionalists insist on women’s subordinate status at home and in the church, traditionalists place wives in secondary and often marginal positions within their own faith tradition. Without voices of their own to defend, or simply explain their positioning in their communities, like bisexuals, evangelical wives’ collective visibility is constantly undermined. These women simply

¹⁶ The term “fence-sitters” is used by many bisexual theorists both as a portrayal of bisexual stereotype and a metaphor for empowering bisexual desires. See Maria Pramaggiore’s “BI-ntroduction: Epistemology of the Fence,” and Majorie Garber’s Vice Versa.
become abstract identities in state of limbo between the polarities of the secular and evangelical feminist and evangelical communities. Similar to bisexuals whose silence is reinforced through their absence in many queer works, the absence of wifely subjects in many evangelical traditionalist discussions perpetually reproduces these women’s peripheral status. More significantly, much like the construction of an oversimplified bisexual closet, evangelical wives’ invisibility and marginal status in turn affirms their false stereotypical identity as a homogenous and complacent group of Christian women.

Paralleling the response of some evangelical traditionalists who attempt better to articulate the wife identity as means of avoiding ambiguity, some queer theorists have also emerged in the hope of rescuing the abstract positioning of bisexual subjects. Similar in some ways to evangelical traditionalists that emphasize evangelical women’s (feminine) experiences, these queer theorists also attempt to develop a common bisexual experience as a site for queer epistemological inquiries. This approach emphasizes “less who bisexuals are and where they might be located, but rather how bisexuality generates or is given meaning in particular contexts” (Hemmings 31). That is, bisexuality becomes “an epistemological as well as ethical vantage point” from which one can destabilize and deconstruct bipolar identity, gender, and sexual categories (Hemmings 31). Using personal experiences, as well as queer and feminist theories, these works primarily focus on the various definitions of bisexuality and the experiences of bisexual desire, and they are negotiated within the wider heterosexual and queer communities (see Rowan 2001; Weise 1992; Loftus 1996; Pramaggiore 1996). By reaffirming bisexuality as a site of knowing outside the heterosexual and homosexual binary, many queer theorists perceive

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17 Heterosexual and homosexual hostility against bisexuals is referred to as biphobia in queer theory and activism.
bisexual identities and experiences as inhabiting a peripheral space in the monosexual dichotomy. Yet citing critiques by bisexual theorist Clare Hemmings, these attempts remain “frequently undercut by the reinstatement of bisexuality as a marginal identity, itself not needing to be ‘undone’” (Hemmings 5). The stability of these bisexual epistemological sites have caused skeptics such as Majorie Garber to develop alternate bisexual epistemological approaches that are critical of both the bisexual identities and identity categories themselves. These responses will be articulated in the latter part of this analysis.

In attempts to locate universal epistemological processes and experiences of evangelical wives, many evangelical traditionalists, like many queer theorists, fail to consider the often partial, heterogeneous, and self-critical experiences of their subjects. Like many earlier noted queer theorists whose attempts to develop a bisexual epistemological vantage point are “frequently undercut by the reinstatement of bisexuality as a marginal identity, itself not needing to be ‘undone,’” these evangelical authors’ arguments fall prey to the same mistake (Hemmings 5). That is, as writers such as Elliot and LaHaye provide a universal and complete definition of a Christian wife, they still continually reaffirm the uniformity of Christian women. These authors deny the possibility for flexibility and spaces of negotiations within a wifely identity. Hence, they imply that, like bisexuality, the identity of a Christian wife itself need not be “undone” and/or questioned.\(^{18}\)

\(^{18}\) It is useful now to distinguish between evangelical writers who are also evangelical wives and the subjects of this study. While evangelical female writers like Elizabeth Elliot and Beverly LaHaye are also married evangelical women, I shall not consider their works as voices of evangelical wives themselves in this study. This is mainly because, rather than being informed by their experiences, authors such as Elliot and LaHaye are informed by religious authorities such as the bible and the evangelical Christian tradition in their articulation of the "wife" identity. When this study references to subjects’ voices, these voices are products of their epistemological experiences, as well as representative of religious and biblical mandates.
As both responses to the authoritarian evangelical Protestant ideals of the “wife” identity, and pragmatic negotiations with pervasive secular values of gender equality, many Christian women’s identities as “wives” are in fact informed by values beyond biblical scriptures and church mandates. Relying on their individual experiences, and their own understandings of gender, many women have redrawn the seemingly rigid boundaries of their wifely identities and duties.

3.4. Redrawing Submissive Boundaries

Contrary to secular and evangelical feminist stereotypes, many Christian women actively redefine their spousal roles when confronted with evangelical traditionalist ideals of gender and marriage. While many feminists and evangelicals deny the agency of these women, in reality, many evangelical Christian wives celebrate their autonomy by continually negotiating within seemingly rigid marital boundaries. One of the most significant examples is their redefinition of female submission.

According to many evangelical movements, wifely submission is a woman’s “disposition to yield to her husband’s guidance and her inclination to follow his leadership” (Piper and Grudem 61, emphasis by authors). However, published interviews and surveys by sociologists Sally Gallagher, Marie Griffiths, and Christel Manning reveal that many contemporary evangelical Protestant wives do not wholly subscribe to this definition of submission.\(^\text{19}\) The women often believe that such definition romanticizes,

\(^\text{19}\) The opinions of evangelical Protestant wives that are used in this work are extracted from Sally Gallagher’s *Evangelical Identity and Gendered Family Life*, Marie Griffiths’ *God’s Daughters: Evangelical Women and the Power of Submission*, and Christel Manning’s *God Gave Us the Right: Conservative Catholic, Evangelical Protestant, and Orthodox Jewish Women Grapple with Feminism*. 

The former element is absent in literature written by many evangelical female authors who primarily self identify as authoritative representatives of the evangelical tradition, and not members of an evangelical female collective.
and unrealistically exaggerates men’s ability to manage marital and family affairs. As demonstrated in Gallagher’s research on the Women’s Aglow Fellowship, a popular Pentecostal Christian women’s group in the United States, many wives view their submission as a weapon of control over their husbands’ lustful and inconsiderate nature. Darien B. Cooper, author of *You Can Be the Wife of a Happy Husband* is a well revered and often quoted speaker for marital health in the Aglow’s Fellowship, and she best sums up the crucial role of submission as warfare strategies in the home. She believes that wives must submit to their husbands’ natural and frequent sexual appetite to maintain marital happiness and family unity. Cooper warns that “if [wives] do not fulfill [their] husband’s sexual needs, [they] may be a stumbling block in his life and cause him to be led away from spiritual truths instead of toward God” (Cooper cited in Griffith 180). According to Cooper and many Aglow women, women’s failure in submission would inevitably encourage men to turn to adultery and savagery (Griffith 180).

Many Christian wives also view submission to husbands as a fundamental strategy for the improvement of the home. Female subjects often argue that if they submit to men despite obvious disagreements, their overt tolerance would eventually bring about positive changes in their husbands (Griffith 179). Ultimately, this would encourage their spouses to recognize their wrong and improve the overall marital or familial conditions (Griffith 180). Also, since many evangelical women believe that they are by nature more spiritual than men, they perceive submission towards their less spiritual counterparts as implicitly facilitating, and thus enhancing their husbands’ spiritual maturity (Manning 112). Rather than perpetual self-victimization, many Christian women understand submission to their husbands as a mode of passive control.
More significantly, as many evangelical wives believe that they are gifted with the female instinct to nurture, they regard the acts of changing or overcoming their husbands’ character, behaviour, and lust to be ultimately nurturing behaviours. Since submission to their husbands is an effective means to these nurturing ends, many evangelical women regard submission as an ideal expression of their God given instinct (Grudem 205).

A subject in Manning’s study echoes this view of male weakness, as she argues that “[t]here’s just a weakness in men. I don’t see a problem with women being weak … it’s the women that are a lot of times leading the families … so we need to encourage men” (qtd. in Manning 112). A woman in the Aglow group, like many of the subjects, believes that acts of encouragement during marital conflicts can be “such a simple little thing” such as commenting on her husband’s “broad shoulders” and his “big strong hands” (qtd. in Griffith 181). In submissively nurturing what they perceive as men’s “fragile egos,” and “giv[ing] him the appreciation and admiration his manhood craves,” many evangelical women in the study argue that they facilitate marital harmony, and eventually encourage spiritual growth in their husbands (Griffith 181). According to many subjects, since the natural result of domestic harmony is spiritual awareness in their spouses, when they achieve peace at home through active submission, they directly create an ideal environment to strengthen their husbands naturally weaker spiritual state (Griffith 181).

This understanding of submission as a spiritual tool for women at home extends beyond simply battling their husbands’ nature and personality. Many evangelical wives argue that wifely submission also challenges the anti-Christian forces of secular humanism and feminism – seen as two of the leading causes of moral breakdown in
North America. Such views are frequently illustrated by evangelical writers such as Mary Pride, and Darien Cooper. Pride, along with a majority of the female subjects in the studies used here, believes that secular humanism and feminism intentionally and blatantly reject Christianity and biblical teachings. According to Pride, feminism is “a totally self-consistent system aimed at rejecting God’s roles for women” by dissuading women from their divinely ordained wifely duties of submission and homemaking (Pride xii). Authors such as John Piper further Pride’s argument in claiming that since feminism demands that women abandon their feminine roles, it perpetuates gender reversal. In turn, this directly threatens the masculinity of husbands and men in general. Consequently, such feminist ideology would undermine the created gendered order of the divine, and eventually lead to the collapse of a society that is organized by sex and gender (Piper 52).

Many wives view their submission at home as an act of combat against anti-Christian secularism in a metaphysical warfare that extends far beyond their domestic sphere. In other words, by submitting to their husbands and hence consciously rejecting their perceived feminist arguments, they perceive their roles as wives as integral to a Christian community that calls for spiritual battles against anti-Christian secular forces. As a result, through submission, the women extend the domestic nature of their “wife” identity to become spiritual as well.

In the studies, many Christian women adopt anti-feminist arguments similar to that of Pride, Cooper, and Piper. Many subjects resemble Nancy, a local Aglow leader in

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20 While it is implicitly stated earlier in the analysis, it is useful now to note that sex (male, female) and gender (masculinity, femininity) are often conflated in evangelical Christian teachings. This is mainly due to the evangelical Protestant argument that just as God made men and women, God assigned them the respective gender roles of masculinity and femininity.
Griffith’s study, in declaring that she was a “former feminist,” and had “‘to move beyond all that’ into God’s true purpose for her life” (qtd. in Griffith 181). She claims that feminism was “bad for [her] marriage,” as it encouraged her to “compete” with her husband, and reject “marriage principles” grounded on wifely submission to male authority (qtd. in Griffith 181). Having abandoned her feminist beliefs for what she perceives as “God’s prescribed roles” for women as submissive wives, Nancy echoes many subjects’ arguments that she has not only saved her marriage, but also contributed to battling the anti-God feminist forces in the wider society (Griffith 181).

This wifely duty as a spiritual warrior is also reflected in another popular contemporary reinterpretation of submission. In this understanding, wives’ submission is primarily directed to God, and not their husbands. Many female interview subjects believe that their submission to their husbands is simply one of the many vehicles through which to demonstrate their obedience and appreciation for God’s grace. Marie Griffith in God’s Daughters best describes this reorientation of submission. According to Griffith, when women agree to submit to God, they obtain forgiveness. In turn, this liberates women from victimization and increases their sense of personal agency and responsibility. Thus Griffith explains that “within this framework, women understand the ideal of submission to husbands not so much as a compliance with an immutable gender hierarchy but as an extension of their submission to God” (Griffith 10). Gallagher furthers Griffith’s argument by maintaining that to many evangelical Christian women, obedience is not only a Christian virtue, it is the essence of Christianity. Gallagher explains that evangelical women see Christ as acting for the greater good by sacrificing himself for the sinful humanity. Hence, in submitting to their husbands in Christ’s model
of “not my will, but your will be done,” many wives perceive themselves to be Christ-like in acting also for the greater good (Gallagher 163). Since evangelicals deem modeling their life after Christ as a fundamental testament to the Protestant faith, many women view their submissive behaviours as spiritual acts that demonstrate their religious commitment and devotion.

While many evangelical wives respond to their religious calling for submitting to male headship both at home and in the church, many reject the evangelical traditionalist understanding of submission as absolute and unquestioned obedience. Rather, they renegotiate the definitions and implications of this submissive duty. They do so by claiming submission as a strategic weapon of control over their marriage and family. Also, in using submission as a spiritual tool to battle against anti-Christian forces, enhance male spirituality, and facilitate their own Christ-like nature, many women transform the passive and complacent implication of submission. Instead, they remain submissive as an active, authoritative, and religiously empowering behavior integral to the survival of their evangelical community.

When evangelical women replace their husbands with Christ as the ultimate object of submission, and through submission, claim that they reaffirm a subordinate status in relation to Christ, and not their spouses, many subjects claim their submissive acts as feminist. That is, since men are called to be servants of God, many women argue that in submitting to Christ, they assume an equal standing with their husbands. Consequently, in emphasizing their servant status to God when submitting to male headship, subjects believe that they are enacting the secular feminist calling for gender egalitarianism (Manning 138). In other words, by no longer perceiving their husbands’
pleasure as the ultimate end of submissive behaviour, many evangelical women argue that they are actively rejecting the secular feminist interpretation of submission as male-centred. Rather, they are actively reconciling the feminist belief for gender equality with the Christian duty of wifely submission. However, it is essential to recognize that while many women do incorporate feminist arguments for gender equality in the home in their understandings of submission, they rarely claim the label of being an evangelical feminist. Nonetheless, these women’s integration of secular and evangelical feminist arguments in their redefinition of submission is demonstrative of feminist influence that has penetrated into contemporary Christian wives’ processes of identity formation.

The reinterpretations of the definitions, means, and implications of submission demonstrate evangelical Christian women’s continued processes of negotiation with Protestant gender boundaries. Appeals to bisexual epistemological theories can further elaborate these processes. Bisexual theorist Majorie Garber frames her discussion of negotiation by employing the metaphor of a relationship between bisexuals and a fence. Garber questions the stereotypes of bisexuals as indecisive and manipulative “fence-sitters” by directing attention to the builders of the fences. She states that “[o]n the open range fences exist because there are no natural boundaries.” Garber continues to argue that “what [fences] signify is not existential difference but the property difference between ‘mine’ and ‘yours’ – or us and them” (Garber 86). In being “fence-sitters,” Garber believes bisexuals are expressing their basic human freedom to enact desires for both sexes. A bisexual identity becomes the locus of understanding in what she refers to as “the overlap between political action and sexual desire” (Garber 90). Simply by their existence, Garber states that bisexuals “unsettle ideas about priority, singularity,
truthfulness, and identity” (Garber 90). Consequently, bisexuality “provides a crucial paradigm […] for thinking differently about human freedom” (Garber 90).

As earlier discussed, rather than equating submission with subordination and passivity at home and in the wider community, many evangelical women reinterpret submission as a principal way for gaining authority over their own lives and marriages. When one equates rigid evangelical understandings of spousal and gender roles assigned to husbands and wives with Garber’s fences in an open space, the wives become Garber’s “fence-sitters.” As wives reject submission as unquestioned obedience and subordination, they render the fences unstable, and they undermine the rigidity of the fence-builders - the absolute authority of the evangelical interpretation of the bible and the traditionalist gender role assignments. By adopting their own experiences and understandings of their submissive roles, like the bisexuals as fence-sitters, these women enact their human freedom as autonomous agents. They are free to initiate submission to their husbands in ways that would best facilitate their specific goals, whether it is changing their husbands or improving the marriage. Negating the mandate for absolute subordination, each woman in the study applies her individual experiences of her husband and marriage to negotiate the boundaries and implications of her submission. Consequently, similar to bisexuals, simply by their existence as wives, these women “unsettle ideas about priority, singularity, truthfulness, and identity” (Garber 90).

Female subjects who replace their husbands with Christ as the object of submission become bodies that transfer knowledge between the disparate realms of the secular and evangelical feminism, as well as evangelical traditionalism. Clare Hemmings’ vocabulary is useful better to articulate these women’s positions. Hemmings
describes the bisexual body as a “‘double agent’ within heterosexual and lesbian communities and present[s] bisexuality as transferring knowledge rather than being produced by the intersection of knowledge and power” (“Bisexual Spaces” 32). As a result, the “bisexual body” becomes “a signifier of the possible reconfiguration of the relationships between the sexes, genders and sexualities” (“Resituating the Bisexual Body” 136). When the aforementioned evangelical Protestant women identify their submission as an advocacy for gender equality, they enact the role of a “double agent” in the feminist and evangelical traditionalist communities. Like bisexuals, these women perceive themselves not as a product of an intersection of feminist values and rigid religious gender regulations. Rather, they extract their understandings of feminism and apply them in reforming their roles as wives. That is, they transfer feminist values of gender egalitarianism from the non-traditionalist arena to their religious homes, and argue that submission is not inherently demeaning to women. By replacing subordination as an implication of submission, the wives actualize the bisexual possibility to reconfigure, what Hemmings describes as, “the relationships between the sexes, genders and sexualities” (“Resituating the Bisexual Body” 136).

3.5. Redrawing Homemaking Boundaries

Along with submission, contemporary evangelical Christian wives are also called to be homemakers. Dorothy Patterson, an evangelical writer and a member of the Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, defines the evangelical understanding of this domestic duty. According to Patterson, homemaking is a duty that “demand[s] a woman’s diligent preparation, foremost commitment, full energies, and greatest
creativity” (Patterson 366). Patterson adopts the evangelical traditionalist belief that women’s career in homemaking is of equal value to male employment outside the home. To articulate this argument, Patterson quotes Dorothy Morrison, another evangelical anti-feminist writer. Morrison states that “homemaking is not employment for slothful, unimaginative, incapable women. It has as much challenge and opportunity, success and failure, growth and expansion, perks and incentives, as any corporate career” (qtd. in Patterson 366). Patterson’s and Morrison’s view on female homemaking is widely shared among contemporary evangelical traditionalists, and apparent in many conservative Protestant teachings.

Central to these arguments for women’s employment in the home are women’s God-given biological abilities as nurturers and helpers as found in the books of Titus and Proverbs.21 Referencing scriptures that associate femininity with household management and family care, many evangelical traditionalist writers have concluded that homemaking is the ideal occupation for women (see Piper 1992; Pride 1985; Patterson 1992). At the same time, these traditionalists also invoke the notion of male-female complementarity to argue for women’s duty as homemakers. As men have historically served in the public and sacred realms of work and church respectively, many writers argue that men are ordained with the masculine roles of breadwinners and spiritual leaders. And since leaders are understood alongside nurturers and helpers, and the public is juxtaposed with the private, many evangelical writers thus argue that God calls women to be caretakers in the domestic realm (see Piper 1992; Pride 1985; Patterson 1992).

21 The Biblical scriptures most often quoted are Titus 2:3-5 and 1 Timothy 3:12. Titus 2:3-5 (NIV) reads “Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands,
Evangelical traditionalists often extend this argument for women’s nurturing instinct to advocate also motherhood as a divine duty for women. As many writers perceive mothering as the epitome of a nurturing act, and only women can biologically give birth, they often view motherhood as the ideal manifestation of Christian womanhood. Evangelical writer Patterson best expresses this sentiment arguing that while motherhood is the God-given female “biological duty,” women should also accept it “as a divinely assigned destiny with the awesome opportunity for a woman to link hand and heart with the Creator God in bearing and preparing the next generation.” (Patterson 370).

Yet similarly to their reinterpretations of the duty of absolute submission, many contemporary evangelical Protestant wives in the Gallagher’s, Griffith’s, and Manning’s studies also have rejected strict adherence to evangelical traditionalist definitions of the home and of the homemaker. Much like their acceptance of submission as a Christian duty, many female subjects do not reject the significance of their designated roles as homemakers. At the same time, they do not deny the indispensable nature of the homes in the religious lives of themselves, their husbands, and children. Yet, by adopting alternate understandings of the home and of their duties as homemakers, many wives negotiate and expand their scope of influence from solely the private realm to include social and religious arenas as well. Rather than simply maintaining an orderly private space for their families, many women in the studies believe that they are establishing a sphere of protest and protection. That is, many subjects view female commitment to the home as an act of protest against and protection from family breakdown. They argue that

so that no one will malign the word of God.” 1 Timothy 3:12 (NIV) reads “A deacon must be the husband of but one wife and must manage his children and his household well.”
women’s employment outside the home is the product of secular feminist advocacy for egalitarianism in the workplace, and it has resulted in women’s neglect of their husbands and children. Consequently, they believe that women’s work outside the home has led directly to current social problems such as drug abuse, crimes, and abortions among the next and upcoming generations (Gallagher 145).

Also, many subjects believe that since women’s employment outside the home brings in a second source of income, and income denotes authority, this would inevitably grant household authority to the wife. Thus this produces a second head, whose presence would severely “upset the balance of gender, power, and identity” within the households, and ultimately undermine a husband’s headship (Gallagher 147). More significantly, many Christian women argue that women’s employment challenges the divinely determined nature of men and women as breadwinner and caregiver respectively (Gallagher 147). As a result, many subjects firmly conclude that as homemakers, they are primarily responsible not only for providing full time care for their husbands and children, they also become cultural and religious warriors against contemporary social diseases that are products of the lack of parental attention, which in turn are the direct results of secular feminist advocacy for female employment in the workplace.

This understanding of homemaking is best reflected in one subject’s notion of “sacred housework” (Griffith 181). After realizing Jesus’ vision for her to be “a happy wife and mother,” and not a “very dissatisfied” and “depressed” woman who yearns for a job in the workplace, Betty recognizes that “cooking and homemaking are ministries to the Lord” (qtd. in Griffith 182). She continues to claim that as she begins to see herself as “very important to the members of her family,” she recognizes the false cultural belief
that she can only “feel good about herself” in the workplace (qtd. in Griffith 182). As a result, in being “a happy wife and mother,” Betty believes that she is not only providing a solution to her misery and care for her family, she also highlights how secular social forces have failed contemporary women, as these forces actively deter women from assuming their “natural” and “most rewarding” role as sacred homemakers (qtd. in Griffith 182).

Such interpretations of homemaking also lead to dramatic redefinition of the evangelical understanding of the home. Identifying homemakers as active challengers against breakdowns in the society and religious traditions, the home becomes the battleground for these women’s cultural and spiritual wars. When the female subjects perceive homemaking as having social and religious implications that are beyond the domestic benefits, they indirectly redefine the private home also to embody immense public and spiritual significance. Thus, the feminized image of the home endorsed in the secular and Protestant communities becomes an androgynous location that amalgamates passive feminine care with active masculine authority over spiritual and social enemies. In redrawing the home’s boundaries and its gendered definition, these Christian women transport the home from the periphery to the centre of the contemporary evangelical Protestant tradition. Hence, the subjects understand the home not only as valuable, but indispensable contributor to the contemporary evangelical Christian movement.

To explore further the redefined notion of the home as bearer of domestic, social, and spiritual significance, it is useful to reference again bisexual theories, in particular theorist Majorie Garber’s perception of bisexuality as an all-encompassing space. In an attempt to explore beyond the “binary opposition between homosexual and heterosexual,
or same-sex and opposite-sex partners,” Garber rejects “a two-dimensional mode,” and appeals to “a model that incorporate[s] a third dimension” (Garber 30). She argues that this model makes “the question of two-versus-one, or inside/outside, essentially moot” (Garber 30). To Garber, this space is a sexual space that is not a “‘third’ but one space that incorporates the concepts of ‘two,’ ‘one,’ and ‘three’” (Garber 30).

As earlier investigated, the contemporary Christian home is in no way confined to the marginal, domestic, and private realm. To borrow Garber’s language, rather than viewing their home as “a third space” outside the secular, godless society, and the infinitely religious church, evangelical wives in the study describe their home as an all-encompassing space. As a site for domestic nurturing, social protest, and spiritual protection, these women perceive their home as an essential convergence of the private, public, and religious. The female subjects’ redefinitions of the home and the homemaker expands the boundaries of female domestic influence. Like a bisexual space, homemaker’s renegotiated existence and contribution in the home directly challenges the evangelically endorsed binary opposition between the sacred and the secular, and the feminine helper and the masculine warrior. The traditionally defined peripheral and one-dimensional private home has taken on the nature of Garber’s sexual space. Its all-encompassing existence demonstrates the presence of spiritual and secular forces. Similarly to bisexuals’ active involvement in Garber’s sexual space, the evangelical women’s reinterpretation of the homemaker role as a protestor and a protector directly engages and creates dialogues between the secular outside and the sacred inside.

3.6. Conclusion
In secular feminist, evangelical feminist, and evangelical traditionalist discussions of evangelical Protestant wives, these women are often regarded as a complacent antifeminist community that perpetuates patriarchal definitions of male headship and female submission. Yet the voices and experiences of evangelical women speak otherwise. Drawing upon personal experiences, feminist influences, and languages of religious warfare, many contemporary evangelical women in fact actively negotiate their wifely identities as well as domestic responsibilities. Applying queer and bisexual theoretical frameworks and vocabulary to illuminate the women’s arguments, it is furthermore evident that existing stereotypes of evangelical wives are oversimplified, and often incorrect. Instead of being victims of oppressive religious dogmas, many women have adopted wifely identities that directly challenge evangelical traditionalist understandings of femininity as strictly private, domestic, and ultimately secondary.
Chapter Four: Evangelical Virgins: Negotiating Sexuality

4.1. Introduction

The previous chapter has demonstrated the positioning and negotiation of wifely identity in contemporary North American evangelical Protestant discourses on marriage. In this chapter, I shall turn to the conservative Christian category of “virgin.” Virgins, like the wives in the same tradition, are informed by their own intricate yet seemingly rigid set of discourses. The tradition’s abstinence programs target mainly teenagers and young adults between the ages of 14 to 25.

Since the early 1970s, evangelical Protestant abstinence propaganda has become a marker of many North American evangelical youth ministries. In the several decades since then, large collections of abstinence literature have been published and resulting from this vast collection is a set of Christian abstinence discourses that explicitly defines sexual boundaries and explores issues such as sexual purity, engagement, and marriage.

In this chapter, I shall first provide an overview of this genre of abstinence publications, followed by investigations on its main themes with concentration on the evangelical Protestant definitions and justifications for “sexual activity,” “sexual abstinence,” and “virginity.” I shall then, parallel to the previous chapter, use a bisexual theoretical framework to explore ambiguities and contradictions within the constructions of a seemingly non-negotiable “virgin” identity. While many writers of abstinence literature repeatedly emphasize the rigid dichotomies between the evangelical Protestant
“virgin” identity and the secular promiscuous sinful culture, the possibility for secondary virginity in these discourses in fact exposes the permeability of these sexual polarities. That is, the category of “secondary virgins” directly challenges the definition of virginity as the absence of sexual experience, and the category’s mere existence undermines the mutually exclusive nature of the evangelical and secular communities.

4.2. Overview of Abstinence Literature

Beginning in the 1970s, abstinence literature became increasingly popular among evangelical Protestant youths. In the 1970s and 1980s, authors like James Dobson, Tim LaHaye, and Letha Scanzoni helped launched new genres of evangelical Protestant reading materials that explicitly address issues of sexuality (see Dobson 1980; LaHaye 1978; Scanzoni 1975). Works such as Letha Scanzoni’s Why Wait? and Duvall’s Why Wait ‘Til Marriage? became best-sellers in the evangelical Christian community, and they explicitly promoted chastity and heterosexuality as the only normative sexual expressions for Christian youths. This new wave of print materials that specifically focuses on abstinence and sexual identity was unprecedented.

While evangelical literature became a phenomenon in the North American conservative Christian community starting in the two decades prior to the 1970s, topics concerning sexuality were rarely discussed at length in any evangelical work (Ammerman 32). In the infrequent instances when influential preachers at the time such
as Billy Graham gestured to sexuality among Christian youths, they presented chastity before marriage and heterosexuality as a matter-of-fact reality.\textsuperscript{22} Rarely were these assumptions questioned until the new genre of abstinence works emerged in the 1970s.

According to writers such as Evelyn Mills Duvall, Letha Scanzoni, and Stacy Rinehart, their primary motivation for publishing abstinence Christian literature in the 1970s and 1980s was to counter the social influences of the Sexual Revolution and the Gay Liberation Movement that began in the 1960s.\textsuperscript{23} As the two social movements encouraged sexual expressions among individuals of any sexual identity or marital status, many evangelical authors believed that North American youths – including Christian youths – were urged to participate in the anti-Christian activities of sex before marriage and homosexuality. In these abstinence works, writers often appealed to theological, psychological, and sociological arguments, as well as to case studies of Christian youths and the writers’ own experiences to advocate rigorous forms of chastity.

Beginning in the 1990s, evangelical Protestant movements promoting abstinence became increasingly institutionalized. With the establishments of organizations like Focus on the Family, REAL Women, and Straight Talk Ministry that openly address issues of dating, sex, and gender, explicit discussions of sexuality were no longer confined to literature. Pamphlets, websites, and videos became popular mediums in promoting sexual purity among Christian youths. Despite the popularity of their multimedia propaganda, these organizations remained dependent on and primarily derived their arguments from evangelical Protestant literature. In the decade following

\textsuperscript{22} For more information, see Joel Carpenter’s accounts of Graham’s sermons and ministries in \textit{The Early Billy Graham}. 
1990, works surrounding the themes of abstinence and homosexuality remained popular among Christian youths. A new generation of writers such as Joshua Harris and Jeremy Clark emerged and works such as I Kissed Dating Goodbye (1997) and I Gave Dating a Chance (2000) became best-sellers combining over 1 million of copies sold to date (“I Kissed Dating Goodbye”). Adopting similar approaches to their predecessors, new generations of evangelical authors continue to promote sexual abstinence and heterosexuality as the only forms of evangelical Protestant sexuality among young single Christians (Ziegler).

Despite the growing numbers of authors and the vast collection of abstinence literature that has been published in the past forty years, a majority of works share a common manual-style approach. That is, most of the authors organize their works in ways that allow their young readers to explore and understand Christian expressions of sexuality in a step-by-step manner. In abstinence literature, authors such as Jeremy Clark, Joshua Harris, Ken Abraham, and Stacy Rinehart would first provide definitions of dating, marriage, sex, love, and other issues that pertain to abstinence. They would then offer detailed instructions for readers to follow in different situations. The most illustrated scenarios include how to ask a member of the opposite sex on dates, how to act in sexually provocative situations, and how to discern between sexually pure and impure actions.

Many writers share a common reason for their step-by-step instructional approach. They claim that they are not simply interested in teaching authentic and

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23 As a response to the two social movements in the 1960s and 1970s, a new genre of evangelical anti-homosexual literature also emerged. Many of the Writers of abstinence literature referenced in this study such as Letha Scanzoni also contributed to this new wave of literature devoted to discussions on the evangelical position on homosexuality. Other writers such as Rinehart and Harris also draw on arguments
Christian forms of sexual abstinence. Rather, they are deeply concerned with guiding the entire journey of dating and sexual questioning among youths. Writing in conversational language and arranging chapters that often begin with how to find a partner and progress to issues surrounding engagement and marriage, many authors explicitly present their works as references for youths in every stage of their pre-marital lives (Harris 1997; Clark 2000; Abraham 1994; Rinehart 1988). Also, by incorporating slang and references to case studies set in church youth groups, high schools, and colleges, writers target their works at a specific community of young single Christians between the ages of 14 to 25. Writers address this target group of readers as youths who are inexperienced in dating, struggling with their sexuality, and needing guidance in a culture that authors label as “R-rated,” “sexually irresponsible,” “just-do-it,” and ultimately ungodly (Abraham 55; Duvall 7; Harris 121). Yet the authors’ emphasis on marriage throughout their manuals also suggests that they share the belief that a majority of their readers wish to and will eventually marry. Thus in all the abstinence works, writers address their evangelical Christian audience with the dual assumptions on their present state of singlehood and their future destiny of marriage.

In this genre of abstinence literature, writers have developed a discourse on sexual abstinence using languages of marriage, purity, deviance, chastity, and explicit sexual activities. Since the limited space of this chapter does not allow for a full discussion on the different aspects of this vast collection of themes, I will, in the following sections, explore the definitions and implications of what the authors understand as “sexual activity” in this evangelical Christian discourse on abstinence.

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regarding gender and heterosexuality from anti-homosexual works such as Tim LaHaye’s *The Unhappy Gays*, and Bob Davies’ and Lori Rentzel’s *Coming Out of Homo-sexuality*. 
4.3. Abstinence Discourse

While many contemporary evangelical youths acknowledge that Christian teachings prohibit sexual activities before marriage, many may simply define sexual activities as sexual intercourse (Abraham 56). Thus they may regard Christian teachings to permit any act of physical intimacy that is not sexual intercourse. In the discourses of abstinence in the collection of manual-style works, authors explicitly address this prevalent understanding of sex. Arguing that sexual activities in fact include many other forms of physical encounters, many authors condemn such intercourse-centred interpretations of sexual activity as “incorrect,” “narrow,” and even “sinful” (Abraham 1994; Harris 1997; Clark 2000). Appealing to theological, sociological, and biological justifications to discourage any sexual activity before marriage, many writers draw distinct boundaries for the definitions of sexual activity. The most common ruler of measuring activities as sexual is to define “sexual activity” as any behaviour that brings sexual pleasure.

Joshua Harris’ I Kissed Dating Goodbye and Jeremy Clark’s I Gave Dating a Chance share the argument that all activities varying from light kissing to necking to oral sex are considered sexual activities (Harris 87, Clark 101). This belief is repeated from Letha Scanzoni’s Why Wait? and Evelyn Mills Duvall’s Why Wait ‘Til Marriage? where the authors label any physical encounter between members of the opposite sex as sexual, which must be avoided (see Scanzoni 1975, Duvall 1965). By providing lists of

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24 By “sexual intercourse,” all authors refer to penis-vagina intercourse.
behaviour that are regarded as sexual activities, most authors believe that readers now have guidelines with which to uphold sexual abstinence.

Yet while some authors such as Scanzoni and Duvall believe that little qualification for the meaning of “sexual” is necessary to explain their lists of sexual transgressions, most writers of abstinence literature provide further arguments to justify their compilations of sexual behaviours. The most frequently cited are biological justifications. Following every list of prohibited sexual activities in Don’t Bite the Apple ‘Til You Check for Worms, Ken Abraham qualifies his use of “sexual.” One of his most explicit definitions of “sexual activity” is “any willful activity that is designed to ignite the fires of sexual passion in a person who is not your married partner” (Abraham 96). This definition is also echoed repeatedly in Harris’ work, as he believes “sexual activity” to be “physical interaction [that] encourages us to start something we’re not supposed to finish, awaken desires we’re not allowed to consummate, [and] turn on passions we have to turn off” (Harris 96). Both Abraham and Harris argue that since human bodies are not designed for physical stimulation that would not eventually lead to sexual intercourse, and since God is the “original designer” of the human body, no form of physical contact beyond friendly gestures is acceptable for Christian youths who are dating. Abraham and Harris’ approach is often shared among many writers who also derive theological arguments from biological responses to conclude that minimal physical contact between Christian readers is not only biologically determined, but divinely mandated (Rinehart 108; Clark 102; Duvall 75).

While almost all authors consider any behaviour that brings sexual pleasure to be sexual activity, their definition of the latter often is not restricted to acts that involve
physical contacts. According to writers like Duvall, Harris, Clark, and Abraham, sexual activities also include acts such as lustful looks, sexual fantasies, and even a quick glance at attractive clothing on bodies. These non-contact-based actions are deemed sexual mainly because of their adulterous nature. By explaining adulterous intentions as “the desire to possess [those] who do not belong to us,” many authors thus regard any action that inspires or expresses physical attraction and sexual imagination as sinful, and to be avoided (Abraham 58; Harris 66; Clark 5). Since many writers believe that biblical teachings equate physical sins with mental sins, and all sins are equal in gravity, they argue that both non-contact and body-based sexual activities are in direct violation to the divine calling for sexual abstinence.

In articulating the definition of “sexual” and expanding the understanding of sexual activities in evangelical Christian abstinence discourses, many writers also directly redefine the boundaries of “abstinence.” Since sexual activity includes actions that are both contact and non-contact based, authors ask readers to abstain not only from performing such activities, they encourage readers also to avoid opportunities in which sexual activities can occur. For instance, Duvall and Scanzoni believe that sexual abstinence for men and women includes strict avoidance of being alone in the same room with each other and paying too much attention to one’s date, as these occasions can tempt the reader to become both physically and mentally sexually stimulated.25 Similarly, Harris and Clark’s dating manuals encourage readers to celebrate sexual abstinence by privileging group, telephone, and long-distance dating over all other forms of face-to-face interactions between dates. According to Harris and Clark, physical bonding often

undermines emotional and spiritual connections between dates. The former constantly threatens the boundaries of sexual abstinence, while the latter recognizes and respects such boundaries.

While almost all writers expand the understanding of sexual abstinence and provide detailed instructions for readers of both sexes, they argue that female readers should bear more responsibility than their male dates in safeguarding sexual abstinence. This approach is most explicitly demonstrated in their advice on female fashion. In most abstinence literature, writers teach female readers to avoid wearing clothing that attracts attention to their bodies as one of their commitments to sexual abstinence. Many authors, like Harris, argue that since “guys most commonly struggle with [their] eyes,” it is difficult for “a guy [to remain] pure when looking at a girl who is dressed immodestly” (Harris 99). Hence, in “taking the responsibility to guard their brothers’ eyes,” authors often agree that women’s modesty in wardrobe choice is one of the primary ways for women to be accountable for the sexual abstinence of both sexes (Harris 99).

As demonstrated, the evangelical Protestant discourse on abstinence mainly focuses on promoting authentic Christian behaviours in interpersonal interactions among single youths. However, it also investigates the implications of solitary activities, such as masturbation, in safeguarding sexual abstinence. Like various other contact- and non-contact-based activities between dates, many authors consider masturbation an activity that violates vows of sexual abstinence. In much abstinence literature, masturbation is described as an activity that is a “simple release of sexual tension,” “scratching a genital itch,” or an “appease[ment] of hormonal passions” (Duvall 79; Abraham 64). Reintroducing arguments against pre-marital sexual activity to condemn masturbation to
be adulterous and hedonistic, many authors such as Duvall, Rinehart, and Abraham condemn masturbation by unequivocally equating masturbation to non-marital sexual behaviour. In other words, the writers argue that since both masturbation and non-marital sexual activity are body-centred, and thus not spiritual-centred, the two activities are equally ungodly and sinful.

It is crucial to recognize that while the authors’ views on the nature of pre-marital sexual intercourse is one of the underlying premises of their works, these views are rarely stated explicitly in their arguments. In their promotion of sexual abstinence, many writers concentrate mostly on the sinfulness of the various non-intercourse forms of pre-marital sexual expressions. So the writers’ views on the specific act of pre-martial sexual intercourse, like those quoted from Duvall and Abraham, are often evident only in their discussions on masturbation. In likening non-marital sexual intercourse to masturbation, authors describe both activities to be “momentary pleasure,” “self-gratification,” and “power drives” (Abraham 109). One possible reason for such transparency may be that, in comparison other forms of physical contacts, masturbation most closely resembles sexual intercourse. In other words, like sexual intercourse, masturbation is also an activity that allows individuals to reach maximum sensation – orgasm – through physical stimulation.

While writers of evangelical abstinence discourse on sexual activity clearly and repeatedly condemn the pursuit of sexual pleasure prior to marriage, they do not condemn sexual desires and activities in general. In fact, all of the authors frequently reinforce the argument that sexuality and bodily pleasures are natural, God-given gifts to humanity (Harris 100; Abraham 109; Clark 102; Scanzoni 94). However, they all insist that any
sexual pleasure and activity is divinely prepared to be enjoyed only within the boundaries of marriage. When sexual drives emerge prior to marriage, all the authors share Duvall’s belief that “sex […] can be treated in the same way [one] treats [one’s] other impulses – with restraint and respect as a part of [one’s] heritage as a human being” (Duvall 75).

In addressing various forms of what authors perceive as “sexual activity,” it is evident that the authors construct the virgin identity in the abstinence discourse in relation to readers’ ability to reject a clearly illustrated set of actions that authors deem sexually deviant, thus unchristian. In other words, the readers’ success in claiming and retaining a “virgin” identity is predicated on how well they resist the temptations to commit acts of sexual transgression. According to most authors of abstinence works, these acts of sexual deviancy saturate an unholy secular culture. Therefore, many authors position the “virgin culture” in the evangelical Protestant community in direct opposition to what they view as the “R-Rated culture” of the secular society (Abraham 55).

In abstinence literature, authors often identify the secular world as one that is overwhelmed by “sexual traps” resulted from sexual promiscuity (Clark 6; Harris 121; Abraham 72). By labeling these “sexual traps” as “heartbreakers” in Don’t Bite the Apple ‘Til You Check for Worms, Ken Abraham exemplifies the view of a majority of the writers of abstinence literature. Abraham identifies the three main “heartbreakers” of secular youths who engage in premarital sexual activities: pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and guilt (Abraham 72).

Quoting statistics and case studies, he repeatedly emphasizes the frequency of non-marital pregnancies and STIs, and the negative repercussions that he believes inevitably follow. In the case of unwanted pregnancies, Abraham and many authors of
abstinence literature insist that the youths affected most often suffer from lifelong guilt and regret over abortion, the abandonment of the newborn, or forced and hasty marriages that end in broken homes (Abraham 76; Clark 104; Rinehart 95). Many writers present a similar argument regarding STIs, as they believe that youths who contract STIs through premarital sex would lead lives of inescapable guilt and misery (Abraham 78).

According to many authors of abstinence literature, the “heartbreakers” of the secular world are direct and inevitable products of the sexual philosophy that they perceive to underlie the “epidemic” of sexual promiscuity that most non-Christian youths espouse. They identify this philosophy as hedonism (Abraham 55; Clark 104; Rinehart 12). In viewing premarital sexual activity as acts that champion self-gratification through valuing the heart and the body over the mental self-control, writers such as Harris and Clark believe that contemporary secular youths prioritize their own welfare over others like their partners and God (Clark 21; Harris 93). Clark further articulates this argument using theological justifications. He states that “sin has corrupted God’s perfect design for love and companionship on this earth” as illustrated in Genesis, and only marriage can allow individuals “to live holy lives full of love and God-honoring romances” (Clark 12). Hence, Clark believes that all non-marital sexual and romantic relations inevitably render secular youths sinful and miserable (Clark 12).

Author Abraham follows Clark’s argument and identifies sexual sinners also as idolaters. Referencing the First Commandment when God asks believers to not commit idolatry by worshipping other gods, Abraham believes that the person who engages in what he perceives as hedonistic premarital sexual activities “is worshipping the created order rather than the Creator” (Abraham 58). As a result, according to Abraham,
premarital sexual behaviours are not only unchristian, they are in fact anti-christian, and anti-god.

In constantly juxtaposing the evangelical Protestant abstinence culture against the secular promiscuous society, writers develop a set of intricate abstinence discourses that is firmly grounded on dichotomies between the conservative Christian and secular worlds. The authors warn readers against transgressing the secular-Christian polarities by repeatedly highlighting the mutually exclusive nature of the two worlds. According to many authors like Clark, Harris, and Abraham, once youths compromise their strict adherence to the abstinent lifestyle, they would permanently forgo their long cherished virgin identities, and fall prey to the “dangerous” and adulterous lifestyle of “the enemy” (Clark 7, 100; Harris 18).

Authors Stacy and Paula Rinehart best describe such rigid boundaries between the evangelical Christian and secular sexual communities using the metaphors of train tracks. According to the Rineharts, a Christian’s life resembles a “two-track model train; one track represents life in the [Holy] Spirit, while the other represents life in the flesh” (Rinehart 103). Since a train cannot run on two tracks simultaneously, the authors believe that an individual cannot choose to be spiritual and body-centred at the same time. They believe that “when one choose[s] to allow [one’s] spiritual drive to dominate and energize [oneself], the desires of the flesh go dormant […] exhibiting the Spirit’s fruit – self control” (Rinehart 103). Also, they insist that individuals must choose between the Spirit and the flesh “moment by moment” (Rinehart 103), and the decision would ultimately and inevitably control the decision-makers. In representing spiritual yearning and bodily desires as two paths that never cross and lead in different directions,
the Rineharts share the belief of other writers of abstinence literature in arguing that evangelical sexual ethics are oppositional to secular immorality. While other authors portray the secular-Christian dichotomous worldviews ideologically, the Rineharts visually illustrate the mutually exclusive boundaries of the two communities using the metaphors of the train tracks.

4.4. Secondary Virginity

Upon closer investigations of the abstinence discourse, the mutually exclusive nature of the worlds of the secular and the Christian is in fact less rigid than the authors have repeatedly highlighted. In other words, the “virgin” identity that authors generally perceive as stable and non-negotiable can be renegotiated and reimagined. Such reimagination can not only be initiated by the readers, there are in fact prescribed spaces inherent within abstinence literature to destabilize the abstinent identity that authors have carefully formulated. One of the most apparent examples of renegotiating virginity is the evangelical Protestant notion of “secondary virginity.”

In addressing various forms of sexual activities, authors often adopt a cautionary tone in their works. That is, most writers offer definitions and discussions on various sexual behaviours and temptations that aim to caution youths against performing such acts. These approaches are demonstrative of the majority of writers’ assumption that their readers have not committed acts of sexual deviancy, and are struggling to maintain their virginity. Yet it is essential to recognize that a significant portion of most abstinence works is also devoted to repentant readers who have in fact accidentally or consciously broken their vows of sexual abstinence. With meticulous step-by-step
instructions that teach readers to “regain” virginity, most authors believe that formerly sexually deviant youths can restore purity, and more importantly, amend the severed relationship with God resulting from sexual transgressions.

Among the many approaches offered to readers to become “born again virgins,” Stacy Rinehart’s model in Choices is the most representative and comprehensive. She illustrates a three-step program for readers who wish to “begin with a clean slate” (Rinehart 110). The first step involves, what she calls, “complete repentance.” To completely repent, Rinehart states that the individuals must ask God to remind them of all the past experiences that “haunt [them] presently and have violated [God’s] principles and commands” (Rinehart 112). In doing so, the individuals would be freed from the sexual acts that she claims to have inevitably “offended God’s holiness” (Rinehart 112). The next step requires individuals to completely immerse themselves “in the doctrine of God’s love and grace and mercy,” through memorizing scriptures and songs that “herald God’s forgiveness and acceptance” (Rinehart 113).

In the last step, Rinehart calls readers to share their past with another Christian, and achieve “complete transparency” (Rinehart 113). She believes that this person will “mirror [God’s] love and acceptance back […] and thereby heal the wounds of [the] past” (Rinehart 113-4). According to Rinehart, when individuals complete the three steps, they are able to attain “secondary virginity,” and become virgins “in God’s eyes” again (Rinehart 114).

Guidelines like these for admitting and abandoning sexual sins are present in almost all abstinence literature. Apart from allowing readers to regain purity in their

26 The term “born again virgin” is popular among authors such as Joshua Harris, Jeremy Clark, and Ken Abraham.
relationships with the divine, it is implicit in these “revirginizing” instructions that the guidelines are rules for reintegration in the Christian community. That is, since many writers presume most of their readers to be virgins, by encouraging their sexually deviant readers to perform steps of “revirginization,” those who are formerly sinful can successfully reintegrate themselves into the larger evangelical Christian youth community that self-proclaims to be sexually pure.

However, while authors actively encourage their readers to rekindle their own “virgin” status, the writers by no means equate the identities of “virgins” and “secondary virgins”. Although sexual sinfulness remains the inherent marker of both identities, many writers argue that secondary virgins inhabit a distinct category from virgins. This argument is implicit in many authors’ constructions of the secular-Christian dichotomy. By insisting that one cannot make restitution for taking one’s own or others’ “virginity or dignity,” or “erase the memories of […] intimacy” once an individual enters the secular world of sexual activity, many writers emphasize the reconciliatory, rather than pure, nature of secondary virginity (Abraham 84). That is, while the identity of “virgin” is contingent on the safeguarding of sexual purity, secondary virginity insists upon the reconciliation with past sexual sins and re-envisioning of sexual purity.

Although secondary virgins cannot be fully integrated into the virgin youth community, the “secondary virgin” identity directly challenges the notions of the impermeability of purity and inevitable misery resulted from sexual transgressions that predicate an evangelical Christian virgin status. In reconstructing the nature of virginity and purity also to include possibility of repentance, reconciliation, and reintegration, the “secondary virgin” identity also expands the seemingly rigid boundaries of the homogeneous and finite definitions of virginity.

4.5. Revisiting Virginity

In their discussions of secondary virginity, authors inevitably revisit the question that underlies all their works: what is the evangelical definition of virginity? By allowing readers who have committed sexual sins to rekindle virginity, albeit in a secondary form, it is evident that the total absence of sexual experience is in fact not the essential characteristic of the evangelical Christian “virgin” identity. In other words, the construction of a “secondary virgin” identity implies that participation in sexual activity cannot deter one from claiming virginity in the evangelical Protestant community.
Rather for both virgins and secondary virgins, it is their recognition of premarital sexuality’s sinfulness that guarantees their “virgin” status. While all authors of abstinence literature encourage their readers to reject premarital sexual experience, their inclusion of the possibility for secondary virginity reveals that such pledges of rejection are not essential markers of the evangelical Christian understanding of virginity. In fact, these acts of rejection are simply behavioural manifestations of one’s recognition of sexuality’s sinfulness. Thus, when youths who have transgressed prescribed sexual boundaries admit to and repent their sexual sins in order to “begin with a clean slate,” they are entitled also to “virgin” status (Rinehart 110).

As earlier discussed, the authors’ implicit redefinition of virginity in their discussions of secondary virgins does not equate their identity categories of “virgins” and “secondary virgins.” The absence of sexual experience remains to distinguish the former identity from the latter in the abstinence discourse. Yet the construction of secondary virginity reveals a common understanding of virginity that not only underlies both categories, it permeates the evangelical Protestant abstinence discourse as well.

To explore further the implications and challenges posed by the identity of “secondary virgins,” it is useful to introduce again bisexual epistemological theories. As illustrated in the previous chapter, theorists Clare Hemmings and Majorie Garber describe bisexuality and bisexual experience as an effective site for epistemological inquiries. In this approach, bisexuality becomes “an epistemological as well as ethical vantage point” from which one can “destabilize and deconstruct” bipolar identity, gender, and sexual categories (Hemmings 31). Garber furthers Hemmings’ argument and states that since bisexuals “unsettle ideas about priority, singularity, truthfulness, and identity,”
bisexuality “provides a crucial paradigm […] for thinking differently about human freedom” (Garber 90).

Like Hemmings’ and Garber’s descriptions of bisexuality, secondary virgins also inhabit “an epistemological as well as ethical vantage point,” where they challenge the definition of virginity as the absence of sexual expression. At the same time, the possibility of secondary virginity deconstructs the seemingly non-negotiable “priority, singularity, truthfulness, and identity” of the evangelical Protestant notion of “virgin.” Thus with new and expanded understandings of virginity, secondary virgin identity’s destabilizing nature, like that of bisexual identity, provides a paradigm that allows youths to explore and reimagine the essential marker of virginity.

The application of a bisexual epistemological framework can not only further illuminate the identity category of “secondary virgins,” bisexual theories also can analyze the authors of this identity. Using Garber’s metaphors of the fences, the role of the authors in the evangelical Protestant abstinence movement can be better understood. As illustrated in the previous chapter, Garber appropriates bisexuals’ stereotypes as indecisive “fence-sitters” to discusses the authors of identity categories as fence-builders. According to Garber, “[o]n the open range fences exist because there are no natural boundaries” (Garber 86). Thus, “what [fences] signify is not existential difference but the property difference between ‘mine’ and ‘yours’ – or us and them” (Garber 86).

When one equates the rigid definitions of “sexual activity” and “sexual abstinence” in the earlier sections with Garber’s fences that regulate boundaries “on the open range” of human sexuality, it becomes evident that authors of abstinence literature are, what Garber describes as, fence-builders who delineate “property difference”
between the evangelical Christian and the secular communities. When the writers understand evangelical Protestant and secular worlds of sexuality and sexual ethics as opposing dichotomies, they locate the “virgin” identity and the “virgin culture” as belonging to “us,” while they allocate all elements of promiscuity and sexual sinfulness to the secular “them.”

Writers of abstinence literature, like Garber’s fence-builders, are indeed convinced of identity categories’ effectiveness in withstanding contamination from the other side of the fence. However, when one views secondary virgins as fence-sitters who have navigated into the secular world of sexual activities, but have since re-identified with the evangelical “virgin culture,” they, like bisexuals in Garber’s model, directly challenge the fences’ impermeability. More importantly, in questioning and re-envisioning the notion of virginity that underlies evangelical sexual “fences”, the identity of secondary virgin also undermines the presumed rigidity of the sexual boundaries as well as the behaviorally regulated category of virginity.

Using Garber’s vocabulary to articulate the identity of secondary virginity further raises another question: if secondary virgins are “fence-sitters” looking onto the two worlds of secular and evangelical Protestant sexual ethics, when exactly do virgins become “fence-sitters”? In other words, if the definition of virginity, according to the writers of abstinence literature, indeed requires one to navigate among a large variety of sexual expressions, then when do youths cease to be virgins and need to embrace secondary virginity?

In almost all abstinence works, authors like the Rineharts and Harris repeatedly insist that “virtually everyone has sinned in the area of sex,” and “none of us can stand
completely pure before God” (Rinehart 79; Harris 107). Yet they all address their readers with the assumption that the majority of them are indeed virgins. However, when one juxtaposes the writers’ insistence on universal sinfulness with their notion of virginity that assumes absolute Christian spiritual and physical purity, the authors seem to suggest implicitly that no individual is a “complete” and “authentic” virgin. That is, since authors believe that almost all individuals have been contaminated by lustful thoughts, it seems logical, though counter-intuitive, to conclude that no individual can ever fully identify as a virgin. If there is indeed no one who fits perfectly the “virgin” identity, the earlier described evangelical category of “virgin” as belonging to the property of “us” becomes problematic, if not empty.

Garber’s notion of the “fence-sitters” implies not only the fences’ existence, but also their location – between the two areas designated to “us” and “them.” Implicit in Garber’s argument is that fence-builders can only build fences when there are clearly demarcated boundaries distinguishing the opposing camps. Yet when the evangelical Protestant notion of virginity is revealed to be less stable than the authors had argued, the boundaries alongside which authors build their fences become more ambiguous. In other words, when taking into account that there is no absolute “virgin” among evangelical Protestant youths, it becomes less clear where authors as fence-builders build their fences that delineate between evangelical virgins and secular sexual sinners. Thus, the identity of “virgin,” like “bisexual” and “secondary virgin” identities, is also an ambiguous, unstable, and ultimately plural category that is in itself open to imagination and transgression.
4.6. Conclusion

In the past four decades, the evangelical Protestant abstinence discourse that is grounded largely on collections of abstinence literature has firmly established seemingly rigid dichotomies of an evangelical “virgin” youth culture and a secular promiscuous community. According to writers of abstinence literature, the evangelical Christian youth community is regulated by strict, non-negotiable behavioural definitions of “sexual activity,” “sexual abstinence,” and virginity. Yet upon closer exploration, the possibility of secondary virginity for repentant sexual transgressors within this abstinence discourse has demonstrated that the dyad of evangelical and secular sexual ethics can in fact be destabilized and ultimately deconstructed. As secondary virginity allows for once sexually active youths to rekindle a “virgin” status, this identity category also directly challenges the presumed marker of virginity as sexually abstinent, and demands reimagination of the identity category of “virgin.”
5.1. Bisexual Theory as a Limited Trajectory

As demonstrated in the previous chapters, bisexual theoretical frameworks and vocabulary are useful in analyzing contemporary evangelical wives’ and youths’ negotiations with identity-formations. Also, the parallel positioning of evangelical women and youths with bisexual subjects in the respective discourses of evangelical traditionalists and queer theorists can further illuminate Protestant literature and teachings on evangelicals. Yet at the same time, it is necessary to recognize that bisexual theorists’ redefinition of bisexuality and the evangelical reimagination of the “wife” and “virgin” identities are not the same. One of the main divergences is each group’s relationship with established and authoritative interpretations of their collective identities.

In developing bisexual theories, theorists such as Clare Hemmings and Majorie Garber strive to create bisexual identities that aim to dispel stereotypes of bisexuals propagated by earlier queer theorists. Some examples are bisexuals as fence-sitters, promiscuous, confused, and abstract desexualized political activists. By explicitly refuting third-party constructions of bisexuality, theorists like Hemmings and Garber openly challenge contemporary theories that have silenced bisexual voices, and create innovative, epistemological models for understanding bisexuality.

However, many evangelical subjects’ motivations for redefining their wifely and virgin identities are neither innovative nor confrontational. Rather, many evangelical women and youths renegotiate the boundaries of their respective marital and premarital roles to bargain with the status quo – patriarchy for the former and abstinence for the
latter. Among evangelical women, instead of challenging and rejecting the definition of an evangelical “wife” as a submissive homemaker, many subjects reimagine and expand the implications of their mandated duties. Primary instances of such reimagination are the ways in which subjects transform the nature of submission and homemaking from mere religious imperatives to spiritual and cultural strategies integral to the evangelical movement.

Similarly, evangelical youths do not embrace secondary virginity to undermine the definitions of sexual abstinence and activity. Rather, they reimagine their “virgin” identity to expand existing notions of sexual purity and reimagine prescribed boundaries of virginity. By redefining virginity as an ideological belief in the sinfulness of premarital sexual expression, and not the necessary absence of sexual experience, secondary virgins can thus identify as virgins and reintegrate into the evangelical Protestant abstinence movement. Hence, unlike bisexual theorists’ liberatory impulse, evangelical women in this study do not wish to depart from the religious authorities of the Bible, church, and youth leaders. Rather, the subjects wish to accommodate as well as champion both their divine mandates and their own experiences as evangelical women and youths.

5.2. Varying Degrees of Negotiation

Yet despite similarities between the identity categories of evangelical wives and secondary virgins, it is evident that married evangelical women enjoy larger spaces for negotiation than non-married young members of the same tradition. This difference is

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27 This notion of “bargaining with patriarchy” is adopted from feminist scholars Judith Stacey’s Brave New Families and Susan Rose’s “Women Warriors”.

particularly apparent when bisexual frameworks of identity-negotiation enjoy wider applications to evangelical “wife” identity than “virgin” identity. As voices and experiences of many married evangelical women have demonstrated in Chapter Three, there seems to exist fluid boundaries surrounding their submissive and homemaking identities. That is, the evangelical Christian tradition seems to allow this population a high degree of liberty to reimagine various metaphysical, spiritual, social definitions of their wifely identities that are not prescribed by the church and biblical mandates. Thus, evangelical women can, to a certain extent, change or invent new meanings and implications for their wifely identities and still receive collective recognition and respect by their wider religious community.

On the contrary, although youths in the evangelical abstinence culture also are exposed to the negotiable spaces within the “virgin” identity, namely through secondary virginity, the prescribed rules and behaviours safeguarding virginity are more intensely regulated than those applied to wives. It is repeatedly emphasized in the abstinence works that youths should only perform such negotiating attempts through secondary virginity when they fail to maintain their “default” virginity. In other words, unlike many wives who voluntarily and actively reimagine their chosen role as wives, youths should only adopt a negotiated identity when they fail at enacting their initial chosen identity as “virgins.” At the same time, the apologetic tone of the category of “secondary virginity” also highlights the identity’s primary impulse as conformative and not expansive. That is, when youths admit to and repent their sexual sinfulness, as well as embrace secondary virginity, their primary motivation is not to introduce alternative or expand existing evangelical understandings of sexuality. Rather, they adopt secondary virginity to
reintegrate into the evangelical abstinence culture, and simultaneously reaffirm virginity’s marker as the belief in the perversion of any sexual activity outside marriage. In other words, it seems that the evangelical Protestant marriage discourse allows several variations of a “wife” identity that are equally tolerated. Discussions concerning abstinence, however, allow only one acceptable definition of a “virgin” identity, and a less desirable alternative of secondary virginity only when necessary.

One possible reason for the differences in the negotiable spaces available within the two identities is the permanent and temporary nature of the identities respectively. When evangelical women enter into marriages, they take on their permanent role as wives. I have alluded to this identity’s permanent nature in the earlier sections of Chapter Three. Similar to bisexuality that is often falsely labeled as temporary and is in fact considered by many a permanent and valid identity, the evangelical Protestant wife identity is also a lifelong, albeit negotiable, identity. It is possible that a tradition like evangelical Christianity allows greater liberty for internal negotiation within an identity when it is viewed as permanent. This is because the boundaries of any permanent identity would naturally have to accommodate, to various degrees, changes in both the subjects and their environment through time. The evangelical Christian wife identity is no exception.

Instances in which such theory may apply are necessary redefinitions of the “wife” identity when the evangelical women become mothers. As illustrated in Section 3.5, when married evangelical women become mothers, many subjects redefine the implications of their homemaking roles. Being primary caregivers to their children, many women view their homemaking duties to reflect the church mandated domestic
nature that accompanies their wife identity. They also perceive their evangelical role as homemaking wives as spiritual protectors and protesters in a cultural warfare against anti-Christian feminist and liberal forces that undermine feminine, domestic roles for women.

Another example of how the “wife” identity’s permanent nature contributes to possibility for negotiation is illustrated in subjects’ reactions to marriage or familial conflicts. As demonstrated in section 3.4, many women reinterpret the evangelical Protestant calling for submission also to be strategies for domestic improvement. It may be possible that when evangelical women first enter in marriages, they justify their submission only through biblical scriptures and church teachings. Yet when they encounter problems within their marriages and recognize that submission can prompt their husbands to improve their marital conditions, many subjects in the studies expand or alter the motivations for their submission to fulfill their personal goals of familial harmony. These two aforementioned instances demonstrate that a permanent wife identity implies lifelong engagement within evangelical Protestantism, and such engagement inevitably encounters changes in both personal roles and external circumstances. As a result, it is logical to infer that a permanent and valid identity, like that of a wife, must allow for spaces of negotiation and imagination.

Yet unlike their views on wife identity, evangelical Protestant communities only see a virgin identity as temporary. As earlier mentioned, a “virgin” identity is only a “default” identity for all youths until they marry. That is, according to the evangelical Protestant abstinence discourse, all individuals who are not yet married are expected to remain virgins and ascribe to the ideological and behavioural principles of virginity. However, it is implied in almost all the abstinence works explored in Chapter Four that a
large majority of youths will soon be married and thus will eventually abandon their virgin identity.

It is essential to explore further this relationship between the temporary virgin identity and the eventual permanent spousal identity. As demonstrated in Chapter Four, although the evangelical Protestant tradition recognizes sexuality as a god-given and positive facet of humanity, it must be contained prior to marriage. As a result, all abstinence writers are meticulous to articulate that while sexual activities and expressions are not inherently negative and unholy, they become destructive and sinful when performed outside of marriage. Thus, writers conclude that all aspects of sexuality prior to marriage must be highly regulated, and the careful safeguarding of a “virgin” identity guarantees individuals’ holiness and sexual purity when they enter into marriage. In other words, all writers agree that if individuals participate in sexual activities prior to marriage, they would defile the sanctity of sexual expressions within their future marriages, and the nature of marriage itself. Consequently, the temporary yet regulated nature of a virgin identity bears permanent consequences on the married identity.

It is highly possible that since authorities within the abstinence movement are convinced of the lasting and damaging consequences of any departure from the prescribed “virgin” principles and behaviour, the “virgin” identity allows for very limited spaces for negotiation and imagination. This argument can be justified also by the reaffirming nature of the notion of secondary virginity. That is, while the secondary virgin identity is sanctioned, its primary impulse, again, is to champion, rather than challenge, the compulsory nature of virginity. Thus the temporary status of virgin identity, coupled with fear of its possible permanent ramifications, may have contributed
to much narrower boundaries and fewer sanctioned justifications for identity negotiation, reimagination, and ultimately destabilization.

5.3. Final Questions

By meticulously defining rules and concepts pertaining to “wife” and “virgin” identities, and closely teaching women and youths how to be ideal wives and virgins, evangelical Protestant authorities such as the church and the aforementioned writers share the belief that all aspects of gender and sexual behaviours must be taught. More significantly, in claiming to be objective interpreters of the bible and the evangelical Protestant tradition when illustrating authentic Christian spousal or abstinence behaviours, authors present their teachings, and thus themselves, as authoritative and integral to the social and spiritual health of the married female and young single Christian communities.

This then poses the question that must be directed to many of the resource materials: if the respective identities of “wives” and “virgins” for women and unmarried youths are indeed innate and God-given, why are there collections of literature and church doctrines that aim to educate and regulate these identities? In other words, if the instinct for women to be wives and youths to be virgins are biblically grounded, and thus a priori understandings of human nature, why do they have to be repeatedly articulated by self-consciously authoritative teachers?

When exploring responses to these evangelical Christian discourses, another similar question must be asked: if the “wife” and “virgin” identities are in fact instinctive and natural facets of the respective nature of married women and unmarried youths, why
would they seek negotiation with these identity categories? If, according to evangelical authors investigated in this study, women and youths indeed possess a priori notions of “wife” and “virgin” identities, it would seem counter-intuitive that any member of two groups would seek to destabilize, or even transgress their prescribed boundaries of gender and sexuality.

5.4. Revisiting Foucault, Butler, and Sedgwick

These questions, as well as other issues in this chapter, echo the main concerns of Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick illustrated in Chapter Two. Foucault rejects the assumption that homosexuality, or any identity, is predicated on common experiences. Rather, for Foucault, all identities are simply strategically adopted cultural categories with the functions of preserving or contesting existing hegemonic forces. Butler furthers Foucault’s argument and contends that the incongruence between sexed bodies and gender identities challenges the notion of a collective a priori understanding of gendered identities. Sedgwick, following arguments by Butler and Foucault, states that since the body is in fact unencumbered by seemingly universalized and determined sexual and gendered identities, it can act as a transferer of knowledge. For Sedgwick, individuals can thus take on multiple epistemological vantage points and comprehend their own bodies and identities independent of biologically or socially prescribed rules. Their arguments, along with earlier musings, expose existing gaps among evangelical Protestant notions of biologically prescribed “wife” and “virgin” identities and their respective duties.
If, according to Foucault and Butler, the “wife” and “virgin” identities are indeed socially and, as in this study, religiously assigned and regulated, the metaphysical arguments proposed by evangelical Protestants would be severely undermined. In other words, when one adopts Foucault’s and Butler’s arguments, one would consider the “wife” identity of married evangelical women and “virgin” identity of evangelical youths to be adopted, and not ontologically inherent. Such social constructivist arguments in fact further help answer the question regarding subjects’ enthusiasm for negotiating and reinventing identity boundaries.

According to Butler and Sedgwick, when individuals realize that their prescribed (gendered and heterosexual) duties and behaviours are performances, individuals are then restored agency and autonomy. To the two authors, this realization of agency is then naturally manifested in individuals’ adoption of multiple vantage points and active negotiations within their respective identities. If “wife” and “virgin” identities are indeed socially prescribed, rather than divinely ordained a priori, identities, the socialized nature of these identity categories would help explain the subjects’ impulses to reimagine and even transgress their respective identities.

Yet when evangelical Protestant authorities insist on the metaphysical nature of these identities and reject any explanations grounded on socialization, resistance, or epistemology, these authorities expose the very gaps in their arguments that theorists like Foucault, Butler, and Sedgwick could help address. By dismissing women and youths who transgress prescribed identity boundaries simply as misfits, rebellious, and even unchristian, the contemporary evangelical Protestant authorities and writers referred to in this study seem to have ignored, rather than resolved, the inconsistencies that exist within
their own religious tradition. While bisexual epistemological frameworks are used throughout this study to articulate better the inconsistencies within evangelical Protestant marriage and abstinence discourses, return to earlier discussed arguments by Foucault, Butler, and Sedgwick also help explain how such inconsistencies originate and continue to permeate evangelical sexual ethics.
CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

Evangelical Protestant ethics form an integral part of the backbone of the contemporary North American evangelical Protestant movements. I have, in this project, explored two identities that are at the forefront of conservative Christian moral agendas. They are the “wife” and “virgin” identities. Using bisexual epistemological frameworks from Clare Hemmings and Majorie Garber to illuminate identity category formations of both identities, this study has demonstrated that evangelical wives and virgins are in fact less complacent and homogeneous than evangelical Christian authorities would believe.

While secular feminist, evangelical feminist, and evangelical traditionalist discussions of conservative Christian wives attempt to articulate an abstract “wife” identity or a universalizable evangelical wifely experience, their subjects’ agency is often ignored. Instead, sociological research by Sally Gallagher, Marie Griffith, and Christel Manning have demonstrated that evangelical women constantly negotiate their submissive and homemaking duties. Using personal experiences, as well as languages of feminism and religious warfare, many contemporary evangelical wives in fact destabilize their identity as “wives” and reinterpret the justifications and implications of their roles as submissive homemakers.

Similarly, although the evangelical Protestant discourse on abstinence is predicated on a seemingly rigid notion of the identity of “virgin,” and a seemingly impermeable dichotomy between the cultures of Christian virginity and secular promiscuity, the “virgin” identity, like the “wife” identity, is often destabilized and reimagined. The possibility for evangelical Protestant youths to rekindle virginity through secondary virginity actually compels sexually repentant youths to reevaluate both
the conservative Christian concept of virginity, and the dyad of evangelical and secular sexual ethics. The category of “secondary virginity” challenges the traditional marker of virginity as the absence of sexual activity, and at the same time exposes the fluid, rather than absolute, boundaries of the evangelical “virgin” identity.

When examining the applicability of bisexual theory to analyze “wife” and “virgin” identities, it is evident also that the evangelical wifely and virgin identities are of different forms. Comparisons between evangelical Protestant discourses on marriage and abstinence reveal that the identity of “wife” bears a permanent nature, while evangelical Christian authorities intend the “virgin” identity to be only temporary. Such difference has wide implications on the fluidity of the boundaries of the two identities. Since the evangelical tradition regards marital roles to be lifelong identities, the permanent nature of the wifely identity may account for the high degree of liberty sanctioned for wives to navigate the boundaries of their identity. On the contrary, since the evangelical community expects almost all youths to marry, the temporary status of the “virgin” identity may explain youths’ tighter regulations in safeguarding the boundaries of virginity.

In the contemporary North American climate where evangelical Protestants vocally articulate in the social, political, as well as the religious realms of our society, it is necessary for religious studies scholars and researchers to provide thorough and nuanced analyses of this faith tradition. While the limited space of this project only allows for discussions on two identities in the evangelical Protestant moral discourses, I am confident that it has contributed to a wider field of studies on evangelical Christian moral and sexual ethics. Like marginalized bisexual and other queer identities in the
present heterocentric and largely patriarchal society, both the secular and religious communities too often simplify the identities of “wife” and “virgins.” Through looking at evangelical teachings, texts, and sociological data, I sincerely hope that the voices of evangelical wives and youths can provide unique insights into contemporary evangelical Protestant communities, as well as these communities’ social and moral agendas.
Bibliography


