“You're either a ho or an innocent little baby”

Self-surveillance, regulation of the sexual body, and moral anxiety among American Evangelical teenage girls

by

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with a commentary by

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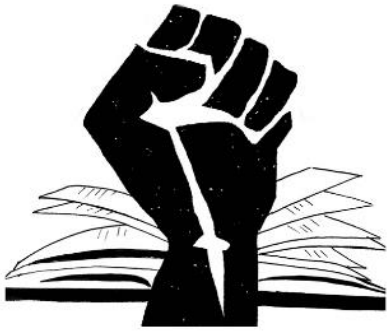

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"You're either a ho or an innocent little baby"[1]:
Self-surveillance, regulation of the sexual body, and moral anxiety among American Evangelical teenage girls

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Self-surveillance, Evangelical Christian, purity culture, agency, girlhood, morality, sexuality, anxiety, Girlhood Studies, short-term ethnography

[1] This is a quote taken from Hannah, a participant, during an interview about the difficulties of high school life as Christian teenage girl. She felt that she can either be perceived as "ho" if she expresses romantic/sexual interest and/or considers/engages in sexual activities or as a prude "baby" if she does not act on her feelings for boys and/or actively tries to suppress sexual desires.

Abstract

This article draws from a short-term ethnography which followed six white, lower-middle class teenage girls who participated in Evangelical bible study groups in the American West. The larger project examined discourses of morality, submission, and the contrast between secular in Evangelical ideology in daily high school life. Focusing specifically on two of those girls, this piece examines how they ethically interact with contradictory value systems and the ways in which they locate morality within the sexual body. Both the Evangelical and high school sphere narrowly define acceptable forms of sexual desire and expression for teenage girls. As the girls construct good, Christian, moral selves through self-surveillance, they are influenced by what they understand as right according to an American Evangelical culture of sexual abstinence and redemption through monogamous, heterosexual marriage. Through constant, conscious striving and intense worrying about their choices, the girls experience moral anxiety which for them is an integral part of creating the moral self. This article serves to argue that sexual agency as a modality of action can be found within the girls' beliefs, justifications, and actions informed by their Evangelical upbringing.

Introduction: A double-edged moral choice

"You're never going to be good enough in society's eyes, like ever," explained Hannah,[2] a lively and verbose 16-year-old girl as she took a sip from her whipped drink while we sat in a main street coffee shop in a small mountain town in the American West. Lisa, a shy and soft-spoken 15-year-old girl, chimed in to say that no matter what she does, someone is always there to criticize her. In the social space of their bible study group, the girls commiserated over what they felt they *should* do according to their Evangelical beliefs and how that clashed with the expectations of their high school peers.

This article draws from research done within the parameters of my Master's dissertaion which followed six white, lower middle-class girls associated with one American Evangelical church who took part in bible study groups.[3] The larger project sought to examine discourses of morality, submission, and uncertainty as well as a split between secular high school life and Evangelical values. The girls and their bible study teacher gave their written and oral consent to be involved in this study and were made aware that I would use our documented time together to write about the experiences of growing up as an Evangelical girl today. As time went on during the four week long short-term ethnography,[4] this one coffee shop became our space where we discussed matters of goodness and religious morality. This piece focuses on Hannah and Lisa, their views on sexuality, how they ethically interact with contradictory value systems, and the ways in which they located morality within the sexual body.

The two girls told me about their experiences with two morally-loaded archetypes of the teenage girl which caused them significant distress. Hannah explained that in their high school girls are compelled into embodying one of two archetypes: "It's either, 'Wow you're a ho' or, 'Wow you're such an innocent little baby.'" A good example of the Madonna/Whore split as outlined by Deborah Tolman,[5] these labels were irreconcilable and unavoidable. I explore how Hannah and Lisa consciously engage in self-surveillance and discipline their thoughts and behavior to construct a good, Christian morality.[6] They regulate their sexual desires and behaviors in such a way to avoid being subjectified as a "ho" but in doing so position themselves as "innocent little babies" in the eyes of their non-Christian, sexually active peers.

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[2] All names, locations, and other identifying characteristics have been changed to protect the privacy and anonymity of all those involved.

[3] Rebecca L. Anne, Seeking Goodness: Discourses of Morality, Submission, And Uncertainty Among American Evangelical Teenage Girls. (MA Diss., University of Luxembourg, 2018).

[4] Sarah Pink and Jennie Morgan. "Short-term ethnography: Intense routes to knowing." *Symbolic Interaction* 36, no. 3 (2013): 351-361.

[5] Deborah L. Tolman, "Doing Desire: Adolescent Girls' Struggles for/with Sexuality." *Gender & Society* 8, no. 3 (1994): 324–42.

[6] Joel Robbins, *Becoming sinners: Christianity and moral torment in a Papua New Guinea society*. Vol. 4. (Univ of California Press, 2004).

As Hannah and Lisa saw things, the secular, or pop culture as they often referred to it, exists in opposition to their Evangelical world as two different yet sometimes overlapping and/or contradictory moral value spheres.[7] They found comfort and familiarity within the Evangelical sphere, but as they entered into the secular sphere in their daily lives at school, anxieties and dangers arose. Following Saba Mahmood's explaination of the dichotomoy between secular and religious language, the girls as members of a conservative religious group often felt they were at a moral impasse where they could only be *for* secular values or *against* them; one cannot hold middle ground.[8] Furthermore, this moral dilemma was resolved through "vigorous defense of norms and moral standards"[9] as well as intense self-reflection. In the seemingly amoral, godless space of public high school, Hannah and Lisa encountered different ways of experiencing sexuality and perceptions of sex and established themselves as moral subjects in contrast to their non-Christian peers.

This study draws from the anthropology and sociology of Christianity, the anthropology of morality, as well feminist theories of body regulation and studies of adolescent female sexuality. Scholars Breanne Fahs and Shoshanna Ehrlich have investigated the consequences of purity culture where children and teenagers are encouraged to stay sexually abstinent until marriage.[10] This article contributes to such discussions surrounding religious sexual morality, American teenage girlhood, and the regulation of the young female sexual body. This article does not intend to analyze Foucauldian notions specifically, but I utilize a Foucauldian definiton of self-surveillance for its clarity and acessiblity. Self-surveillance is usually understood as the attention one pays to one's behavior when confronted with the immediate or mediated observation by others whose opinion she deems as relevant.[11] I support the proposal put forth by Paulo Vaz and Fernanda Bruno that self-surveillance includes individual's attention to their actions and thoughts while constituting themselves as subjects of their conduct.[12]

Divided into three parts, I first explore the "ho" and how the discourse of dangerous sexuality functions within Hannah and Lisa's daily lives. Second, I consider what it means to fall on the other end of the moral spectrum and the ways in which being an "innocent little baby" places Lisa and Hannah in an uncomfortable position for ridicule from their peers. In the third section, I argue that this moral dichotomization and social/sexual dilemma contribute to what the girls describe as anxiety. The purpose of this article is to continue bringing stories of young female religiosity into

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[7] Max Weber, *Essays in Sociology.* (New York. Oxford University Press, 1946).

[8] Saba Mahmood. "Religious reason and secular affect: An incommensurable divide?." *Critical inquiry* 35, no. 4 (2009): 836-862.

[9] Ibid 65.

[10] Shoshanna J. Ehrlich, "From Age of Consent Laws to the 'Silver Ring Thing': The Regulation of Adolescent Female Sexuality." *HEALTH MATRIX* 16 (2006): 33; Breanne Fahs. "Daddy's Little Girls: On the Perils of Chastity Clubs, Purity Balls, and Ritualized Abstinence." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 31, no. 3 (2010).

[11] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1979); Michel Foucault, *The history of sexuality. Volume one: An introduction, (*New York: Vintage Books, 1980).

[12] Paulo Vaz and Fernanda Bruno, "Types of Self-Surveillance: From Abnormality to Individuals 'at Risk'." *Surveillance & Society* 1, no. 3 (September 1, 2002): 272–91.

view so that we may better understand the processes of young female sexuality as it pertains to (patriarchal) moral religious structures.

Part 1. On being a "ho"

Following Hannah and Lisa's understandings, to be a "ho" is to be a female who is interested in sex and/or participates in sexual activities. Being a ho, I argue, is something that the girls earnestly try to avoid being subjectified to by rejecting any implicit or explicit sexual activities. This includes dancing, dating, holding hands, kissing, or even just having feelings for a boy. This requires a level of self-surveillance and regulation of both body and desire as they attempt to assert a good, moral self through ethics of compassion and purity. In this section, I explore two incidents in which the girls engaged with discourses of being a ho. In the first incident, Hannah grapples with her curiosity towards pole dancing. The second is an exchange between Hannah and Lisa about a common female friend who is sexually active. These interactions highlight the perceived danger that sexuality poses for girls as well as how the girls reinforce each other's relative moral positioning.

Pole dancing

In their bible study group, Hannah and Lisa used the daily devotional book, *All Things New* by Kelly Minter, as a study guide.[13] This book dives into the teachings of the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians. These teachings have been repackaged to provoke elements from young females' daily lives to be biblically re-examined. The night before one of our coffee shop get-togethers, I read the following passage about living a holy life in the "cultural setting we live in":

> *Personal reflection: What about your culture makes it difficult for you to live a holy life? […] [The Corinthians] were a struggling church, filled with individuals who had bought into the trends and passions of the environment they lived in. I can relate to this. If I'm not alert and aware, I can easily slip into accepting the popular beliefs of the day.*[14]

This passage highlights the Christian duty to be on constant guard against nefarious non-Christian influences. The author makes it clear that accepting pop culture's values would be detrimental for believers; it gets in the way of living a holy, righteous life. Self-surveillance and regulating how one reacts to outside popular beliefs are the key to living a sinless life like Jesus. I wondered if the girls

[13] Kelly Minter, *All Things New: A study on 2 Corinthians for teen girls. (*Nashville, Tennessee: Life-Way Press, 2016).

[14] Ibid 16.

felt this need to distance themselves from popular beliefs in order to live a holy life and whether that could be possible in a secular high school setting.

The next morning, Hannah, Lisa, and I gathered around a small round table in the back of the coffee shop. We chatted over their plans for their winter break and our drink orders; Hannah and I have to avoid coffee- we both get heartburn and too "hyper" as she puts it. As we got comfortable, I asked them the personal refleciton question from the bible study guide: What about your culture makes it difficult to live a holy life? Hannah then began to explain how the sexualization of pop culture gets her down.

> *Everything I feel like in pop culture is so sexual 24/7 […] I just really hate it because like one thing that- this is going to sound like, not really- crossing the line, but one thing that I hate that is sexualized […] is pole dancing. I hate that it's sexualized cause […] it would be like a really good work out and like, it looks really fun to do and it takes like a lot of talent and hard work to be able to do that. It's not just some ho putting on like strips of fabric and just walking […] I would take a pole dancing class cause it looks so fun and I wouldn't sexualize it at all. […] I hate that it's sexualized and like even just dancing in general. I'll tell people like, 'Yeah, I'm dancer.' and people are like, 'Oh you're a dancer?' [raises eyebrows suggestively]. Like stop! [laughs]*

Hannah's irritation with the sexualization of (pole) dancing feels intense and desperate. The fact that even her 'normal' dancing is sexualized weighs on her heavily, as well as her desire to give pole dancing a try which is something she knows is taboo in her community. Hannah recognizes that engaging in a sexual bodily activity, she would be looked down on by other Christians. So, she has to report her dilemma to me and Lisa to demonstrate that she knows that this is wrong. Hannah's self-disclosure of her desires, curiosity, and recognition of the sinful nature of pole dancing allows for an absolvance of guilt through confession, in this way she is albe to keep her moral standing in check.[15]

Wanda Pillow notes that adolescent women (especially within Evangelical circles, I argue) often negotiate discourses of alarm surrounding sex; it is dirty and dangerous.[16] This alarm is distinctively present in Hannah's negotiation of morality concerning pole dancing. Hannah takes great care not to say something that would suggest that she might be a wannabe "ho" who just puts on "strips of fabric".[17] The fear of being a "ho" keeps Hannah from participating in certain activities and attempts to contain her body within the Evangelical moral sphere and away from popular culture's influences.

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[15] Jen Pylypa, "Power and Bodily Practice: Applying the Work of Foucault to an Anthropology of the Body." *Arizona Anthropologist* 13 (1998): 21–36.

[16] Wanda S. Pillow, *Unfit subjects: Educational policy and the teen mother*. (Psychology Press, 2004); Mary Douglas, *Purity and danger: An analysis of concepts of pollution and taboo*. (Routledge, 2003).

[17] When Hannah says that she would not just be "some ho wearing strips of fabric", she reinforces the notion that clothing is a representation of morality as noted by Lyn Parker in "Religion, Class and Schooled Sexuality among Minangkabau Teenage Girls." *Bijdragen Tot de Taal-, Land- En Volkenkunde / Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences of Southeast Asia* 165, no. 1 (2009): 62–94.

Religious morality is inscribed in and on the body;[18] through keeping away from activities that are deemed sexual, the body, and therefore the whole being, can become more moral.

Her curiosity and desire are padded with assurances and recognition that this is a dirty, bad thing to want because it sexualizes the female body. This self-surveillance echoes the theory of Vaz and Bruno which proposes that self-surveillance is not only the attention one pays to their behavior in order to conform to authorities they deem important, but it is also their attention to their own thoughts and actions when constituting themselves as a subject of their own conduct.[19] Hannah sees how she ought to obey (and please) religious and moral authorities, but she does this by placing herself as the subject of her own conduct and morality. Consciously, she chooses her expressions of morality and holds herself accountable for her sense of goodness.

Hannah distances herself from the sexuality of pole dancing by heavily emphasizing how it could be a "good workout" and reassuring not only herself, but also Lisa and me that *she* would not sexualize it at all. So, Hannah believes she has the ability to sexualize or de-sexualize dancing in her mindset and physical movements. However, in contradiction, she recognizes that (pole) dancing is a sexualized activity within pop culture over which she has no control. Although it is questionable whether she would be given parental permission to give pole dancing a go, Hannah makes it clear that she *chooses* not to do these things out of her own moral conviction even though she sees them as being perhaps enjoyable. This choice demonstrates the possibility that agency also lies in the reiteration of non-liberal norms to actively construct the moral self.

This sense of agency is similar to that found in the work of Mahmood.[20] There is a tendency to think of agency within a normative, liberal framework where free choice, freedom, and resistance are synonymous with agency. Much of the literature around women in non-liberal religious communities suggests that a woman's agency comes from her conscious actions to subvert and challenge a patriarchal order and not from her choice to participate within such an institution. If we think of agency not as a synonym for resistance to social norms, but instead a modality of action, then one can focus deeper on the relationship established between the subject and the norm, between performative behavior and inward disposition.[21] Hannah's moral reasoning is not seeking to challenge Christian norms; rather she sustains the problematization of sexuality as dangerous thus requiring that we consider agency through a different lens.

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[18] Fahs "Daddy's Little Girls: On the Perils of Chastity Clubs, Purity Balls, and Ritualized Abstinence."; Foucault *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, *The history of sexuality. Volume one: An introduction*; Robbins *Becoming sinners: Christianity and moral torment in a Papua New Guinea society.*

[19] Vaz and Bruno, "Types of Self-Surveillance: From Abnormality to Individuals 'at Risk'."

[20] Saba Mahmood, *Politics of piety: The Islamic revival and the feminist subject*. (Princeton University Press, 2011).

[21] Ibid 147.

She needs some Jesus

Our conversation about the challenges of trying to live a holy, Christ-like life in their secular high school culture continued as Lisa recalled a difficult experience she had with a mutual friend, Sharon, a non-believer. Sharon sometimes liked to share stories about her sex life with Lisa and these narratives of boys and sex gave Lisa an uneasy feeling; she was embarrassed to even talk about these things and didn't want to perpetuate sinful behavior. Sharon's sexuality was like a trap for Lisa. There was no way she could go about it without experiencing some unwanted/morally dangerous emotion or interaction. In the following dialogue, Hannah and Lisa maneuver out of that trap by affirming their moral standings in comparison to Sharon.

> *Hannah: That poor girl.*
>
> *Lisa: I love [Sharon].*
>
> *H: She needs some Jesus so bad though.*
>
> *L: She does need Jesus but she's like- I don't know.*
>
> *H: She's so sweet.*
>
> *L: It's so hard because she's like, such a good friend but like, she's so-*
>
> *H: She makes some real bad choices […] She's got a lot of bad, I don't know.*
>
> *L: But she was like 'Hey, hey Lisa.' And I was like, 'What?' And she was like, 'Don't tell anyone.' And I was like, 'Alright, I won't.' She was just like telling this story [about sex] and I was like, 'ah, I did not need to hear that.' And then she will just be like, 'Hey Lisa, when are you ever going to do that?' And I even told her- I was like, 'I'm not- I'm waiting till marriage' and she was all like, 'That's weird.' And I was like, 'Okay well I'm sorry.'*
>
> *H: Sorry that you're slightly a ho [chuckles] […] Is she better about that now? Or?*
>
> *L: About?*
>
> *H: Keeping all of herself to herself.*
>
> *L: Yes.*

To understand this exchange, Francesca Montemaggi's theory of ethics of purity and compassion is quite useful.[22] Ethics of purity and compassion exist along a spectrum; at one end is extreme compassion which avoids any judgement and at the other is judgmentalism (purity, moralism) which ignores the person. When an ethic of purity is applied, one seeks for "unity through conformity to religious and moral norms", whereas an ethic of compassion aims to embrace the other without judgement.[23] Montemaggi argues that all moral decisions exist along this ethical spectrum. As the girls are making moral judgements upon Sharon, they began compassionately as they empathized, "That poor girl", "She's so sweet", and "I love her." However, Hannah ended up closer to the purity

[22] Francesca Montemaggi, "Compassion and Purity: The Ethics and Boundary-Making of Christian Evangelicals." *Religion* 48, no. 4 (October 2, 2018): 642–58.

[23] Ibid 646.

end of the spectrum with her statement "Sorry you're slightly a ho", where the "sorry" was not very sorry at all with tones of sarcasm and the "slightly" cushioned the blow of calling Sharon a ho.

How the girls framed 'having Jesus' resembles what Tanya Luhrmann witnessed as "walking with God", i.e. establishing and maintaining a personal relationship with God (Jesus) and to use that to manage everyday (faith) challenges in order to be 'better'.[24] Being better, in this sense, would mean not expressing sexuality until one is in a (heterosexual) marriage. Hannah and Lisa refer to Sharon as a "cautionary tale" who acts out because she doesn't know any better or because she doesn't have a good relationship with God. The two girls demonstrate an ethic which would fall near the middle of the compassion-purity spectrum; they love and care for Sharon, but they know she needs to adhere to the religious and moral norms in order to live a 'better' life. While they are concerned about her behavior in other aspects of life (like doing so much cocaine that she "has holes in her nose"), their main concerns are her sexual inclinations and whether or not she keeps "all of herself to herself." It seems as if within this Evangelical culture (as in other religious circles), sexual sins stain much worse than any other, especially so as a female.

As they talk about Sharon and her sexual transgressions, the girls are increasing their moral and social capital with each other and within the Evangelical value sphere.[25] They reassure that they know what she is doing is wrong as if to prove to themselves, each other, and to me as some sort of authority figure that they know what is right and wrong. They reinforce the boundaries between good and bad thereby positioning themselves in relation to Sharon's ho-ness. Kathryn Klement & Brad Sagarin maintain that women within patriarchal religious structures learn that their worth can be determined by their sexual experiences.[26] The fewer experiences a female has prior to marriage, the more moral and valuable she is. This belief, as Hannah and Lisa demonstrated, can lead to the stigmatization of other women who have had sexual experiences. Females who enjoy sex outside of the context of a heterosexual, monogamous marriage are seen as being broken in some way, according to their Evangelical viewpoint. But what about the other end of the spectrum? If you're not a ho, then according to their high school/pop culture's logic you're probably a prude. This, according to Hannah and Lisa, is also problematic but for much different reasons.

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[24] Tanya M. Luhrmann, "Metakinesis: How God becomes intimate in contemporary US Christianity." *American anthropologist* 106, no. 3 (2004): 518-528.

[25] Parker "Religion, Class and Schooled Sexuality among Minangkabau Teenage Girls."

[26] Kathryn R. Klement and Brad J. Sagarin, "Nobody Wants to Date a Whore: Rape-Supportive Messages in Women-Directed Christian Dating Books." *Sexuality & Culture* 21, no. 1 (March 2017): 205–23.

Part 2. On being an "innocent little baby"

Hannah and Lisa are very careful to stay away from being identified as a ho by their peers by distancing themselves from and condoning sexual(ized) activities. Yet, they understand that this places them at the opposite end of an extreme dichotomization of young female sexuality. The girls were raised as bible-based Christians who take the bible as the literal and true word of God. Through this theology reinforced by their parents and other religious authorities, they believe that sex is to occur *only* in the parameters of a heterosexual marriage. This, they unhappily acknowledge, makes them subject to teasing and questioning from their non-Christian peers. But despite being ridiculed and feeling "bad", Hannah and Lisa feel justified in their standpoint. They know they are doing the right thing; they know they are following the rules and for their efforts, they hope they will be rewarded someday with a healthy, Christian marriage. First, I highlight an incident with Hannah where she explains how feels she is different from the other girls in her high school because she has set her heart on Jesus. Second, sex and dating will be examined as Hannah and Lisa discuss interactions with non-Christian peers and express their intentions to date for marriage.

Setting the heart on Jesus

Around our little table scattered with drinks, notebooks, pens, and phones, I brought up another page from the bible study book that made me wonder what the girls thought of this text. It was 2 Corinthians 5:14-16a[27] which reads as follows:

Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can we light have with darkness? […] what does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols?

The author analyzes that, "We can pretty much divide humanity into two segments: those who grew up in the church being taught about what it means to be 'unequally yoked' and those who didn't."[28] The word *yoke* refers to a wooden bar or frame that joins plow animals at the necks for working.[29] In that sense, Christians are fundamentally different than non-Christians and really should not mix.

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[27] *The Holy Bible: New International Version, 1984*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984).

[28] Minter, Kelly. *All Things New: A study on 2 Corinthians for teen girls.* (Nashville, TN. Life-Way Press, 2016).

[29]Merriam Webster. Definition of Yoke. Accessed October 15, 2020. https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/yoke.

It would be unequal to be in close contact with a non-believer either as a friend or as a romantic partner; the Christian would end up doing more of the moral work.

As Hannah and Lisa mulled this over, they expressed how they place themselves in opposition to non-Christian girls. When I asked them to think about what makes them different, Hannah responded:

> *I don't have my heart set on like a lot of sinful things like other girls do. For instance, like a lot of the girls in our high school are very, very um- sexually active? And boy crazy. I'm not saying that I'm not boy crazy because sometimes I am, but it's not what completes me, it's not what I strive for in everyday life. I feel like I have my heart set on more clear things [God].*

What makes her different is that she has her heart set on something better: God. And specifically, she is different (and better off) because of her reserved views towards sexuality. The girls in her high school waste their time going crazy thinking about boys, dating, and sex. But Hannah, on the other hand, knows that there is something more important. Other girls find their worth in sex and boys, but Hannah sees her worth as coming from God. However, it can be argued that Hannah *does* find her worth through boys and sex, it's just the opposite. The less she has to do with sex, the worthier she feels she is in God's eyes.

Recognizing that she sometimes goes a little boy crazy, she sees this sinful nature and works to sanctify it through repentance and aligning herself to God's will. She knows what her sights *should* be set on, so she consciously works in order to create that moral reality for herself.[30] There is a constant state of ethical and moral negotiation as Hannah interacts with secular ideologies. As Mahmood theorizes, Hannah feels the rigid choice between secular and religious values and thus rejects that which does not reflect her Evangelical worldview by defending these norms.[31] When Hannah looks within, she compares her feelings and desires with how she should conduct herself according to an Evangelical regime of knowledge.[32] Colin Gordon writes that there is no need for physical violence or constrains in order for humans to subscribe to a regime of knowledge.[33] All one needs is an introspective gaze where, like Hannah, "each individual is under its weight will end by interiorizing to the point that [she] is [her] own overseer […] thus exercising this surveillance over, and against, [her]self."[34] But, more than just being her own overseer, she knows that God is watching

[30] Joel Robbins, "Between reproduction and freedom: Morality, value, and radical cultural change." *Ethnos* 72, no. 3 (2007): 293-314.

[31] Mahmood. "Religious reason and secular affect: An incommensurable divide?"

[32] Nikolas Rose, *Inventing our selves: Psychology, power, and personhood.* (Cambridge University Press, 1998).

[33] Colin Gordon, "Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977, trad." *Colin Gordon [et al.],* (Brighton: Harvester 1980).

[34] Ibid 155.

her, too. Hannah understands that God knows what it is in her heart, so she cultivates her thoughts and actions to reflect what she has learned God wants for her.

Hannah knows that it's not boys, dating, or sex that will complete her. She professed that her life "[is] not for anyone else, […] it's for Christ." God is her constant and what keeps her steady in an unstable word that is, among other things, filled with sexual temptation. This temptation, Hannah notices, is constantly present so she must focus on her relationship with Jesus to make it through high school life with a sense of goodness. Temptation is a reminder to use the gaze inwardly in order to regulate her behavior based on what she has learned is right. Sexuality is, for her, a distraction that could take her away from what her heart is clearly set on (God).

Waiting until marriage

Self-surveillance and regulation of the moral body manifest in the girls' attitudes and actions regarding relationships and marriage. The girls believe that sexual/romantic relationships should be designed in such a way that marriage is the ultimate goal. According to (American) Evangelical teaching, marriage is the *only* space where sex should be expressed and enjoyed; anything outside of that is against God's design for love, sex, and life.[35] Lisa and Hannah have their hearts set on marriage and they aren't afraid to make this clear to their peers even when they know that they'll perhaps be mocked or misunderstood. I asked the girls how it felt to navigate through a high school world where people were having pre-marital sex. Hannah responds from an ethic of compassion saying, "I won't purposefully put my opinion into their life but […] I don't think it's right and I'm not going to do this." This is reminiscent of a prolific saying/attitude in the Evangelical community: 'Love the sinner; hate the sin' which separates people from the actions they engage in. But the extent to which this compassion is enacted in their lives is difficult to say.

As much as Hannah tries to be compassionate towards non-Christians and their attitudes towards sex, she finds herself stepping onto a higher moral ground where she knows *the* truth: sex is for marriage and anyone who does it before has sinned. She knows that she cannot control their lives, but she will try and make it clear to them that what they're doing is wrong. I asked Hannah what she says when people ask her why she doesn't think pre-marital sex is right:

> *Yeah, well like the bible doesn't say this is right and I don't want to and […] sex should be shared between a husband and a wife because there is an actual connection there and I only want that connection with my husband.*

[35] Heather Hendershot, "Virgins for Jesus: The Gender Politics of Therapeutic Christian Fundamentalist Media," in Hop on Pop: The Politics and Pleasures of Popular Culture, ed. Henry Jenkins, Tara McPherson, and Jane Shattuc Durham: Duke University Press, (2002); Klement and Sagarin. "Nobody Wants to Date a Whore: Rape-Supportive Messages in Women-Directed Christian Dating Books."

Hannah is seeking an *actual* connection, one that can only be found within a heterosexual marriage. Fahs writes that in Evangelical circles such as this one, "Intimacy, unity, pleasure, and procreation are constructed as solely occurring within the realm of married heterosexual couples."[36] While Hannah recognizes that people do sexual things outside of this realm, she juxtaposes these actions against what the bible says is true and good and again acts through an ethic of purity. Any sexual connection that exists outside of the Christian, heterosexual marriage is a sinful illusion.

For young Christian females, marriage is often portrayed as a savior from immoral life paths or unhappiness as Teguh Wijaya Mulya found in her study of teenage Christian girls in Indonesia[37]. Lisa and Hannah believe that if they are to indulge their sexual desires through whatever means, they are putting themselves at risk of not only heartbreak but also the potential for sin. In relationships, there is often temptation to perhaps go further than one has been told is acceptable. Sexual desires that arises within non-marital relationships are considered to be dangerous not just because of STIs, unwanted pregnancy, or heartbreak, but because these relationships can "lead them off track and into disaster."[38] If they engage in pre-marital sexual activities (to any extent), they are cheating not only themselves but also their future husbands. Such assertions promote the idea that sexuality can be owned by another, territorialized, and/or reduced to the confines of the heterosexual couple.[39]

Hannah and Lisa learned that they need to wait for this true connection that they will have with their husband; anything that deviates outside of this paradigm is a dangerous diversion from God's plan for their (love) lives. Hannah and Lisa trust God's plan and they regulate their sexual desires and relationships accordingly. This means that they choose not to date because the purpose of courtship is to ultimately lead to marriage.

> *L: […] the thing is you're like, either dating to marry someone or break up with them. Like, why would you date someone to break up with them?*
>
> *H: I've always thought about that, but like, recently I've had a revolution. Just don't [date].*
>
> *L: Yeah so like, why date them if like you don't want to marry them kind of thing.*

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[36] Fahs "Daddy's Little Girls: On the Perils of Chastity Clubs, Purity Balls, and Ritualized Abstinence," 130.

[37] Teguh Wijaya Mulya, "From divine instruction to human invention: The constitution of Indonesian Christian young people's sexual subjectivities through the dominant discourse of sexual morality." *Asian Studies Review* 42, no. 1 (2018): 53-68.

[38] April Burns and Maria Elena Torre. "Shifting desires: Discourses of accountability in abstinence only education in the United States." *All about the girl: Culture, power, and identity* (2004): 127-137.

[39] Marion C. Willetts, "Union quality comparisons between long-term heterosexual cohabitation and legal marriage." *Journal of Family Issues* 27, no. 1 (2006): 110-127.

So, if marriage with this boy is not plausible, why even date? Within this avoidance of romantic relationships, Hannah and Lisa justify avoiding the heartbreak and rejection of a break up. This relationship eschewal places the girls in a vulnerable position to be made fun for being an innocent little baby.

When Lisa explains her position on sex and dating to non-Christians, they call her "weird" and "lame" and this makes her feel embarrassed. But Lisa is aware of this pressure to conform to an immoral way of life away from God's will. There are two contradictory discourses at play within these interactions between the secular and the Evangelical: female sexual availability and female sexual unavailability respectively. In this moral conflict, Hannah and Lisa communicate their understanding that their goodness and worth comes from the ability to control their bodies through careful examination of their thoughts, feelings, and actions on an individual level but perhaps even more so within the group context. Within this space, the girls express feelings of anxiety and confusion that arise from navigating the dichotomous space of sexuality as a teenage girl.

Part 3: Moral anxiety

While being a "ho" is negative within the Evangelical context for moral and biblical reasons, it is also highly negative within their high school. You do not want to be seen an 'easy slut' who has rumors circulating about her, but you also do not want to be seen as a sexually inexperienced know-nothing. Being placed in either one of these stereotypes would negatively impact one's social capital. Hannah and Lisa feel troubled by both ends of the spectrum of sexual experience in high school. However, confronted by the moral panic of pre-marital sexual relationships,[40] Hannah and Lisa reluctantly settle into the "innocent little baby" category placed upon them by their non-Christian peers. Lisa explained,

> *Yeah, like when I don't give in to things, I'll feel kind of like bad about it cause everyone will be like, 'You're stupid, Lisa,' but then like, I'll feel like kind of good in a way almost cause I'm like, 'Well I didn't do that for you, like I'm like not doing it for God' […] Like, I'm sorry that I disappoint you but I'm not disappointing God and that feels better to me, I guess.*

While her peers call her stupid and make fun of her, she knows that her ultimate judgment is before God, not students in her high school. This realization brings her some relief; the pressure she feels

[40] Teguh Wijaya Mulya, "From divine instruction to human invention: The constitution of Indonesian Christian young people's sexual subjectivities through the dominant discourse of sexual morality."

to "give in" is strong, but she knows she will be rewarded by God for following his design for her life. However, the social rejection by her peers still has an immediate effect on her.

Hannah has trouble finding a good middle ground between what she knows God wants for her through biblical teachings, parents, and church leaders and what she wants to experience. Hannah's desires do not fit into the mold of what a good Christian girl looks like; good girls do not pole dance nor are they "boy crazy". Hannah works consciously to shape her moral self and to subjectify herself as a good, Christian girl. But this is hard work to constantly be on guard against dangers of secular temptation. She vented that,

> *Yeah, it's hard to find a line. Like I don't know […] I get a lot of anxiety from it. Cause it's something like, well because […] I'm only going to be in high school for this long. When am I ever going to like- I can't- I like, I'm never going to have this opportunity to have fun and be in this time of life again so kind of yolo […] So it's really hard to find this median of like, where does God want me to be and where do I want to be.*

Hannah demonstrates here what I have defined as *moral anxiety*.[41] Although Hannah and Lisa act and engage in ways that demonstrate their longing to become a moral person though the regulation and suppression of sexual desires and actions, they are filled with an often overwhelming sense of doubt and uncertainty.

As they self-regulate, they are making active choices, debating 'right' from 'wrong', and worrying intensely about these choices and decisions. The girls expect clear choices when it comes to sexuality, but experience anxiety when desire or curiosity conflict with what they 'should' do. This creates a sense of uncertainty and puts the responsibility on the individual girl to decide what she will do to determine her ultimate morality. High school life just does not match up with the right/wrong dichotomy of their Evangelical education. In such a context, the potential for disorder gives way to a sense of anxiety and confusion. For these two young women, creating a moral Christian self entails a constant, conscious striving which leads to moral anxiety.

Friedrich Nietzsche theorized that people believe in a disorienting force that could turn them into sinners unless they make conscious effort to confront it or deny it.[42] Individuals who hold this belief are internally torn between God and the devil and between the good and the bad in their lives. The girls exhibit this as they talk about their near constant moral anxiety and policing of their bodies and sexualities. Self-surveillance is based on the cultural postulation that certain thoughts and actions are dangerous or unwholesome for the constitution of the individual as a subject.[43] Self-surveillance should also be associated with practices of the care of the Self where individuals need to care and work on something which corresponds to the production of an ethical substance. As Mahmood

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[41] Anne. *Seeking Goodness: Discourses of Morality, Submission, And Uncertainty Among American Evangelical Teenage Girls*.

[42] Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, On the Genealogy of Morals. In Kauffman (ed.) *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*. (New York: The Modern Library, 1968), 449-599.

[43] Vaz and Bruno, "Types of Self-Surveillance: From Abnormality to Individuals 'at Risk'."

argues, it is not simply *that* one acts morally or virtuously, but more so *how* one enacts and comes to embody a certain moral or virtue through intent, emotion, commitment, etc.[44] The ways that their individual bodies experience sexuality informs their morality. Thus, Hannah and Lisa demonstrate constant care and surveillance to reassure that they do not trip up on any sort of sexual sin or temptation.

Sex and desire are trivial distractions which Hannah and Lisa consider themselves and other Christians to be above, but they are also morally and spiritually dangerous terrain. The two girls see themselves as responsible for their own morality through the observation, control, and disclosure of their sexual desires. I argue that through self-surveillance and self-regulation, the girls co-create themselves as "docile bodies" as defined by Susan Bordo.[45] These docile bodies then serve to reinforce a patriarchal social order that exists not only within the Evangelical church but also in what they refer to as "society". In this constellation, the girls negate their own sexual desires but also condemn females who openly express their sexualities. Tolman argues that the possibility that girls might be interested in sexuality, either in their own right or as objects of male desire, is met with resistance and discomfort.[46] This discomfort is only amplified within the Evangelical community as (particularly female) morality is inscribed within the sexual body and the restriction of desire. This creates a dichotomy in which Lisa and Hannah can either be 'bad' (immoral) for being interested in exploring their sexual desires or they can be 'good' (moral) by controlling their sexual selves and 'saving' themselves for their future husband.

Their moral anxieties seem to be relieved through group discussion and disclosure.[47] Within their bible study group, the girls construct a common identity based on the regulation and marital deferral of sexual desires and activities. Fahs found that for Evangelical teenage girls involved in purity culture, the notion of emphasizing one's differentness in comparison to the mainstream by celebrating marriage and regulating (repressing) one's bodily desire holds special meaning.[48] They are better than that, they know better than that, they were taught better than that. They seek out and celebrate this difference between them and their non-Christian friends. They are the good ones, the ones who actually know what is right. The others need to be saved by having Jesus in their lives.

This social space normalizes the regulation of women's bodies via control over developing sexual identities and expression. There is a re-inscription of bodies as sexual property belonging to some authority, be it parents, a future husband, and/or God. Their bible study is organized around, among other values, the negation of their sexual desires and the condemnation of female sexual expression. They establish connections and encourage one another to perpetuate this discourse of sexual

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[44] Mahmood, *Politics of piety: The Islamic revival and the feminist subject*. 139.

[45] Susan Bordo, "The Body and the Reproduction of Femininity: A Feminist Appropriation of Foucault,'Gender/Body/Knowledge, A." *Jagger and S. Bordo, eds.,* (Rutgers UP, New Brunswick 1989).

[46] Deborah L. Tolman, *Dilemmas of desire*. (Harvard University Press, 2002).

[47] Pylypa "Power and Bodily Practice: Applying the Work of Foucault to an Anthropology of the Body."

[48] Fahs "Daddy's Little Girls: On the Perils of Chastity Clubs, Purity Balls, and Ritualized Abstinence".

negation by checking up on each other's beliefs about sexuality. They express judgement for other girls for being sexually active and for not keeping all of themselves to themselves, as they've learned they should if they are to be 'good' in the eyes of God and their Evangelical community. However, maintainting such a stringent moral position through constant worry and assessment seems to take a toll on their sense of well-being.

Conclusion

Fahs asks, "Can we capitalize on women's assertion of agency in the sexual decision-making process without relying upon patriarchal constructions of limiting sexual desire as the means to liberation?"[49] I argue that the Evangelical and secular spheres in which the girls find themselves navigating and negotiating between are patriarchal constructions that narrowly define acceptable sexual desire and expression for teenage girls. While I agree with Fahs to some extent, I maintain that sexual agency can also be found within the girls' beliefs, justifcations, actions based on their Evangelical upbringing. Agency must not necessarily be a resistance to whatever norm, it is, as I argue, a modality of action which may be found in the reiteration of patriarchal religious norms.

The conscious construction of Hannah and Lisa's individual moral selves within a structure that suppresses female sexuality does denote agency even if the moral self is expressed in ways which contemporary Western feminist thought might find unsettling.[50] They are not, as some may suggest, operating under a "false consciousness".[51] To reconcile with a more holistic view of agentive moral being, Mahmood and Rosa Vasilaki's three-fold theoretical framework has been taken into account: the first requirement is the detachment of agency from progressive politics because the desire for freedom or to subvert against societal norms are not innate nor cross-cultural. The second requirement is the reformulation of agency in relation to embodied capacities and means of subject transformation. The third requirement is understanding that a moral self-formation lies beyond emancipatory politics outside the narrative of secular history.[52] The goals of this short-term ethnography were to witness life as lived as an evangelical teenage girl, to explore their moral realities and hold them as valid (although not necessarily commendable) simply because they are living it. This is only possible when one releases (pre-concieved) notions of what it means to morally act an agentive female.

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[49] Ibid 137.

[50] Mahmood, *Politics of piety: The Islamic revival and the feminist subject*.

[51] Kristin Aune. "Evangelical Christianity and women's changing lives." *European journal of women's studies* 15, no. 3 (2008): 277-294.

[52] Rosa Vasilaki. "The politics of postsecular feminism." *Theory, Culture & Society* 33, no. 2 (2016): 103-123.

The girls' decision-making processes are heavily influenced by what they understand as good and true according to an American Evangelical culture of sexual abstinence and redemption through heterosexual marriage. This resonates and clashes against the contradictory voices they hear in their high school environment which tell them that being a sexually inexperienced teenage girl is "stupid" and "embarrassing" but also too many sexual experiences makes one a "dirty ho". Within Evangelical purity culture, the (female) teenage body is subjectified as lacking in self-control and with the only remedy being through some spiritual commitment to sexual abstinence. Hannah and Lisa have learned not to give into the sins of the flesh because there is something greater waiting for them if they can just hold off until marriage. When the girls achieve control over the sexual body, they feel they have achieved a higher moral self.

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Commentary

Religion and Gender: Agency Within the Muddle of Believers' Lives

By *Judith Bachmann*

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Just this term, the question of the agency of Pentecostal women in Africa arose in my seminar. We were discussing the words from a speech given by a very popular female pastor who described that rather than preaching, her first calling from God was to her husband. Many of my students expressed their concern about these words and how they would encourage women in the audience to follow this example of divinely ordered subjugation and would thus re-affirm patriarchal power structures. And though I find my students' concerns valid, I pushed them in another direction as well: What if the contents and the functions/ performances of expressions of Pentecostal women do not always simply align? And what if the women in the audience have a knowledge of this as well, of the difference between rhetoric and doing? What if Pentecostal women are actually capable of saying one thing and doing the other because they are conscious of the various and contradicting expectations they encounter within different contexts?

When it comes to gender topics within Evangelicalism or Pentecostalism, many researchers turn to the pastors' opinions, sermons or the churches' teaching materials and even if interviews and ethnographic fieldwork is included, they tend to privilege the leaders' output. Rebecca L. Anne, however, has presented a very interesting and necessary look into the self-reflections of Evangelical teenage girls, not starting with pastors' output but with particular believers' reflections. This puts much of research done on Evangelicalism and Pentecostalism on its feet, I think, because there is

the constant danger that researchers overstate the influence of pastors' utterances or churches' teachings in the lives of the believers. Most of them do spend a lot of time outside of church and within other contexts like work places, educational institutions, family, etc.

The topic the teenagers reflect the most on in Anne's article is the issue of sexual behaviour. From my own experiences, pastors oftentimes feel the need to reprimand their congregations, especially female groups, reminding them in strong terms of how to behave and what to do, specifically concerning their sexual conduct. We could then either focus on the contents of these reprimands or we could also take it as a hint that the lives of these females are not lived as purely as their pastors would want them to. There seems to be a constant drive towards purity but that drive also attests to the muddle, the "temptation," the inconsistencies of the daily lives of the believers. Anne's article also stresses this point that for the teenage girls whom she observed and interviewed, there was a constant pull and push between their high school context and the teachings of their church or bible study group. On the one hand, they could demarcate themselves from their Non-Christian peers as "knowing better" and "staying on the right path"; on the other hand, they also expressed desires that fell somewhere in the middle. One girl wanted to do pole dancing as a "fun sports," while its popular reception as sexual made her abstain from it. The girls also acknowledged to be a little "boy crazy" at times, just like their Non-Christian female friends, although they strongly emphasized that they abstained from sexual activities unlike some of these friends.

I find these dilemma situations that the girls in Anne's article described as relevant in their lives and even as a cause of anxiety to them, very interesting because they show that Pentecostalism or Evangelicalism are not mere doctrines that produce cookie-cutter believers. Instead people ascribe themselves to certain churches, beliefs or doctrines within life situations and desires that are often muddled and difficult to morally navigate. This bottom-up approach does not only change our view on Pentecostalism or Evangelicalism and the humans we find in these movements, it also challenges age and gender dynamics.

By asking what the teenage girls themselves think and feel about their high school life and their churches' teachings with focus on the topic of sexuality, Anne takes a new perspective on teenage girls' agency. Against the background that teenaged females are often regarded as limited in their agency, both as not-yet-grown-up and as female. The article argues that through self-surveillance these girls also constitute themselves as subjects of their own conduct. I think this point comes across even more clearly against the backdrop of these muddled feelings that the girls attested to concerning their high school contacts and their commitment to God.

Considering the contents and rhetorical output of Pentecostal and Evangelical teaching is easy (that is also in the interest of the churches!). What is much harder, is to gain a glimpse into what believers actually make of it. I think, this is even more relevant when it comes to gender as many find themselves shocked, just like my students were, by the often mysogynist messages. Of course, close consideration of the contents is still necessary, I do not want to argue otherwise. But I would encourage the thought that many Evangelical or Pentecostal females (and in fact, all believers) have complicated lives with many different and contradicting challenges. This makes decisions on how to apply church teachings rather muddled endeavours as well, far from simple implementation situations. This also means that there is a constant push and pull between what they think and hear they ought to do and what they then do and feel. This push and pull may be frightening for them but it also opens up an array of opportunities how to act for believers. Acknowledging the relevance of the muddle of believers' lives also opens up new academic perspectives on religion and gender, as Anne has shown.

