

Public Abstract

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Title:True Love Waits? An Examination of the Motives and Methods of the True Love Waits Organization

True Love Waits was created in 1993 with the intention of encouraging teens to refrain from premarital sexual activity. Despite the efforts of TLW most studies show rates of sexual activity for teens have remained relatively steady and that the majority of teens (including TLW participants) continue to participate in premarital sexual activity. In light of this apparent failure in this paper I examined TLW to determine why it exists and what its primary motives were. I utilized Joseph R. Gusfield's theory of Symbolic Crusades and Status Politics as a lens through which the symbolic value of TLW can be further explored and understood. I also utilized interviews with the founders of TLW in conjunction with materials produced by the TLW organization and first hand accounts of TLW participants to provide a better understanding of TLW and why it exists. In my research I found that for those involved with the creation of TLW the organization exists not only to prevent premarital sexual activity, but also to provide those involved in the organization a community and social network where they feel like they can live the lifestyle of a Christian. It provides TLW participants with a sense of belonging and validates their religious identity by building up and reinforcing the status of those who abstain from premarital sexual activity. This is significant because it illustrates the significance of religious identity as a primary sociological identifier over and above more traditional sociological identifiers such as race, class, and gender. This also illustrates the importance of not using strictly instrumental methods to measure the success or failure of an organization. Although TLW failed to significantly alter the percentage of teens participating in premarital sexual behavior it succeeded in providing TLW participants with a sense of belonging and comfort in their religious identity.