

TRUE LOVE WAITS? AN EXAMINATION OF THE MOTIVES AND METHODS OF THE TRUE  
LOVE WAITS ORGANIZATION

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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School,  
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TRUE LOVE WAITS? AN EXAMINATION OF THE MOTIVES AND METHODS OF THE TRUE  
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# **TRUE LOVE WAITS? AN EXAMINATION OF THE MOTIVES AND METHODS OF THE TRUE LOVE WAITS ORGANIZATION**

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## **ABSTRACT**

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 it seems reasonable to question why an organization like TLW continues to exist. In this paper I examine TLW to determine why it exists and what its primary motives are. I utilize 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 evaluate TLW as a symbolic crusade proposing that the organization exists not only to prevent premarital sexual activity, but also to provide TLW participants with a sense of belonging and status by reinforcing their identity as Christian virgins through conferences, media, public action, and popular culture.

## INTRODUCTION

“If the family trends of recent decades are extended into the future, the result will be...the gradual elimination of marriage in favor of casual liaisons oriented to adult expressiveness and self-fulfillment.”<sup>1</sup>

“The so-called sexual revolution of recent decades has created a dangerous moral precipice from which many are falling to destruction. We must do more than just erect a barbed wire fence at the top of the cliff or put a fleet of ambulances at the bottom to care for the wounded. *We must keep our young people away from the cliff in the first place.*”<sup>2</sup>

In response to beliefs surrounding the above quotes the last three decades have seen the emergence and growth of conservative Christian groups such as the Moral Majority, the Christian Coalition, Focus on the Family, the Christian Broadcasting Network, Teen Mania, and Promise Keepers. All of these groups share something in common; they have started very public campaigns attempting to restore “traditional family values” by opposing things such as homosexuality, abortion, and, most importantly for the purposes of this paper, premarital sexual activity.<sup>3</sup> In addition to

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<sup>1</sup> Popenoe in Minnery, Tom and Gleen T. Stanton. “Family Integrity.” *Toward an Evangelical Public Policy: Political Strategies for the Health of the Nation*. Ed. Ronald J. Sider and Dianne Knippers. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005. 247.

<sup>2</sup> Mcdowell, Josh. *Why True Love Waits: The Definitive Book on How to Help Your Kids Resist Sexual Pressure*. Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale Publishing House, 2002. 25.

<sup>3</sup> *Sexuality in America: Understanding our Sexual Values and Behavior*. Ed. Patricia B. Koch and David L. Weis New York: Continuum Publishing Company, 1998. 16.

these larger parachurch organizations' attempts to restore traditional family values, smaller parachurch organizations emerged and often focused on one particular aspect of the restoration of traditional family values. One of the most popular and publicized of these organizations is True Love Waits (TLW).<sup>4</sup>

The primary goal of TLW is to promote abstinence from premarital sexual behavior as an acceptable lifestyle choice to be made by teens.<sup>5</sup> This goal is accomplished by encouraging teens to sign virginity pledges in which they commit to remain a virgin until marriage.<sup>6</sup> TLW uses conferences, media and publicity stunts, the selling of material goods such as jewelry carrying the TLW logo and/or message, and a variety of other methods to encourage teens to participate in their program. Despite the multi-faceted efforts of the TLW organization, the most comprehensive study of TLW pledgers revealed that the majority of them still participate in premarital sexual activity.<sup>7</sup>

Other studies have shown abstinence programs and virginity pledges to be no more effective than other forms of sex education, and numerous studies criticize abstinence and virginity pledge programs for failing to adequately educate teens about

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<sup>4</sup> Mebane, Felicia E. et al. "Sex Education and the News: Lessons From How Journalists Framed Virginity Pledges." *Journal of Health Communication*. 11 (2006):583-606.

<sup>5</sup> The phrase premarital sexual behavior is used here and throughout this paper because for TLW, abstinence is not only about sexual intercourse, but also about abstaining from other sexual behaviors such as oral sex, petting, and even having sexual thoughts. However, statistics about premarital sexual behavior will focus on premarital sex unless otherwise noted.

<sup>6</sup> The pledge is more complex than this, but will be examined more fully later.

<sup>7</sup> Bearman, Peter S. and Hannah Bruckner. "Promising the Future: Virginity Pledges and First Intercourse." *The American Journal of Sociology*. Vol 106 No 4 (January 2001): 859-912. and Winner, Lauren. F. "Sex in the Body of Christ." *Christianity Today*. Vol 49 Iss 5 (May 2005).



safe sexual behavior.<sup>8</sup> In addition, societal trends towards increased premarital sexual behavior have leveled off, but have not reversed and between 60%-85% (the percentage varies widely based on the study) of teens are continuing to participate in premarital sexual behavior. They are also doing so at even earlier ages with higher rates of teenage pregnancy and births out of wedlock.<sup>9</sup> In light of these apparent failures it seems reasonable to wonder why an organization such as TLW continues to exist. Why fight what appears to be a losing battle and risk socially isolating individuals from what statistics illustrate has become the normative behavior of their peers? Why maintain an organization that encourages teens to pledge to not engage in premarital sexual behavior when studies show the majority of those who pledge will still participate in said behavior? Wouldn't it be easier to appease the complaints of those opposing abstinence only education and encourage teens to be responsible in their sexual behavior since their participation in it seems inevitable?

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<sup>8</sup> Pamela K. Kohler, et al., "Abstinence-Only and Comprehensive Sex Education and the Initiation of Sexual Activity and Teen Pregnancy." *Journal of Adolescent Health*. Spring 2008. and Douglas Kirby, et al., "Emerging Answers 2007: Research Findings on Programs to Reduce Teen Pregnancy and Sexually Transmitted Diseases." *The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy*. November 2007.

<sup>9</sup> Mebane, Felicia E. et al. 583 and Winner, Lauren F. and Donnerworth, Gregory and Larry R. Petersen. "Secularization and the Influence of Religion on Beliefs about Premarital Sex." *Social Forces*. Vol 75 Iss 3 (March 1997):1071-1088. and Beck, Scott H. et al. "Religious Heritage and Premarital Sex: Evidence from a National Sample of Young Adults" *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. 30:2 (1991). 173-180. and Kyle, Richard. *Evangelicalism: An Americanized Christianity*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2006. 314-315. and Sider, Ronald J. *The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience: Why are Christians Living Just Like the Rest of the World?* Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005. 23. and "Teens Break No-Sex Vows, Study Suggests: Some Say Oral Sex Not Sex." Accessed 10/31/2007 [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m1058/is\\_26\\_120/ai\\_112131087/print](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1058/is_26_120/ai_112131087/print) and Barkan, Steven E. "Religiosity and Premarital Sex in Adulthood." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. 45:3 (2006): 408. and Greeley, Andrew and Michael Hout. *The Truth About Conservative Christians: What They Think and What They Believe*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006. *Sexuality in America: Understanding our Sexual Values and Behavior*. Ed. Patricia B. Koch and David L. Weis. New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1998 and Countryman, L. William. *Dirt, Greed, & Sex: Sexual Ethics in the New Testament and Their Implications for Today*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1990. 237-267.

While it certainly might be easier and more socially acceptable to succumb to the social currents regarding more permissive attitudes towards premarital sexuality, for those involved with TLW succumbing to these currents seems to not be a valid option. The reason for this is that the TLW organization exists not only to prevent teens from having premarital sex, but also to protect the status and reinforce the identity of those sharing the ideals of TLW.<sup>10</sup> Joseph R. Gusfield introduces this concept in his book *Symbolic Crusade: Status Politics and the American Temperance Movement*.<sup>11</sup> Using information from the American Temperance movement Gusfield explains that when a group perceives its beliefs, lifestyle, or values to be resisted by society, the group members' identities and status are challenged. Status, in this case, refers to group status which shares "a common culture in the form of standards of behavior" which is "normative for members of the groups" constituting the "'canons of decency' by which group members live."<sup>12</sup> As a result, the group is likely to mobilize in an effort to protect or regain respect for its beliefs, lifestyle, or values, thus re-securing the status and identity of its members. Although Gusfield's study is of an incredibly large movement over a broad period of time, it is my contention in this paper that, through a similar process to the one Gusfield describes, the TLW organization exists not only to prevent premarital sex, but also to create, maintain, and protect a social space where those

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<sup>10</sup> It is important to note here that I am not saying that the results do not matter, or even that the leaders and organizers of True Love Waits are not more focused on results than anything else. Rather, I am contending that regardless of the intentions of the True Love Waits campaign and its organizers and leaders, to give up on what seems to be a losing battle would be to give up on an essential part of their identity and to sacrifice the defense of a societal niche for those who share in their ideals and beliefs about the more narrow issue of abstinence and premarital sex, as well as the broader issue of traditional family values and evangelical identity.

<sup>11</sup> Gusfield, Joseph R. *Symbolic Crusade: Status Politics and the American Temperance Movement*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid 16.

sharing in TLW's ideals and beliefs can have their status and identity reinforced through one of the most popular cultural expressions in American culture, namely, sex.

In an effort to evaluate the validity of this contention I will examine the TLW movement in light of Joseph R. Gusfield's *Symbolic Crusade: Status Politics and the American Temperance Movement* in an effort to get at why TLW was created and why it is so important to those who created it to maintain it. I will first summarize Gusfield's theory of status and symbolic politics and provide updates to, and revisions of, his theory found in later works. Second, I will locate the TLW organization within the theoretical background of status politics identifying if it is accurate to label TLW as a movement of status politics. Third, I will examine what it is about premarital sexual behavior that makes it such an important target for those involved with TLW. Finally, I will conclude by evaluating the results of TLW's efforts towards attempting to change premarital sexual behavior and the perceptions and beliefs surrounding it. I will determine if the organization has been a success or a failure, and if it even makes sense for it to continue to exist. I will then step back and examine what those findings might teach us about: a) the future of TLW and similar organizations and b) the significance and importance of understanding not only economic or instrumental, tangible and easily recognized goals, but also the part that status and the symbolic might play when attempting to understand and evaluate the legitimacy of social groups and their battles, particularly where religious beliefs are involved.

Prior to evaluating the TLW movement as a case of status politics it is necessary to undertake a deeper examination of status and symbolic politics theory. In the next

section of this paper I will provide a summary of Gusfield's theory followed by a brief literature review of work on status politics theory in the nearly fifty years following Gusfield's initial work.

## **SYMBOLIC CRUSADES AND STATUS POLITICS**

“We have always understood the desire to defend fortune. We should also understand the nature to defend respect. It is less clear because it is symbolic in nature but it is not less significant.”<sup>13</sup>

In *Symbolic Crusade: Status Politics and the American Temperance Movement*, Joseph R. Gusfield capitalizes on the work of Max Weber among others to illustrate the significance of “status politics” as opposed to “class politics.” The two types of politics differ in that the former is more focused on the prestige afforded an individual or group because of a particular lifestyle, whereas the latter is more focused on economic interests and the allocation of material goods and resources. Gusfield explains the distinction is important because individuals define themselves, and are defined by others, based on much more than their class. Class is significant, and it should not be overlooked considering it undeniably influences and shapes the tastes, cultural commitments, and lifestyles of individuals.<sup>14</sup> However, class does not necessarily ensure an individual's social status and in some cases social status may, to varying degrees

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<sup>13</sup> Gusfield, Joseph R. 11.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid 13-14.

depending on the social issue in question, transcend class as shared ideals bridge the economic gap between groups of people.

Gusfield's understanding of status politics is derived from Weber's "multi-dimensional approach to social stratification" which introduced the idea that "although social status might be closely related to economic bases, it was not determined by this exclusively or primarily."<sup>15</sup> For example, with regards to the TLW movement, although participants are often white, middle class, conservative Evangelicals/Protestants, it is the participation in the conferences (which are typically free), the wearing of promise rings (which are often given as gifts at the conferences), and the commitment to remain a virgin until marriage that all provide a common ground and shared identity that allows individuals within TLW to be united by the cause of sexual abstinence regardless of class.<sup>16</sup> In other words, the door has been opened for shared beliefs to transcend class and bring people from differing social classes together. As one reviewer of Gusfield's work explained, where social status and status politics are concerned it is not money or

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<sup>15</sup> Gusfield, Joseph R. 14-15.

<sup>16</sup> Data specifically on TLW participants is lacking because of its localized and populist nature, but the TLW leadership have specified most participants are Conservative Protestants or Evangelicals and the statistics of both of those groups reveal they tend to be white and middle class. Additionally, the terms Evangelical, and to some degree Protestant, are commonly used but do not come close to sharing a universally accepted definition. Among those who identify with both Protestants and Evangelicals there are liberals, moderates, and conservatives. When one of the co-founders of TLW was asked who TLW was created for, he said it was primarily created for Evangelicals and Protestants who were politically and socially conservative, but that it has since expanded and pledgers come from a variety of backgrounds. Generally speaking, the terms Evangelical and Protestant refer to belief in God as good and as creator, Jesus as God's son who died on a cross and was resurrected to defeat sin and death and save humanity from it, the trinity of God, Jesus, and Holy Spirit, and the Bible as an important and reliable source for following God (with varying degrees of how literally it should be interpreted).

assets that people share in common, but rather “the prestige of a life style...the issues are symbolic; the contest is over who shall set the tone.”<sup>17</sup>

This distinction between class and status is central to Gusfield’s work, and is at the heart of his analysis of the American temperance movement. Similarly to TLW and the abstinence movement as the focus of this paper, Joseph R. Gusfield describes the temperance movement as an instance where *moral reform* is viewed as “a political and social issue,” and thus where social status is more informative and important than class.<sup>18</sup> Status politics, as explained by Gusfield and numerous others, arises when a group perceives it is necessary to take action to “preserve, defend, or enhance the dominance and prestige of its own style of living within the total society.”<sup>19</sup> This action becomes necessary when a group’s lifestyle or worldview is perceived to be under attack from changing social conditions.<sup>20</sup> Even more important as it relates to TLW, because behavior is one of the few ways of measuring an individual’s lifestyle or values, within status politics particular social behaviors are often targeted as a marker which identifies people as members or nonmembers of a particular subculture.

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<sup>17</sup> Lang, Kurt. “Reviewed Work(s): Symbolic Crusade: Status Politics and the American Temperance Movement.” *American Sociological Review*. Vol 29 No 5 (October 1964): 768-769.

<sup>18</sup> Gusfield, Joseph R. 2

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 3. Klatch, Rebecca E. “Of Meanings & Masters: Political Symbolism & Symbolic Action.” *Polity*. Vol 21 No 1 (Autumn 1988): 137-154. Adam, Barry D. “The Defense of Marriage Act and American Exceptionalism: The Gay ‘Marriage’ Panic in the United States.” *Journal of the History of Sexuality*. Vol 12 No 2 Special Issue: Sexuality and Politics since 1945 (April 2003): 259-276. Wallis, Roy and Richard Bland. “Purity in Danger: A Survey of Participants in a Moral-Crusade Rally.” *The British Journal of Sociology*. Vol 30 No 2 (June 1979): 188-205. McConahay, John B. “The Symbolic Politics of Fantasy.” *Law and Contemporary Problems*. Vol 51 No 1 (Winter 1988): 31-69. Dickson, Donald T. “Bureaucracy and Morality: An Organizational Perspective on a Moral Crusade.” *Social Problems* Vol 16 No 2 (Autumn 1968): 143-156.

<sup>20</sup> Wald, Kenneth D. et al. “Evangelical Politics and Status Issues.” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. Vol 28 No. 1 (March 1989):1-16. Scott, J. Wilbur. “The Equal Rights Amendment as Status Politics.” *Social Forces*. Vol 64 (1985). Zurcher, Louis A. et al. “The Anti-Pornography Campaign: A Symbolic Crusade.” *Social Problems*. Vol 19 No 2 (Autumn 1971):217-238.

For example, within the American Temperance movement it was drinking that identified people as members or non-members of the movement and everything the movement represented. Within the TLW organization it is sexual behavior and public attitudes towards sexual behavior that identifies people as members or non-members of the TLW movement and everything it represents. Gusfield explains the behavior of an individual “indicated to what culture the actor was committed and hence what social groups he [or she] took as his [or her] models of imitation and avoidance and his [or her] points of positive and negative reference for judging his [or her] behavior.”<sup>21</sup> In short, what you do (or at least what you say you do and others think you do) says something about who you are and what you believe. This is very important within status politics where “the public support of one conception of morality at the expense of another enhances the prestige and self-esteem of the victors and degrades the culture of the losers.”<sup>22</sup>

Gusfield applies this understanding of status politics to the American Temperance movement, and he emphasizes the importance of the symbolic when dealing with status. He explains that because of the subjective and constantly fluctuating nature of status and status politics, when a groups’ status is challenged the response is often such that it targets perception.<sup>23</sup> This is necessary because social status, particularly where issues of morality are concerned, is not about how much a

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<sup>21</sup> Gusfield, Joseph R. 4.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 15.

status group has, but rather about public attitudes taken towards a status group.<sup>24</sup>

Social status is measured by public attitudes of respect, admiration, and approval, as opposed to by economic or material gains. Within status politics this differentiation between more tangible and objectively identified gains such as money, and less tangible and subjectively identified social gains, is often described as differentiating between instrumental and symbolic aims. Gusfield explains that although status politics often strive for instrumental aims such as the passing of legislation, it is the symbolic aspect of those aims that is often of most importance. Gusfield tracks this process in the Temperance movement showing how the response of the movement progressed through stages as dictated by fluctuations within the social climate.

Early on the Temperance movement emerged when Temperance adherents believed drinking was becoming a problem, but the “normative definitions of the Protestant middle and upper classes” (those most likely to participate in the Temperance movement) still dominated society and strategies of resistance were rooted in the stage of “assimilative reform” focusing on education, persuasion, and attempting to aid those whose social and/or class status might lead them to drink.<sup>25</sup> Within this stage it is still a case of social dominance because the problem can be viewed as one of deviance from the norm. However, if that social dominance is challenged by the continued growth of an opposing social force the problem transitions from one of deviance to the emergence of an enemy and the legitimacy of the

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<sup>24</sup> “Public” here refers to the general consensus as represented (and often directed and influenced by) the media, government, and highly regarded public figures.

<sup>25</sup> Gusfield, Joseph R. 6, 68-69, 82-83.



reformers' subculture, and thus part of the reformer's identity, is also challenged often resulting in the next stage of "coercive reform."<sup>26</sup>

Coercive reform focuses on instrumental and symbolic victories rather than persuasion because "the object of reform is seen as an intractable defender of another culture, someone who rejects the reformer's values and really doesn't want to change."<sup>27</sup> At this stage, the initial efforts of dealing with the challenge to the status group and preserving the social climate have failed, and the challenge(s) have grown stronger necessitating more drastic measures if status is to be preserved. The goal becomes one of self-preservation as steps are taken which attempt to secure the reformers' social status through political and public action.<sup>28</sup> In short, assimilative reform attempts to solve the problem by dealing with the challengers directly to try and encourage them to be more like you. Coercive reform goes beyond the challengers to the people in power in an attempt to force the challengers to be more like you.

Returning to the Temperance movement, the lifestyle of drinking continued to grow to the point where it challenged the "normative definitions of the Protestant middle and upper classes." Ideas of acceptable forms of fun and leisure were beginning to shift and proponents of the Temperance movement were forced to fight for their place within American culture and society or sit back and watch as the ideals of the Temperance movement were displaced. It was within this stage that the Temperance movement successfully secured the passage of the 18<sup>th</sup> amendment hoping it would

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<sup>26</sup> Gusfield, Joseph R. 6-7, 68-70.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid 6-7.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid 7, 87-88, 98-99, 111.

secure the status of the movement's participants. Unfortunately for members of the Temperance movement, the story did not end there as the 18<sup>th</sup> amendment failed to stop people from drinking and eventually became the first and only amendment in American history to be repealed. Gusfield describes this as a devastating blow because members of the Temperance movement still wanted and needed their beliefs and ideals to be respected because of how closely they were intertwined with their status and identity, but the government was no longer lending public credence to the Temperance cause. However, Gusfield does point out that the subjective nature of status allowed for the Temperance cause to persist despite this instrumental failure because the battle over perceptions and symbols could still take place.

Although the Temperance movement failed to outlaw drinking, it succeeded in continuing to shape societies' attitude towards drinking. The passage of the 18<sup>th</sup> amendment itself was a symbolic victory because it announced to society that the lifestyle of participants of the Temperance movement was valid. Similarly, even as the amendment was repealed the movement continued working towards re-securing the status of Temperance adherents by painting drinking, particularly excessive and irresponsible drinking, as socially unacceptable, despite the fact that it was once again legal.<sup>29</sup> Members of the temperance movement conceded their defeat on the legalization of alcohol, but still fought to shape attitudes towards drinking in a continued attempt to protect their status.

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<sup>29</sup> Zald, Mayer N. "Reviewed Work(s): Symbolic Crusade: Status Politics and the American Temperance Movement." *The American Journal of Sociology*. Vol 70 No 3 (November 1964):392.

Gusfield concludes, “the temperance movement represents an example par excellence of a movement oriented to the preservation and reaffirmation of the prestige and way of life of status groupings.”<sup>30</sup> The political and social battles of the temperance movement, particularly as it became clear that people would continue to drink, retained their significance because of their influence on perceptions of status and identity. As long as perceptions were positive and the status of abstainers was maintained, the reality that people were drinking in increasing numbers was somewhat irrelevant. In other words, the status politics of the Temperance movement were driven by symbolic battles that influenced perception. While in reality people were drinking, as long as symbolic victories were achieved status could be maintained. Those agreeing with and sharing in the ideals of the temperance movement declined and then leveled off as time passed, but the status of participants of the Temperance movement was still protected (to varying degrees depending on the changing social climate) thanks to symbolic victories, such as the passage of the 18<sup>th</sup> amendment and continued shaping of public attitudes towards drinking. In short, those who identified with the Temperance cause were still able to be accepted and, in most cases, respected members of society, even as their lifestyle and beliefs became the minority position, because of the continued social and political efforts of the Temperance movement.

This is somewhat difficult to understand because symbolic victories are not always tangible, but the reality is the efforts of the Temperance movement successfully changed the nature of drinking in America despite the repeal of the 18<sup>th</sup> amendment

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<sup>30</sup> Zald, Mayer N. 392.

(which was both a symbolic and real defeat to the Temperance movement). Gusfield explains, “America in 1933 was not the same as it had been before Prohibition.” The saloon and drinking were no longer the primary modes of “playtime” as they existed “among many possible alternatives,” and they were viewed by many as potentially dangerous and irresponsible.<sup>31</sup>

Following Gusfield’s popularizing of status and symbolic politics it was used in a number of scholarly publications covering a wide array of issues.<sup>32</sup> Before proceeding to discuss these later uses of Gusfield, it is helpful to locate Gusfield’s original work within the broader academic trend of status politics that began with an essay by Max Weber in 1946 which introduced the notion of differentiating between “status groups” (groups sharing similar claims to social honor and prestige) as opposed to “class” or “interest” groups (groups sharing economic capacity and interests).<sup>33</sup> Following Weber, in 1955 Seymour M. Lipset and Richard Hofstadter were among the first to apply Weber’s ideas to the political realm and differentiate between class and status politics.<sup>34</sup> However, both Lipset and Hofstadter applied the notions to areas where class and status heavily

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<sup>31</sup> Gusfield, Joseph R. 198-199. Of course, the Temperance movement may not have been solely responsible for this shift, but that doesn’t matter in a symbolic crusade. As long as Temperance adherents perceived their actions as responsible for the shift then the movement was a success.

<sup>32</sup> Klatch, Rebecca E. 137-154. Gusfield, Joseph R. “On Legislating Morals: The Symbolic Process of Designating Deviance.” *California Law Review* Vol 56 No 1 (January 1968): 54-73. Wood, Michael and Michael Hughes. “The Moral Basis of Moral Reform: Status Discontent vs. Culture and Socialization as Explanations of Anti-Pornography Social Movement Adherence.” *American Sociological Review*. Vol 49 No 1 (February 1984): 86-99. Adam, Barry D. 259-276. Wallis, Roy and Richard Bland. 188-205. McConahay, John B. 31-69. Dickson, Donald T. 143-156. The phrase symbolic crusade is often replaced with moral crusade or variations thereof, but the concept of status politics where people with shared ideals feel their beliefs are being challenged mobilize and take action to protect their social status is present throughout.

<sup>33</sup> Brandmeyer, Gerard A. and R. Serge Denisoff. “Status Politics: An Appraisal of the Application of a Concept.” *The Pacific Sociological Review*. Vol 12 No 1 (Spring 1969):5-11.

<sup>34</sup> Hofstadter, Richard. *The Age of Reform*. New York: Vintage, 1955. and Lipset, Seymour M. “The Sources of the ‘Radical Right’.” *The New American Right*. Ed. Daniel Bell New York: Criterion, 1955. 166-233.

overlapped and did not focus exclusively on status politics. It wasn't until Gusfield's work in 1963 that the idea of status and symbolic politics independently of class politics was the primary focus of an academic study.<sup>35</sup>

Returning now to reviewers of Gusfield and those utilizing his theory and ideas in their own work, generally speaking responses to his work were very positive.<sup>36</sup> While some reviewers were critical of his history and of a few other areas of his study, his theory of status and symbolic politics along with the application of that theory to the American Temperance movement received very little criticism or challenge. Possibly the most critical reviewer of Gusfield's work was Gusfield himself as he provided additional insight based on reviews of his initial work in the epilogue of its second edition.

One of the more important insights Gusfield provides in his revised edition is reiterating that individuals pushing for prohibition and temperance were not simply concerned with drinking, but rather they were concerned with the larger direction of society. This is an important reiteration because reviewers criticized Gusfield for not fully grasping the broader implications of what was at stake.<sup>37</sup> Gusfield agrees with those charges explaining that as more information on the Temperance Movement became available following his initial study he quickly realized that the movement was

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<sup>35</sup> Brandmeyer, Gerard A and R. Serge Denisoff. 5-7.

<sup>36</sup> A wide array of uses and applications of status politics have emerged since the work of Weber, Hofstadter, Lipset, and Gusfield, but for the purposes of this paper, and for the sake of brevity and simplicity, with's theory being the basic grounding for my work I will focus on articles which primarily rely on or respond to Gusfield's applications of status politics and symbolic crusades. Examples of positive reviews of Gusfield include Ullman, Albert D. "Reviewed Work(s): Symbolic Crusade: Status Politics and the American Temperance Movement." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* Vol 355, Programs and Problems in Child Welfare (September 1964):154-155. and Hessel, Dieter. "Reviewed Work(s): Symbolic Crusade: Status Politics and the American Temperance Movement." *Review of Religious Research*. Vol 6 No 1 (Autumn 1964):56-57. and Zald, Mayer N. 392-393. and Lang, Kurt. 768-769.

<sup>37</sup> Brandmeyer, Gerard A and R. Serge Denisoff. 6-8. Lang, Kurt 768-769. Hessel, Dieter 56-57. and Zald, Mayer N. 392.

“one of the responses of the American middle classes to the felt reality of public disorder. The transformation of America from a rural to an urban society, from a Protestant country to a melting pot of ethnic and religious diversities, from an agricultural to an industrial world was experienced as including, among other dimensions, the growth of crime, immorality, and secular rejection of religion. The malaise was epitomized and understood as connected with drinking and drunkenness, especially drinking in a public or quasi-public location.”<sup>38</sup>

In other words, drinking became the symbol which represented a variety of cultural contentions against those who supported prohibition and temperance, and victories and losses surrounding the practice of drinking had symbolic import concerning the status of those involved.

This is a critical point within status and symbolic politics because when dealing with status the symbolic is essential because it is through shaping people’s perceptions of particular symbols or symbolic issues that status is affected.<sup>39</sup> Gusfield discusses this reality in his revised edition explaining that status politics are not focused on “only one set of meanings,” but they often are represented through one, or a small number of easily identified, issue(s).<sup>40</sup> This is not to say that the issue(s) chosen is not important, but rather that fighting for the issue(s) and the continued existence of social acceptance and respect for a particular social status tied to the issue(s) is incredibly important. This is because it can be seen as one easily identifiable piece among the much larger puzzle of problems that proponents of a particular social status perceive. In other words, the issue(s) becomes a symbolic identifier of a larger social struggle that is much more complex than simply whether or not it is socially acceptable to drink, have premarital sex, etc. (As a result, when discussing TLW in this paper it will be important to

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<sup>38</sup> Gusfield, Joseph R. 196.

<sup>39</sup> Wald, Kenneth D. et al. 1-16. Scott, J. Wilbur. Zurcher, Louis A. et al. 217-238.

<sup>40</sup> Gusfield, Joseph R. 201.

remember that there might be much more at stake than whether or not people have sex. If TLW fits within Gusfield's theory of status politics it can be argued sex, while incredibly important on its own, is also a symbolic identifier for the broader social concerns of proponents of TLW.)

A second criticism of Gusfield is his oversimplification of those involved in the American Temperance movement. Reviewers criticized Gusfield because he painted a picture in which it was simply us v. them, drinkers v. non-drinkers.<sup>41</sup> Once again, in his second edition Gusfield identifies this oversight explaining he made the mistake of viewing the two competing sides as fairly monolithic and unchanging, "as if it were two football teams rushing toward each other."<sup>42</sup> Viewing the two sides in this way made it easy to view Temperance in terms of winners and losers, but the reality is that the categories of drinkers and non-drinkers do not fairly represent the diversity within those two positions, nor do they represent the reality that everyone involved were winners and losers to varying degrees.

Reviews aside, it is important to examine more recent applications of Gusfield's work to determine if his ideas on status politics are useful outside of the purview of the American Temperance movement. A simple search of "status politics" and/or "symbolic crusade" in any academic journal reveals that Gusfield's work has been applied in a number of areas.<sup>43</sup> I have selected four of those areas that are spaced periodically from as early as 1968 to as late as 2003. One of the first uses of Gusfield's ideas is

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<sup>41</sup> Klatch, Rebecca E. 141-142. Ullman, Albert D. 154-155. Hessel, Dieter. 57.

<sup>42</sup> Gusfield, Joseph R. 191.

<sup>43</sup> Klatch, Rebecca E. 141.

governmental involvement in moral reform such as the 1968 article “Bureaucracy and Morality: An Organizational Perspective on a Moral Crusade,” by Donald T. Dickson.<sup>44</sup> In this article Dickson investigates the U.S. Bureau of Narcotics’ “moral crusade” against marijuana. His primary goal is to show that previous ideas claiming that moral crusades in bureaucratic settings were the result of powerful individuals with a particular moral agenda are incomplete.<sup>45</sup> In contrast, similarly to the point Gusfield reiterates in his second edition, Dickson shows that the U.S. Bureau of Narcotics anti-marijuana campaign was a larger organizational process stemming from broader goals and the Bureau’s responses to its environment (American society generally but more specifically the government).<sup>46</sup>

Dickson explains just as the Temperance movement undertook efforts and modified those efforts when necessary in an attempt to alter its environment (American society), the Bureau’s war against marijuana (as well as a number of other government efforts according to Dickson) undertook efforts to shape societal views and ensure the sale and use of marijuana were prohibited. More importantly, Dickson shows that just as the Temperance movement was about more than drinking, the U.S. Bureau of Narcotics’ war against marijuana was about more than marijuana. He explains the Bureau’s war against marijuana was also about the larger concern of the Bureau’s status relative to other government organizations. The Bureau was not only seeking the outlaw of marijuana, but also more organizational power, improved government and

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<sup>44</sup> Gusfield himself wrote an article on this topic titled “On Legislating Morals: The Symbolic Process of Designating Deviance.” *California Law Review*. Vol 56 No 1 (January 1968):54-73.

<sup>45</sup> Dickson, Donald T. 144.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, 145.



public perceptions of the Bureau's importance, and increased budget appropriations.<sup>47</sup>

Dickson's study is particularly useful in that it illustrates how broad the application of Gusfield's theory can be. Within Dickson's work status politics took an indirect route in that there was not a group losing status because of a moral issue, but rather a group that used a moral issue to gain status for itself. In other words, the U.S. Bureau of Narcotics tied itself to a moral issue to gain the status benefits of a symbolic or moral crusade.

Following the work on governmental moral reform, the next major issue where Gusfield's theory was used is pornography, most notably in 1971 with the publication of Louis A. Zurcher et al's "The Anti-Pornography Campaign as a Symbolic Crusade."<sup>48</sup> In Zurcher et al's work Gusfield's theory is applied and tested through a case study of two American communities and their local campaigns against pornography. Zurcher et al show that the anti-pornography campaign is an example of status politics being exercised through a symbolic crusade.<sup>49</sup> Zurcher et al explain that just as alcohol was symbolic in the Temperance movement, pornography was symbolic in the two anti-pornography campaigns representing the challenges to their status and values found throughout the social landscape of America in venues such as television programming, crime rates, media, and Supreme Court rulings on school prayer and pornography. As

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<sup>47</sup> Dickson, Donald T. 152-156.

<sup>48</sup> Wood and Hughes work will be discussed later because it is very similar in its criticisms of Gusfield to another article that deals with abortion. Zurcher et al. 217-238 and Wood, Michael and Michael Hughes. 86-99. Others, such as McConohay, John B. 31-69., have also used Gusfield's ideas to deal with pornography, but none use Gusfield as explicitly as Zurcher et al.

<sup>49</sup> The concept of a symbolic crusade will be discussed later in this section

one participant in the anti-pornography campaigns explained, the direction America was headed was opposed “to all that I have stood for all my life.”<sup>50</sup>

The participants in the anti-pornography campaigns responded to these challenges to their status by forming organizations that targeted the support of community leaders and public officials while also undertaking a number of public actions. For example, organizations in the two campaigns took action including mobilizing to achieve “prohibition of ‘objectional’ advertisements for ‘objectional’ movies...scheduling of ‘mature’ movies at later T.V. times...closing of an ‘adult’ theatre...increased police action concerning pornography...” community meetings, a “decency rally,” publication of newspaper articles opposing pornography, and in one of the communities participants even got the mayor to proclaim “Action for Decency Day” to raise awareness and support for anti-pornography activity.<sup>51</sup>

Despite all of these efforts, Zurcher et al report that in both communities pornography itself not only failed to decline, but actually increased. However, as was the case with the Temperance movement, the anti-pornography campaigns were viewed as successful because participants were able to defend their status and regain prestige and respect for their lifestyle. One participant explained, “maybe that bookstore [an adult bookstore the campaign attempted to shut down] will stay open, but the decent people in this town have gone on record about how they feel, and what they can do if they want to, and everybody knows it.”<sup>52</sup> Zurcher et al conclude

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<sup>50</sup> Zurcher, Louis A. et al. 222.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 225-227.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 231.

participants viewed their status as being challenged, and “by their mobilization for action, citizens concerned with threats to their accustomed life style, to the ‘basic values’ which they cherished, were able to express status discontent, to impel community action, to attract the status-enhancing attention of ‘important’ local and national leaders, and in general by status politics to demonstrate publicly and at least symbolically that their style of life was dominant, prestigious and not at all powerless.”<sup>53</sup>

The next major issue where Gusfield’s ideas were applied is abortion. There are two works that rely heavily on Gusfield within discussions of abortion, the first is Kristen Luker’s *Abortion: The Politics of Motherhood*, published in 1985. Luker’s work differs from Gusfield’s in that she does not directly evaluate abortion as an issue of status politics or a symbolic crusade, but she does illustrate how people on both sides of the abortion debate are motivated in large part by a desire to protect and maintain their status within American society. She explains abortion is an issue that is certainly of tremendous importance in and of itself, but it is also symbolically representative of larger struggles about the way people see and understand the world around them. In his revised edition Gusfield compares Luker’s use of abortion to his use of alcohol claiming they are ultimately both “a ritual drama about what values in American life are dominant and which are to remain degraded and devalued.”<sup>54</sup> Luker echoes these sentiments in her work explaining the abortion debate is not about the “facts” but about the “meaning and value of motherhood” and that abortion itself is only the “tip of

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<sup>53</sup> Gusfield, Joseph R. 233.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 205.

the iceberg.”<sup>55</sup> She explains the abortion debate “draws on deep—and often unconscious—beliefs and feelings about, and experiences with, such things as children, families, sex, religion, and the basic natures of individuals.”<sup>56</sup>

In addition to Luker’s work on abortion, in 1987 Alan Clarke published an article with the most critical use of Gusfield and status politics I found. The article was “Moral Protest, Status Defence and the Anti-abortion Campaign.”<sup>57</sup> In his article Clarke applied Gusfield’s theory to an anti-abortion campaign in Britain and found that, although Gusfield’s general ideas of the importance of status and symbols were present among participants, the goals of participants were much more instrumental than Gusfield would seem to allow within status politics. Clarke criticizes Gusfield for overstating his belief that instrumental goals do not have significance or meaning within status politics.<sup>58</sup>

Clarke’s criticism is fair and accurate, and it is shared by others including another article on pornography written in 1984 by Michael Wood and Michael Hughes with the title, “The Moral Basis of Moral Reform: Status Discontent vs. Culture and Socialization as Explanations of Anti-Pornography Social Movement Adherence.”<sup>59</sup> The criticism ties directly into Gusfield’s admitted tendency to oversimplify and generalize in his initial work. At its’ heart it is a criticism that focuses on the intent or motives of those involved

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<sup>55</sup> Luker, Kristen *Abortion: The Politics of Motherhood*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985. 5, 8. Luker in Gusfield, Joseph R. 205-206.

<sup>56</sup> Luker, Kristen. xiv.

<sup>57</sup> Clarke, Alan. “Moral Protest, Status Defence and the Anti-abortion Campaign.” *British Journal of Sociology*. 38: (1987a): 235-253.

<sup>58</sup> Clarke, Alan 235-253.

<sup>59</sup> Wood, Michael and Michael Hughes. 86-99. Clarke, Alan. 246-248. Ullman, Albert D. 154-155. Zald, Mayer N. 392-393. Lang, Kurt. 768-769.

in status politics as well as how status politics is defined. Clarke, Wood and Hughes, and others ultimately criticize Gusfield based on the belief that his distinction between instrumental and symbolic goals is too rigid, and his understanding of status is too broad or general. They claim that those involved in status politics do not participate to protect their status, but rather to achieve instrumental goals, and that they are motivated by their culture or socialization as opposed to by their status.<sup>60</sup> This is an incredibly important point because it is essential to ensure in any study that the subjects are represented accurately. To better understand and respond to these criticisms it is helpful to divide them into their two parts. The first is how status politics is defined. The second is to understand the motives as instrumental or symbolic.

Concerning the first criticism of how status politics is defined, the argument is over whether status should be broadly or narrowly defined. Both the Clark and Wood and the Hughes articles argue for a narrower understanding of status criticizing Gusfield by claiming it is not status, but rather specific cultural or social influences (such as religion, past experience, or parental or spousal influence) that move people to participate in moral reform movements. They argue a broad understanding of status allows it to become a catch all that can be applied to virtually any social movement.<sup>61</sup> The criticisms are accurate in that while Gusfield mentions a multitude of social influences, he definitely places an emphasis on an incredibly generic catch-all of white, non-immigrant, middle class, Protestant status as being the primary motive for

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<sup>60</sup> Clarke, Alan. 246-248. Wood, Michael and Michael Hughes.86-89. Ullman, Albert D. 154-155. Zald, Mayer N. 392-393. Lang, Kurt. 768-769.

<sup>61</sup> Clarke, Alan. 246-248. Wood, Michael and Michael Hughes.86-89. Zald, Maney N. 393.

participants in the Temperance movement. What those who share Clarke and Wood and Hughes views fail to consider is that the incredible breadth of the Temperance movement necessitates a broader understanding of status, although he still attempts to differentiate between more specific influences and motivations. For example, Gusfield discusses the significant influence religion had for many of the participants in the American Temperance movement. However, he uses the broader term of status because religion was not the only social influence acting on participants in the American Temperance movement. There may have been Temperance organizations that focused on religion as their primary motive, but there were a multitude of Temperance organizations and Gusfield reiterates in his updated work that each of them approached the issue of Temperance from a different perspective and with a different motive (although those differences sometimes appeared quite small).

Those Temperance organizations whose primary motive was religion did not exist in a vacuum and were subject to other secondary motives. This is an important distinction because by simplifying the motives to only religion or some other socializing force the possibility that a multitude of social influences are acting to motivate an individual may be lost. To say that the Temperance movement was a movement motivated by religion would be accurate, but it would ignore the fact that additional motives were likely present for at least some of the movement's participants. However,

it is also important to not understate or reduce the importance of certain motives for various social groups' participation in social movements.<sup>62</sup>

Concerning the second criticism of motives as instrumental or symbolic, Gusfield explains that within status politics the symbolic necessarily takes precedence over the instrumental, but that does not mean the instrumental does not matter. The instrumental goals are important because they are connected to the symbolic. For Gusfield, within the Temperance movement as well as each of the issues described thus far, the overall goal is to maintain and protect status. However, this overall goal is typically sought by participants through the more simple confines of a particular issue. This is the case because instrumental goals are tangible representations of broader concerns. For example, within the Temperance movement instrumental goals surrounding drinking were sought, but those instrumental goals were not the sole motive for their participation. Individuals participated in the Temperance movement not only because they had feelings about drinking and wanted to do something about it, but also because they identified drinking as one easily identified issue among many challenges to their lifestyle and status which they perceived to be losing. Within Clarke's study these multifaceted motives were clearly present as 56 of the 64 participants in the campaign stated their participation would be worthwhile regardless of if they successfully changed legislation concerning abortion. In other words, even if the instrumental goal was not achieved their participation would still be validated

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<sup>62</sup> This idea will be explored further in the paper, but as a preface, there are those who contend that certain social influences such as religion are often downplayed in favor of more easily identified and somewhat less subjective sociological categories such as class, race, and gender.

because of other reasons. Gusfield identifies those other reasons as the bigger picture of symbolic victories and status politics.

While Gusfield's claim that the symbolic is important is true, the criticisms are accurate in that in his work he often downplays the significance of instrumental goals in the Temperance movement. This is an important criticism for the purposes of this paper because it illustrates the difference between a large scale study of a broad movement spanning a vast time period (the Temperance movement) and a more localized study focused on a smaller time period and a particular organization (TLW). Were this a study of abstinence it would be much more in tune with Gusfield's work, but as a study of one particular organization within the larger abstinence movement it will allow for deeper insight into the motives of those involved and a more accurate representation of what is taking place with TLW. In short, it is a micro-application of Gusfield's theory that will not only provide insight into TLW, but it will also provide insight into the accuracy and usefulness of Gusfield's work as a model for understanding what is really at stake at the everyday individual and organizational level for those involved with social groups, particularly those dealing with issues of morality.

Transitioning now to the last and most recent issue of gay rights in American society, Gusfield's theory and ideas have been used in a number of articles including Adam Barry's 2003 article "The Defense of Marriage Act and American Exceptionalism: The Gay 'Marriage' Panic in the United States" and Donald P. Haider-Markel and Kenneth J. Meier's "The Politics of Gay and Lesbian Rights: Expanding the Scope of the



Conflict.”<sup>63</sup> Barry and Haider-Markel and Meier are somewhat unique in comparison to the other articles mentioned because they rely on Gusfield for one of a large number of theoretical arguments within their articles, but they are included here because Gusfield’s ideas are at the heart of their overall argument.

Barry traces the multitude of reasons for why American society is so dramatically opposed to legislation in support of gay marriage and he finds a number of culprits including American exceptionalism, tradition, opposition by political elites, and religion. In the end he concludes that although a number of factors come into play they can be broadly grouped as “perceived threats to or an actual decline in status.”<sup>64</sup> In other words, just as status was at the heart of the American Temperance movement’s opposition to drinking, status is at the heart of a less unified opposition to legislation in favor of gay marriage.

Similarly to Barry, Haider-Markel and Meier rely on Gusfield in conjunction with a number of other theoretical arguments to analyze data on gay rights initiatives in Oregon and Colorado. Haider-Markel and Meier found that when the scope of gay and lesbian rights is more narrowly focused within strictly political circles that the struggle for gay and lesbian rights acts as interest group politics. In contrast, when the scope is broadened beyond political circles and social and religious groups become involved the struggle for gay and lesbian rights acts as traditional morality or status politics.<sup>65</sup> Their explanation for this is that when gay and lesbian rights were moved outside of strictly

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<sup>63</sup> Adam, Barry D. 259-276. Haider-Markel, Donald P. and Kenneth J. Meier. “The Politics of Gay and Lesbian Rights: Expanding the Scope of the Conflict.” *The Journal of Politics*. Vol 58 No 2 (May 1996):332-349.

<sup>64</sup> Barry, Adam D. 275-276.

<sup>65</sup> Haider-Markel, Donald P. and Kenneth J. Meier. 332-333, 343-346.

political circles and expanded to the public sector by actions such as placing an initiative concerning gay and lesbian rights on an election ballot then it became a battle over status. Opponents to gay and lesbian rights perceived their status to be challenged and responded by mobilizing against the initiative.<sup>66</sup>

In conclusion, as the articles and reviews have shown, Gusfield's ideas surrounding status politics and the significance of symbolic victories within status politics extend beyond the American Temperance movement and are applicable to a variety of social issues. Various aspects of status were present in each of the articles, and in all but the last two articles it was clear that victories were achieved that had symbolic significance, regardless of the instrumental results of the movements. In addition, criticisms of Gusfield were included to better clarify his theory and allow for a more accurate application of status politics within this paper. However, prior to transitioning to an application of status politics to the TLW movement, a final clarification concerning Gusfield's theory needs to be made.

Gusfield's title defines the status politics of the American Temperance movement as a symbolic crusade. Up to this point, I have intentionally avoided using the term because within Gusfield's work he fails to use the phrasing of symbolic crusade. For Gusfield, it appears that the term symbolic crusade is simply a catchy title that garners people's attention. However, Gusfield does focus extensively on the significance of symbols and symbolic action within status politics. As such, the term is still very useful because it highlights the symbolic nature of status politics.

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<sup>66</sup> Haider-Markel, Donald P. and Kenneth J. Meier 343-346.

The term is also useful because of its removal of the word politics. This is significant because the word politics carries connotations of particular types of actions. For example, generally speaking, most of the definitions of status politics are centered around political acts with the assumption that the government is the primary institution with the power to confer status. While political acts are certainly important, the term symbolic crusade more easily allows for the inclusion of other institutions that might confer status. Several of the articles above illustrate this by focusing not only on political or legislative battles, but also on town meetings, conferences, publicity stunts, and media attention and representation.<sup>67</sup> Gusfield touches on this in his revised edition explaining “In the struggle between groups for prestige and social position, the demands for deference and the protection from degradation are channeled into government and into such institutions of cultural formation as schools, churches, and media of communication. Because these institutions have power to affect public recognition, they are arenas of conflict between opposing status groups. Their ceremonial, ritual, and policy are matters of interest for status groups...”<sup>68</sup> In short, it is not just legislation and political action that garners status.

Understanding that there are different venues where status might be fought for and conferred leads to consideration of an additional point. If there are different institutions conferring status, then different engagements over status are likely to have different weight in the social scale of determining status and prestige. Perhaps Gusfield and others have focused on the political and legislative battles because they seemed to

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<sup>67</sup> Gusfield, Joseph R. 193-208.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, 175.

have the most social weight, but when evaluating a social movement's implications for status it is important to be mindful of the complexity of the process. The process is complicated by the class, access to power, etc. of those involved in the battle, the social institutions and structures already in place that determine the rules and parameters for the battle, and participants such as media with the power to shape perception within the battle. For example the Scopes Trial was an instrumental victory for fundamentalists opposing the teaching of evolution in public schools. It was a political victory in which the government ruled in favor of their cause. According to Gusfield's theory, this should result in improved status, but in reality it proved to be a catastrophic failure because of factors such as media (a non-governmental institution) coverage shaping public perception and diminishing the status of creationists despite their supposed victory.

With these final considerations in mind, for the purposes of this paper I will continue to refer to status within the TLW movement, but in applying the theory of status politics I will use the term symbolic crusade in an effort to avoid the primarily political connotations of status politics and not overlook the complexity of all of the social processes involved. With that said, it is finally safe to shift to an evaluation of the TLW movement to determine if it fits the criteria of a symbolic crusade.

## TRUE LOVE WAITS: WHO, WHAT, AND WHY?

Locating the TLW movement within the theory of a symbolic crusade appears simple on the surface, but a lack of substantial information, particularly from scholarly publications, on the movement makes the process more difficult. Fortunately, the nature of evaluating a movement as a symbolic crusade lends itself towards using less analytically driven and critical resources. The need for a group to engage in a symbolic crusade is based on how a group perceives itself within its broader context, and as such, relying more heavily on resources produced by the group in question is not only useful, but also necessary. In this section I will rely heavily on information published by TLW and individuals associated with it. I will supplement this material with additional information and analyses from popular media articles and books, as well as the few scholarly publications on TLW. I will evaluate if the components of status politics movements as described above are present within the TLW movement in an attempt to determine if it is reasonable to consider TLW as a symbolic crusade.

As Gusfield illustrated with the Temperance movement, status politics are likely to arise in response to changing social conditions.<sup>69</sup> As social conditions change and the social makeup of society fluctuates the society often undergoes varying degrees of transformation; the things society values and respects may also shift. As these changes, transformations and shifts take place, social groups within society often find themselves sliding along a scale of prestige and respect.

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<sup>69</sup> Gusfield, Joseph R. 2-10.

For example, within the American political system the level of prestige and respect for particular political parties often shifts. Most recently this can be seen in the election of Barack Obama and the subsequent popularity of the Democratic Party as it gained the majority in both the House and the Senate. The Republican Party went from being the majority party with substantial prestige to struggling to retool and regain the favor of both the general populace and its traditional base as many moderates and independents and some Republicans voted for President Obama as opposed to the Republican candidate Senator John McCain. Similarly, the Republican Party responded to the emergence of Democratic popularity by capitalizing on the continued economic struggles and political unrest to regain some of its lost prestige and score some political victories by supporting the emergence of the Tea Party.

As with the ever changing political climate, when changes that affect a particular social group take place, in order to retain prestige and respect the social group must 1) fight the change, 2) adapt to embrace the changes, or 3) fade into the background and potential irrelevance with hopes that the societal values eventually shift back to how they were. Keeping this in mind, the first step in determining if the TLW movement is a symbolic crusade is to examine the historical and social climate within which it arose. What was happening within American society, particularly concerning issues of sexual behavior, prior to the creation of TLW? Were there changing social conditions taking place that might affect the status of potential members of the TLW movement? More importantly, were there changing social conditions taking place that members of the TLW movement could perceive as affecting them and their status? The answer is

complex and a number of articles and books have been written about the changing social conditions concerning American sexuality throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but a brief examination of some of the highlights of this work yields a wide array of useful information.

Generally speaking, the broader context of the TLW movement was covered through the 1950s by Gusfield. Numerous authors have written on the various social changes that have been taking place over the last 200 years and for the purposes of this paper a simple summary will suffice. Ultimately, American society has been drastically changed by a number of historical developments such as industrialization, privatization, immigration, the growth of cities and decline of rural areas, etc.<sup>70</sup> These changes have brought with them an increased push towards openness, tolerance, and acceptance of differing views and behaviors. The ability to relax and have fun gained equal footing with diligence and hard work in terms of status and prestige. Aspects of morality that were once believed by most to be black and white gradually shifted to being viewed by many as varying shades of grey.<sup>71</sup>

One such aspect of shifting morality returns us to the focus of this paper, the changes that have taken place in the way American society views sex, particularly premarital sexual behavior. Patricia B. Koch and David L. Weis, editors of *Sexuality in America: Understanding our Sexual Values and Behavior*<sup>72</sup>, attempt to provide some insight into the causes of this shift in American sexuality. Koch and Weis compile

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<sup>70</sup> *Sexuality in America*

<sup>71</sup> Gusfield, Joseph R. 44-45.

<sup>72</sup> *Sexuality in America*.

information from a number of scholars of American sexuality to illustrate that processes such as those mentioned above (industrialization, privatization, the growth of cities, etc.) have led to the “sexualization of love” during the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>73</sup> The sexualization of love is described as a process in which marriage became less of an “institutional arrangement” and more of a “personal relationship” where love and happiness were intertwined with sexual attraction and pleasure.<sup>74</sup> Understanding sexual pleasure as a “critical part of happiness for married persons” eventually led people to take the next step and “question how it could be restricted only to married persons.”<sup>75</sup>

As a result of this shift, an alternative conception of sex emerged and began to compete with the previously normative perspective of sex as something to be pursued for pleasure and enjoyment (as well as for more practical reasons) within marriage. This alternative conception viewed sex “as a valid and important experience in its own right.”<sup>76</sup> These two competing conceptions have been viewed as a battle between “nineteenth-century romanticism” where the erotic has worth in the proper context of marriage, and “sexual modernism,” where the erotic has worth on its own terms and as “an innocent physical need.”<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> These “historical developments” are numerous and include much more than the few factors mentioned here. A number of books have multiple chapters on this topic for any readers interested in more background for the subject. Examples include the book listed by Koch and Weis, as well as Elizabeth Abbott’s *A History of Celibacy*, John D’Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman’s *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*, Beth Bailey’s *Sex in the Heartland* and *From Front Porch to Back Seat: Courtship in 20<sup>th</sup> Century America*,

<sup>74</sup> D’Emilio and Freedman and Seidman in *Sexuality in America* 14-15.

<sup>75</sup> *Sexuality in America*, 15.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid* 16.

<sup>77</sup> Robinson in *Sexuality in America*. 17.



In addition to these broader conceptual changes that have gradually been taking place in American society throughout the past couple of centuries, and the past century in particular, the period from the 1950s-1980s was a landmark time period in American sexual history because of the changes in sexual behaviors and attitudes that took place during that time period. The changes of the 1950s-1980s warrant a closer look because they are particularly relevant to the TLW movement.

A number of easily identifiable changes began during the 1950s-1980s including the emergence of AIDS and the tremendous increase in other sexually transmitted diseases, rising rates of teen pregnancy and premarital sexual activity, and a shifting in popular attitudes towards a greater acceptance of sexual activity outside of marriage as well as less rigid definitions of what was and was not sex. Providing statistical support for this idea that changes were taking place in American sexuality Weis explains the period from the 1950s to the 1980s was incredibly significant as Americans witnessed: “(1) a decrease in the marriage rate; (2) an increase in the divorce rate; (3) an increase in the birthrate for unmarried mothers...; (4) an increase in single-parent families; and (5) an increase in married couples without children at home.”<sup>78</sup> Weis also explains that these trends cannot be written off as an anomaly as opposed to a change in American sexuality because the trends continued into the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>79</sup> Weis summarizes that although there were broad and general changes in American sexuality that began long before the 1950s-1980s, there was a statistical jump that took place during this

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<sup>78</sup> *Sexuality in America*. 18.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*, 18-19.

time period and rather than going back down the statistics have gradually leveled off or continued to slowly increase.

A study by Gregory Donnenworth and Larry R. Peterson supports Weis' claims. Donnenworth and Peterson found that beliefs about premarital sex were substantially more permissive in the late 1980s and early 1990s than they were in early 1970s. They found that in addition to behavioral changes that began in the late 1950s attitudinal changes were also taking place. For example, from 1972 to 1991 Americans became more likely to agree that "sex before marriage is not wrong at all" (41.9% in 1991 and 21.4% in 1972) and less likely to claim that premarital sex is "always wrong" (26.6% in 1991 and 40.9% in 1972).<sup>80</sup> Donnenworth and Peterson note that these attitudinal changes are as, if not more, important than behavioral changes because they shifted increasing sexual behavior from deviance to an acceptable norm. As opposed to having to hide their desires and experiences with premarital sex and other forms of sexuality for fear of being socially outcast, it was becoming a normal part of adolescence. The prevalence of technology and media only aided in the changes of these norms as television shows, and later seemingly infinite numbers of internet resources, illustrated active teenage sexuality as perfectly normal and acceptable behavior.<sup>81</sup>

In *A History of Celibacy*, Elizabeth Abbott provides additional support for the significance of the 1950s-1980s in American sexuality. Abbott explains, from the late 1950s to the 1990s the median age of losing virginity dropped approximately 3 years

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<sup>80</sup> Donnenworth, Gregory and Larry R. Petersen 1071-1088..

<sup>81</sup> Minnick, Ann Marie. *Twelve Step Programs: A Contemporary Quest for Meaning and Spiritual Renewal*. Westport: Praeger, 1997. 3. Regnerus, Mark *Forbidden Fruit: Sex & Religion in the Lives of American Teenagers*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007. 3-5, 58-59, 212.

and was 17.4 for girls and 16.6 for boys. Further, in the 1990s nearly 20% of 13-15 year olds were not virgins, over 70% of high school seniors had participated in premarital sex; by the age of 20 43% of women would have been pregnant at least once, over 80% of teen pregnancies would be out of wedlock, and one in four teens would have an STD by the age of 21, all figures which are significantly higher than what they were before the 1960s.<sup>82</sup> Findings such as these by Abbott, as well as those by Weis and Donnenworth and Peterson all support the idea that American sexual behavior and attitudes were undergoing some significant changes leading up to the time when TLW was created.<sup>83</sup> Further, in addition to these statistical behavioral changes, a number of other significant changes took place during the 1960s and 1970s that further altered the social landscape of sexuality in America.

One of these changes is that there was a shift in public writings on sex during the late 1960s and early 1970s in which it was no longer the norm to assume a marriage relationship.<sup>84</sup> In other words, books, pamphlets, and articles about sex or providing sexual advice were no longer written based on the assumption that the information was only going to be applied within the context of marriage. Patricia Koch, author of "Sexual Knowledge and Education," explains professional literature on sex before the 1960s was typically "moralistic" and tended to view premarital sex as "deviant behavior" while "emphasizing the costs or negative consequences of adolescent sexuality." This shifted

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<sup>82</sup> Abbott, Elizabeth. *A History of Celibacy*. Cambridge: De Capo Press, 2001. 394-395.

<sup>83</sup> *True Love Waits: Essays and Criticism*. Ed. Wendy Kaminer. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1996. 10-11. DeRogatis, Amy. "What Would Jesus Do? Sexuality and Salvation in Protestant Evangelical Sex Manuals, 1950 to the Present." *The American Society of Church History*. 74:1 (March 2005). 97-137. 97-99.

<sup>84</sup> DeRogatis, Amy. 99-100.

in the 1960s and 1970s and the tone became “less-judgmental” and more accepting of premarital sexual behavior.<sup>85</sup> This shift reiterates the findings of Donnenworth and Peterson about individual attitudes towards sex and shows that conceptions of sex in America were undergoing significant changes in both the public and private sectors of society.

Another change resulted from a number of legal developments that occurred, including a few highly significant legislative changes, which seemed to support the societal trend towards greater sexual permissiveness. In 1961 states began passing adult consent laws in which it became legally sanctioned for single adults to have sex.<sup>86</sup> While these laws were largely a formality, their passing still held a symbolic effect in that they represented an explicit governmental approval of sex outside of marriage.

Then, in 1970 sex education was introduced into public schools marking a shift where “the major loci for sexuality education” as the family, community, and religious institutions was challenged by the public sector and schools.<sup>87</sup> Throughout the 1960s colleges and universities across the country reformed their curfew policies allowing for increased opportunities for sexual behavior among college students.<sup>88</sup> In addition, the 1965 U.S. Supreme Court ruling approving of citizens having a legal right to obtain birth control and the 1972 ruling legalizing abortion were viewed by many as public

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<sup>85</sup> Koch, Patricia B. 106.

<sup>86</sup> *Sexuality in America*. 16. Obviously single adults were having sex prior to this, but the recognition of State Supreme Courts that the cultural climate warranted legislation being passed permitting single adults to have sex shows that, although there was still some tension concerning appropriate sexuality, conceptions of sexuality had changed enough for the courts to justify the new legislation

<sup>87</sup> Koch, Patricia B. “Sexual Knowledge and Education” Ed. Robert T. Francoeur et al. New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1998. 70-76.

<sup>88</sup> Bailey, Beth. *Sex in the Heartland*. Harvard University Press: Cambridge, 2002.

proclamations supporting more permissive attitudes towards sex.<sup>89</sup> Although the intentions of these rulings were likely not to encourage individuals to have more sex, the rulings had both a practical and symbolic effect in reducing the physical and social consequences of having premarital sex.

One final noteworthy change was that the traditionally substantial gap in sexual participation and attitudes between males and females declined.<sup>90</sup> Prior to the 1960s and 1970s surveys of sexual behavior typically revealed that women were significantly less likely to participate in premarital sex or to have a permissive attitude about premarital sex than men. However, from the 1950s through the 1990s the percentage of women having premarital sex and expressing permissive attitudes towards premarital sex has risen more dramatically than that of men, narrowing the gap between the two genders from 25-35% to 15-20%.<sup>91</sup>

Laura Carpenter, author of “The Ambiguity of ‘Having Sex’: The Subjective Experience of Virginity Loss in the United States,” and *Virginity Lost: An Intimate Portrait of First Sexual Experiences*, summarizes all of these changes as they relate to premarital sex explaining as the 20<sup>th</sup> century has progressed, particularly after the 1920s,

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<sup>89</sup> DeRogatis, Amy. 99-100. Two additional cases worth noting because of how they were perceived by the creators of True Love Waits are the U.S. Supreme Court’s decisions in 1962 and 1963 that banned school sponsored prayer and bible reading.

<sup>90</sup> Abbott, Elizabeth. 404.

<sup>91</sup> Koch, Patricia B. 109-110. It should be noted the gap is not closed and varies from study to study, but it is true that the gap is smaller than it was before the 1960s. However, there are still different attitudes towards sex and men are still almost twice as likely as women to express permissive attitudes towards premarital sex without substantial emotional attachment or involvement to their partner. In other words, women are more likely to have premarital sex or a permissive attitude about premarital sex if it is within the context of a somewhat developed and/or committed relationship

“young men typically saw their own virginity as a neutral or negative attribute, whereas young women perceive theirs as a thing of value.”<sup>92</sup>

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, “young people became increasingly likely to lose their virginity prior to marriage, typically to their future spouses. This expanded during the 1960s when more and more youth began to engage in sexual intercourse with people they did not intend to marry.”<sup>93</sup> Also during and following the 1960s, as a result of a number of factors including the civil rights movement, the women’s rights movement, and changing perceptions of sexuality and gender roles, “women’s virginity came to take on a new frame: that of the neutral or negative attribute. In turn, gender differences in sexual experience and age at first sex began to diminish.”<sup>94</sup> She concludes saying the result of all of this combined with a number of other factors is that it “has become unusual for adolescent boys or girls to retain and respect virginity.”<sup>95</sup>

All of these changes in American sexuality, both in actual behaviors as well as in attitudes and norms, have been labeled by some scholars and popular media writers as a “sexual revolution.”<sup>96</sup> Many of these scholars and writers face criticism for making such a bold proclamation, and in the instances where they make the mistake of referring only to the 1960s and 1970s as a sexual revolution, the criticism may or may not be warranted. However, when taking into account all of the shifts in the American

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<sup>92</sup> Carpenter, Laura. “The Ambiguity of ‘Having Sex’: The Subjective Experience of Virginity Loss in the United States.” *Journal of Sex Research* 38:2 (2001): 127-139. and Carpenter, Laura *Virginity Lost: An Intimate Portrait of First Sexual Experiences*. New York: New York University Press, 2005.

<sup>93</sup> Carpenter, Laura. “The Ambiguity” 137.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid 137.

<sup>95</sup> Carpenter, Laura in Mark Regnerus. 119-120.

<sup>96</sup> Hendershot, Heather. *Shaking the World for Jesus: Media and Conservative Evangelical Culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004. 26. D’Emilio John and Estelle B. Freedman *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997. 372 McDowell, Josh. *Why True Love Waits* 25. Berthrong, John. “Love, Lust, and Sex: A Christian Perspective.” *Buddhist-Christian Studies* (24):2004. 4. *True Love Waits: Essays and Criticism*.

sexual landscape that took place in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, only the most notable and relevant of which have been discussed here, it is very difficult to disagree with those who wish to label the changes as a revolution.

Arguments concerning the legitimacy of the sexual revolution label aside, it is obvious that there have been drastic changes in American sexual behavior, attitudes, and norms leading up to the time during which the TLW movement was created. With this in mind, and with an understanding that a symbolic crusade takes place when a group feels or perceives their status or identity being challenged, we will now turn to examining what affects those changes had on those involved with TLW.

#### TAKING A STAND: THE CREATION OF THE TRUE LOVE WAITS MOVEMENT

As mentioned above, evaluating the TLW movement as a symbolic crusade requires an examination of how the creators of, and participants in, TLW perceived themselves within the broader social and historical context and climate. Why was TLW created? What were the motivations behind it and why did people involved with it think it was important? The changes in American sexuality are contrary to the ideals of TLW, but as mentioned earlier, a symbolic crusade is as much about perception as reality. Therefore, it's not enough to simply point out that those involved with TLW had reasonable motivation for starting a movement. If TLW is indeed a symbolic crusade, it is essential that those involved with TLW perceived the societal changes taking place as directly challenging their status and position within the American social landscape.

Not surprisingly, all of the previously described changes in the American sexual social landscape were very challenging to those who still held more traditional beliefs about American sexuality. In the late 1970s and early 1980s there was a wide ranging response from various secular and religious organizational voices throughout America. Perhaps the loudest of these voices were evangelical Christian leaders and media personalities who launched an attempt to initiate a response to these societal shifts.<sup>97</sup> The initial stages of the response involved the release of a number of videos, magazines, and other publications in which teens were told by adults about the horrors of “sex, drugs, and peer pressure.”<sup>98</sup> The AIDS epidemic fueled this method of scare tactics through the 1980s, but by the late 1980s and early 1990s an alternative approach emerged.

Proponents of this new approach viewed the previous efforts as authoritarian and somewhat ineffective because of an inability to connect with teens. In an attempt to better connect with teens, evangelicals initiated a new approach using “hipper” and “less conservative” language and methods. This new approach utilized encouragement, love, support, conferences, media, and material goods to communicate their messages about sexuality.<sup>99</sup> Although the shift in tone softened the approach, the message remained the same in that it adamantly opposed premarital sex as well as any alternative forms of non-marital sexual expression. The message also clearly contained

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<sup>97</sup> This was not an organized undertaking, but during this time period the number of materials dealing with sex produced by evangelicals increased dramatically. The merits of if it is accurate to describe the events of the 1960s-1970s as a sexual revolution will not be discussed here because for the purposes of this paper it only matters that the events were perceived as such, and that statistical evidence for changes in sexual behavior were present, which they were.

<sup>98</sup> Hendershot, Heather 45-47.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid 47.



the belief that American culture had shifted to oppose Conservative Christian and evangelical beliefs about sex. Josh McDowell, author of *Why True Love Waits*, explained that being sexually pure in America is incredibly difficult because teens are “surrounded by a permissive society that accepts and even glorifies casual sex...”<sup>100</sup>

It was within this context of shifting towards a more permissive American sexuality and an array of responses to that shift that TLW came onto the scene in the 1990s.<sup>101</sup> According to the TLW website, the movement originated from the belief of

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<sup>100</sup> McDowell, Josh 5.

<sup>101</sup> It is also important to note that although True Love Waits is certainly the most popular abstinence organization, a substantial number of other abstinence organizations were also created throughout the 1990s. For example, in 1993 Leslee Unruh came up with the idea for an Abstinence Clearinghouse which would compile national resources on abstinence and the organization was formed in 1997. In 1994 Abstinence the Better Choice (ABC) was formed with the mission “to teach children and teens virtues that equip them to make responsible, educated, healthy decisions regarding premarital sex...” In 1993 Gary D. Swant founded Sexual Abstinence and Family Education Inc. (SAFE) with the goal of helping “young people to remain virgins until marriage, or embrace the concept of ‘Secondary Virginity.’” Also in 1993 Marilyn Morris founded Aim for Success with the purpose of helping “students learn the wisdom of committing to be sexually abstinent until marriage” while also providing parents and teachers with resources to help in the process.

I mention the creation of these organizations at around the same time as True Love Waits for two reasons. First, it reiterates the point that there were contingents within American society that disagreed with the more permissive sexuality that had come about, seemingly over the past 30-40 years, and they perceived it necessary that they do something about it. Second, the creation of these other abstinence organizations also necessitates a brief discussion about where True Love Waits fits within these other organizations. Were True Love Waits identical in scope to the other abstinence organizations this issue would become a very large symbolic crusade paralleling the work of Gusfield with the Abstinence movement taking the place of the Temperance movement. True Love Waits would simply be a representative organization for other abstinence organizations just as the particular organizations such as the Women’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) were representative of the Temperance movement in Gusfield’s work.

However, TLW is not identical to all of the other abstinence organizations, and as such, this paper serves as a microcosm of Gusfield’s. As discussed above a micro approach is useful in that it provides a more accurate picture of the motivations of those involved and the effects of the organizations efforts. A micro approach illustrates the reality that while broad movements such as Temperance and abstinence might have shared goals, different organizations within those movements approach those goals from different perspectives and for different reasons. For example, TLW represents a somewhat unique set of ideals compared to other abstinence organizations. Granted, there will be some overlap between abstinence organizations generally and True Love Waits specifically, and discussion of some of those overlapping areas and their implications will follow later in this paper, but True Love Waits proclaims itself as, is one of the few, and is clearly the largest and most influential of abstinence organizations that focus on abstinence with an overtly Conservative evangelical Christian impetus. It is this uniqueness that necessitates studying True Love Waits independently of the other abstinence organizations, and it is

members of the Southern Baptist Convention's Sunday school board that effective "Christian sex education" was lacking in America. An article by Jerusha Olsen, coordinator of TLW for South Africa, provides additional insight explaining there were two primary incidents that inspired the creation of TLW. The first was in 1993 when the U.S. Surgeon General sent condoms to schools throughout America believing that "young people can't control themselves."<sup>102</sup> The second was in the same year when co-founder Dr. Richard Ross was approached by two high school girls in his youth group. The two girls told Dr. Ross that they were embarrassed and felt stupid being "the only two virgins in their school."<sup>103</sup>

These two events sent two crystal clear messages to the soon-to-be founders of TLW. First, they believed that the American government had given up on educating American youth about the dangers of premarital sex and fallen back on the notion that it was better to be safe than sorry. Lisa Bevill and Michael W. Smith, two prominent Christian artists who partnered with TLW, explained "Today's 'safe sex' message is pure madness...this message seems to be telling us that the experts hold no hope for our sexual abstinence. It's like society expects the worst from us so they plan for us to fail...But that's their reality, not everyone's!"<sup>104</sup> Second, they realized that they had done no better than the American government; the claims of the two high school girls were evidence of that. According to Olsen, those two events, in conjunction with the

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opposition to societal changes in sexuality being undertaken from a Conservative evangelical Christian impetus that is the backdrop for the creation of True Love Waits.

<sup>102</sup> Olsen, Jerusha. "True Love Waits: Introducing the Abstinence Revolution." *Africa Christian Action*. <http://www.christianaction.org.za/articles/TrueLoveWaits.htm> Accessed October 23, 2008. Posted 2003.

<sup>103</sup> Olsen, Jerusha.

<sup>104</sup> Bevill, Lisa and Michael W. Smith. "True Love Waits." *Campus Life*. 53:1 (Jul/Aug 1994).

broader belief that society had taken a dramatic turn for the worse since the 1950s when virginity and sexual purity were respected, led to the creation of TLW.<sup>105</sup>

Dr. Ross supports the conclusions drawn by Olsen about his experience and makes it clear that TLW creates a social space where teens “will not be alone” in their choice for sexual purity.<sup>106</sup> He explains, “you’ll be joining hands with hundreds of thousands of other teenagers around the world” who have embraced TLW as a “revolution” against the direction of sexual impurity that society has been taking.<sup>107</sup>

Dr. Jimmy Hester, the other co-founder of TLW, shares Dr. Ross’s sentiments and recalls being heartbroken when Ross came to him with the story about the two girls from his youth group. Pastor of a Nashville church, Dr. Hester’s eyes were opened and he quickly realized that the teens in his congregation live in a society where they are saturated with sex and rarely encounter people telling them it is okay to live a sexually pure lifestyle. In an effort to convey this realization to parents in his congregation he challenged them to count the number of inappropriate sexual references they saw on the way to church one Sunday. These references could be anything from music and advertisements on the radio, to billboards, to public displays of affection and women in seductive clothing. He personally participated and his count for the relatively brief ride to church was over forty.<sup>108</sup>

Initially, Dr. Hester and Dr. Ross responded by working with colleagues in preparing a Sunday School sex education curriculum in affiliation with the Southern

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<sup>105</sup> Olsen, Jerusha.

<sup>106</sup> Richard Ross in Devries, Mark. *True Love Waits*. Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1997.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Hester, Jimmy. Personal Interview November 19, 2009.

Baptist Convention. They received a tremendous response from parents and teens, and this response reinforced their beliefs that Christian sex education was needed, and also inspired the board to partner with Lifeway Christian Resources in October of 1992. The partnership with Lifeway Christian Resources aided in the brainstorming and development process and provided them with substantial resources while also expanding the scope of the project.<sup>109</sup>

Dr. Hester explains that he and Dr. Ross quickly determined it was necessary to take action, and that it was a brainstorming session in the cafeteria at Lifeway Christian Resources in Nashville, TN where they finally came up with the idea for TLW. He explains that the primary purpose of the organization would be to promote abstinence, and that one of the primary methods for doing so would be to provide teens with a social space where it was acceptable and possibly even cool or popular to be a virgin. Rather than having the two girls in Dr. Ross's youth group embarrassingly confess that they were the only two virgins in their school, they wanted to provide youth who valued sexual purity with an organization that would let them know they were not alone. Their excitement over the idea grew and spread to others and in 1993 TLW was founded as an interdenominational parachurch organization in partnership with Lifeway Christian Resources.<sup>110</sup>

A number of other articles agree with Olsen's, Dr. Ross's, and Dr. Hester's assessment concerning the motives for founding TLW, although they lack some of the

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<sup>109</sup> "True Love Waits History." Retrieved from <http://www.lifeway.com/tlw/history.asp> Accessed October 21, 2007.

<sup>110</sup> "True Love Waits History."

specific details. For example, the title of an article by Terry Mattingly, director of the Washington Journalism Center at the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities, speaks volumes about the way TLW was perceived by its proponents. The article is titled “True Love Waits vs. The Culture.”<sup>111</sup> The tone of the article is less hostile than the title, but Mattingly makes it clear that TLW was created as part of a battle between two worldviews, and that for the creators of TLW, the stakes are not only about premarital sex, but also about being accepted and respected members of society as opposed to being viewed as “strange and weird.”<sup>112</sup>

Another article in *The Christian Post* described the purpose of TLW as an organization that provides an opposite message to that of secular culture. The article states that “society is assaulted with images and messages of impurity with devastating consequences,” and TLW provides a venue for those who wish to resist this assault and restore American sexual purity and morality.<sup>113</sup> Referring to the founding of TLW, the article echoes Olsen’s ideas claiming the program was founded because of the large number of teens and parents who felt like their lifestyles and worldviews were being challenged and that they did not have a forum where their views were respected and valued.<sup>114</sup>

Participants in TLW echo these sentiments and in interviews have freely discussed feeling as though they were on the outside looking in. At a TLW conference in

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<sup>111</sup> Mattingly, Terry. “True Love Waits vs. The Culture.” *Scripps Howard News Service*. (August 6, 1997) Accessed October 23, 2008. Retrieved from [www.t matt.net/column/1997/08/06/](http://www.t matt.net/column/1997/08/06/)

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Tse, Rhona. “True Love Waits Takes the Town.” *The Christian Post*. (June 10, 2005) Accessed October 23, 2008. Retrieved from <http://www.christianpost.com/article/20050610/true-love-waits-takes-the-town.htm>

<sup>114</sup> Tse, Rhona.

Florida, one of the pledgers explained “it's tough for kids to practice moral integrity when surrounded by those on the school playground who brag about sexual experiences.”<sup>115</sup> Another teen explained TLW provided “an alternative for teens by replacing world standards with a Biblical-based lifestyle.”<sup>116</sup> Scott Dubuque, a 15 year old teen who participates in TLW explains “the guys are disgusting at school...they talk about what they do with girls sexually. I try to avoid them and ignore it. It's everywhere.”<sup>117</sup>

Michelle, a 19 year old evangelical who submitted a testimonial to TLW explains “...I sometimes feel like I am the last virgin on Earth.”<sup>118</sup> Another girl named Tasha explains “...It isn't easy these days to refuse...”<sup>119</sup> Steven Gregg, a youth minister who encouraged teens in his youth group to attend the conference in Florida explained “it's a choice to live a moral lifestyle in an immoral world.”<sup>120</sup> Reiterating the concept that the decision is clearly going against the grain, Gregg proclaims “it takes a radical teen to make this decision.”<sup>121</sup>

Dr. Hester supports this conception of the purpose for founding TLW in a number of quotes from multiple sources stating teens “need a community of people who can counter the sexual bombardment” they receive as members of American

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<sup>115</sup> Carson, Denise. “Teens Make Commitments to Abstinence in True Love Waits Ceremonies.” *Orange County Register*. (05/26/1999).

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> “True Love Waits: True Teen Stories of Sex, Forgiveness, Promises and Purity.” Ed. Jenna Jones. Created 2006. Accessed November 23, 2008. Retrieved from <http://www.gostudents.net/site/apps/nlnet/content2.aspx?c=ejINI5PNKpG&b=881933&ct=370804>

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

society.<sup>122</sup> He explains, “TLW helps foster a supportive environment” that reinforces the lifestyle and worldview of participants and allows teens to feel their beliefs are respected, reasonable, and accepted as opposed to rejected by the world around them.<sup>123</sup>

The fear and embarrassment expressed by the two girls, as well as the belief that society has changed from a time when their lifestyle and worldview was respected and accepted to a time when their lifestyle and worldview is being challenged, mocked, and viewed as “backward,” are all pieces of evidence that support the argument that TLW is indeed a symbolic crusade. Similarly to members of the Temperance movement and their perceptions about drinking representing a challenge to their status and way of life, members and leaders of TLW perceived the sexual culture of America to be a direct challenge to their identity, social prestige, status and way of life. They found themselves uncomfortable with living out their identity and sought to retake a social space where they could comfortably proclaim who they were and feel accepted and respected in that proclamation.

Now that it has been established that TLW is a symbolic crusade, in the next section of this paper the main goal will be to evaluate TLW’s symbolic crusade in an attempt to understand what TLW is really about. What is it that is at stake with TLW?

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<sup>122</sup> “Lifeway’s True Love Waits Fosters Environment for Successful Abstinence Commitment.” *Business Wire*. (March 12, 2004). Accessed October 23, 2008. Retrieved from [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m0EIN/is\\_/ai\\_114165912](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0EIN/is_/ai_114165912)

<sup>123</sup> Ibid. and Curry, Erin. “Leaders: True Love Waits ‘different’ From Other Programs.” *Baptist Press*. (March 10, 2004) Accessed October 23, 2008. Retrieved from <http://www.bpnews.net/BPnews.asp?ID=17818>

Why is sex, and not having sex in a society where most people do have sex, so important?

## **THE MULTIPLE MEANINGS AND MOTIVES OF SEX IN TLW**

Thus far, this paper has summarized and explained status politics theory and applied that theory to the TLW movement. It has been demonstrated that TLW was created, at least in part, in an attempt to protect the status of TLW participants. The creators and participants of TLW clearly perceived their beliefs and position within society as being challenged and TLW became both an enclave providing shelter from those challenges as well as an attempt to recapture respect and status by popularizing and legitimizing their beliefs. In this section of the paper I will now turn to examine why it is that TLW focused on premarital sexual behavior causing it to become the figurehead for this movement. What made it so important to TLW, what exactly did they do about it, and why?

To answer those questions, it is first necessary to find out who exactly is involved with TLW. This is important because within a symbolic crusade the issue being fought over is a symbolic representation of the larger challenges being faced by a group of people with shared ideals and beliefs.<sup>124</sup> For example, within the Temperance

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<sup>124</sup> It may seem curious to ask what type of people as opposed to the more general whom or which people, but it is because of the nature of status that this is necessary. As discussed in the first section of this paper, status is about people's beliefs and ideals within society, and as such it may transcend typical identifiers such as class and race. This is not to say the typical identifiers don't matter, but rather that within status politics they do not hold a monopoly as they would in class politics. Further, while class may be an additional unifier in that the majority of participants within status politics might be from the same class, it is not their class position that binds them, but rather the perceived challenge to their beliefs and way of life.



movement, Gusfield illustrated that Temperance was simply the vehicle through which individuals mobilized in an effort to protect their status within society. Alcohol was the symbol behind which those to whom Temperance was important (primarily individuals who were white and middle class, religiously and politically Conservative, dedicated to hard work, discipline, and the other tenets of the Protestant ethic) united, but it was more than just alcohol that was at stake.<sup>125</sup> It was the social status and beliefs of those who initiated and supported the Temperance movement that was also being defended, and they felt it necessary to do so because their status was being challenged on a number of fronts, and drinking was one of the primary acts they perceived as separating themselves from the challengers.

According to Gusfield, the act of drinking was, for members of the Temperance movement, what he called a “*contrast conception*.”<sup>126</sup> He explains “each status group operates with an image of correct behavior which it prizes and with a contrast conception in the behavior of despised groups whose status is beneath theirs.”<sup>127</sup> Within these contrasting conceptions, certain behaviors become identifiers which separate one status group from another. In the Temperance movement, it was drinking that served this role. Drinking was viewed by abstainers as morally wrong and irresponsible. They perceived those who participated in the action of drinking,

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This is a somewhat murky distinction in that people from the same class often share similar interests and this is arguably because of their class position, but to reduce their interests, beliefs, and way of life to simply the byproduct of their class is to strip individuals of their agency and overlook the reality that there are all types of people within each class. For example, within Temperance there were middle class abstainers and middle class drinkers, and although from the same class the behavior of drinking had a far greater effect on their perception of each other than did their shared class position.

<sup>125</sup> Gusfield, Joseph R. 34-35.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid 27.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid 27.

particularly drinking in excess, as morally void, irresponsible, uneducated, bad workers, who would be unsuccessful.<sup>128</sup> Abstainers believed that by successfully taking a stand against drinking they would remind society of the importance of having qualities different from those of drinkers, qualities of abstinence, moral virtue, dedication and self-control, each of which are qualities participants in the Temperance movement believed they held.<sup>129</sup> In an effort to inject some humor into his work Gusfield quips that within status politics it is not only about “keeping up with the Joneses” but also “getting away from the Smiths.”<sup>130</sup>

Where alcohol consumption served as a contrast conception for leaders and members of the Temperance movement, sex serves as a contrast conception for leaders and members of TLW. Statistical data about TLW specifically is lacking, but participants in abstinence only programs and virginity pledge programs tend to be white, moderately educated, middle-class, Protestants.<sup>131</sup> While this information is interesting and useful, by focusing on TLW rather than the entire abstinence organization we can gain a more specific understanding of the movement’s participants and their motives.

As with any grassroots organization there are different levels of commitment within TLW. Local communities are allowed and encouraged to use the TLW program and to do so in their own unique way. In short, anyone can participate in TLW, with one stipulation. The only stipulation TLW makes regarding the use of its name is that the religious aspects of the program must be maintained. The TLW name must carry with it

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<sup>128</sup> Gusfield, Joseph R. 32-34.

<sup>129</sup> This emphasis on character qualities as opposed to class or ethnicity is essential to status politics and a key component of what separates it from other forms of politics. Ibid 34-35.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid 28.

<sup>131</sup> Hendershot, Heather. 4-10.

the initial Conservative evangelical Christian vision shared by the organization's founders and early leaders. The pledge must include all of the initial components, particularly God. In other words, the most important sociological category for understanding TLWs' creators and participants is religion. This idea becomes even clearer as we turn to examine how TLW participants see themselves in contrast to those not participating.

Judging from the available material by and about TLW, its participants tend to see themselves as Christian, politically conservative, family oriented, and disciplined.<sup>132</sup> Their commitment to abstain from premarital sexual behavior is a symbol of their commitment to these larger ideals, and it unifies them while also challenging the lifestyles of those who do not abstain from sex. Their commitment to abstain from sex is part of a larger commitment to God and an attempt to fulfill God's plan for their lives.<sup>133</sup>

Although TLW does make concerted efforts to mobilize people who do not share in their worldview, it is clear from comments and literature produced by those within the movement that they are attempting to take back and preserve a social space where their views and beliefs are respected and their status is protected. They operate from the assumption that those who participate but do not share in their worldview will be encouraged to share their worldview through their participation in the program.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> "True Love Waits: A Lifeway Ministry" Accessed 3/22/09 Retrieved from <http://www.lifeway.com/tlw>  
*True Love Waits: Essays and Criticisms*. Ed. Wendy Kaminer New York: Perseus Books, 1997. 14.  
Donnenworth, Gregory and Larry R. Petersen 1071-1088. Ko, Marnie. "Promises Help." *Report Newsmagazine*. Vol 28 Issue 3 (February 2, 2001):56-57. Carson, Denise. Sider, Ronald J. 23.

<sup>133</sup> Bearman Peter S. & Bruckner Hannah 900-902.

<sup>134</sup> Hester, Jimmy.

Language from those involved with the movement often refers to a better time in the past when their social position was more established and their beliefs were the societal norm.<sup>135</sup> When asked about who the movement was created for, Dr. Hester explained that while it is meant to provide anyone who wishes to pursue abstinence with an outlet and a home for doing so, it is evangelical Christians that were the primary target and bulk of the participants in the movement.<sup>136</sup>

Returning now to why sex was so important to TLW, all of those involved with TLW may not explicitly, or even consciously, recognize the significance of sex or why it is so important to them. Additionally, those that do provide explicit or implicit reasons for their focus on sex may not express, account for, recognize, or be aware of everything that is influencing their beliefs or decisions surrounding TLW. As such, we will proceed with caution as we attempt to understand the importance of sex to TLW and its participants.

The majority of TLW publications, leaders, and participants almost always reference two types of reasons as an explanation for their participation in TLW. The first type are faith-based motivations such as the Bible or God's will that people should be sexually pure, and the second type are the practical benefits such as avoiding pregnancy or STDs. While this appears quite simple on the surface, these two types of reasons often overlap and in many cases are multi-faceted and rather complex. For example, in an interview with Dr. Hester, he made it clear he often intentionally references practical concerns in public settings to avoid secular recipients from writing off TLW, despite the

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<sup>135</sup> Hendershot, Heather 145.

<sup>136</sup> Hester, Jimmy.

fact that, according to Dr. Hester, the organization could not exist without its religious aspects, and that the organization is about more than practical concerns.<sup>137</sup>

Similarly, testimonies from teens who have taken the TLW pledge reference a variety of motives within the broad categories of spiritual and practical motives concerning their decisions to pledge.<sup>138</sup> One young woman named Megan never directly references religion during her testimony, but she places substantial weight on the influence her older sister's pledge had on her own decision to pledge sexual abstinence. She also makes it clear that her choice to remain sexually abstinent is affected by her friend who lost her virginity. Megan states that her friend was "weakened and made vulnerable through sex," but that now she is a "recycled virgin" and "finally feels as though she can be OK again."<sup>139</sup> Megan explains her friend experienced an incredible amount of guilt, sadness, depression, and emotional heartache associated with losing her virginity, and it is clear that witnessing her friend's struggles significantly impacted Megan and her continued sexual abstinence.

Another young woman named Sarah focuses on the spiritual concerns throughout her testimony. She explains that she lost her virginity and was straying spiritually until she had a pregnancy scare. She said she was terrified and didn't know what to do, but that just as she was losing hope God comforted her. She recommitted

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<sup>137</sup> It should be noted Mr. Hester specified this does not mean True Love Waits is only for Christians, but rather, that all participants in True Love Waits, regardless of religious preference, would eventually have to work through their sexual decisions with God.

<sup>138</sup> I use testimonies from participants in TLW here because they are the testimonies that were chosen by the leaders of TLW to be placed on the website. In other words, they reflect the approval and selection of testimonies that the leaders of TLW believe the general public should have access to.

<sup>139</sup> "True Love Waits Student Feedback" Accessed November 23, 2009. Retrieved from <http://www.lifeway.com/tlw/students/feedback.asp>

to God and now believes God used the scare “to make a point” to her and cause her to change her behavior.<sup>140</sup> In addition to this experience, she also referenced some other influences in her decision to pledge including “growing up in a Christian home” and her understanding of the “sinful body.”<sup>141</sup>

It is clear that for Dr. Hester, Megan, and Sarah the general categories of spiritual and practical apply, but all three of them also directly or indirectly illustrate the complexity of those categories. For Dr. Hester, the religious motives are of primary importance but providing practical reasons as an explanation for participating in TLW is, at least in some cases, an acceptable method for conveying its message. Dr. Hester also strongly believes that even when teens participate in TLW for only practical reasons they will eventually have to negotiate what he views as the spiritual aspects of the decision.<sup>142</sup> For Megan, a number of factors are present including familial influence, social networks and friends, and her concerns about her emotional health. Throughout her testimony she never directly mentions God or her religious beliefs as a motive, but her use of the phrase “sexual purity” and her willingness to submit a testimony to TLW provide a strong case for religion having a significant role in her decision to abstain from sex until marriage. For Sarah, she directly references her personal relationship with God as the primary motive for her behavior, but also references social networks that caused her to stray from those beliefs and the role of her family in shaping her religious beliefs. Further, she provides more detail concerning her religious motives by expressing her

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<sup>140</sup> “True Love Waits Student Feedback”

<sup>141</sup> Ibid

<sup>142</sup> Hester, Jimmy

perceptions of her “sinful body” and a God who is personally involved enough to utilize a pregnancy scare to alter her behavior and mindset.

The cases of Dr. Hester, Megan, and Sarah all reveal the complexity of analyzing motives for participating in TLW. Their cases also highlight the opportunity to categorize those motives in a way that does not understate the general motives of faith and practicality that are most commonly expressed and recognized by those affiliated with TLW, while also breaking down those general categories into subcategories in an effort to better understand what the broader categories represent.

#### FAITH-BASED MOTIVES

Upon first glance, it could easily appear that TLW is simply an abstinence organization for Christians who are attempting to make their choices about their sexual behavior based on their religious beliefs. Indeed, TLW acts as a medium through which individuals can choose to abstain from sex until marriage because the Bible, their church, or their personal relationship with God conveys to them that doing so is important and part of being a “good” Christian. This is illustrated by the central component of TLW, the pledge, which reads, “Believing that true love waits, I make a commitment to **God...to a lifetime of purity** including sexual abstinence from this day until the day I enter a **biblical marriage relationship.**”<sup>143</sup> The TLW program breaks that pledge down even further explaining the pledge contains commitments to five biblically

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<sup>143</sup> “Making the True Love Waits Pledge” Retrieved from <http://www.lifeway.com/tlw/> 2001-2007. Accessed October 22, 2009. Emphasis not in original

based areas of your life: God (Matthew 22:37), yourself (Matthew 22:39), family (Philippians 4:5), friends (John 15:13), and your future mate (2 Timothy 2:22). In short, Christian and biblically based beliefs are an incredibly important component of TLW.<sup>144</sup>

In academia, it seems there is often a tendency to set these faith-based motives aside in an attempt to get at the “real meaning” of a particular phenomenon. The sociological is often given priority over the personal religious experience. Factors such as class, gender, family, and community are often given precedence when analyzing reasons for behavior and, unfortunately, in some cases religion takes a back seat because it is viewed as ignorant, threatening, overbearing, controlling, or in some other negative sense.<sup>145</sup> Shying away from the faith-based motives is understandable given the difficulty of attaining an objective or unbiased perspective on personal religious experience. This is also understandable given the fact that all of the previously mentioned factors do affect an individual’s behavior.

However, this preference for the typical sociological categories overlooks what for some people is the primary driving force in their lives and the decisions they make. For many people religion serves as the first lens through which they understand their physical and social realities, and more traditional sociological identifiers play a secondary role. From all of the TLW publications, my interview with Dr. Hester, and my resulting correspondence through Dr. Hester with Dr. Ross, and one of the youth leaders of TLW, Dr. Alex Cort, it was obvious that practical reasons were important, but nothing

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<sup>144</sup> “Making the True Love Waits Pledge”

<sup>145</sup> Collins, Kenneth J. *The Evangelical Moment: The Promise of An American Religion*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005. 12. Mills, C. Wright “The Professional Ideology of Social Pathologists” *The American Journal of Sociology*. 49:2 (September 1943): 165-180.



was more important than the religious aspects and dimensions of TLW. Further, the vast majority of media publications about TLW all place an emphasis on the religious aspects of TLW. As such, it is necessary to address how a personal relationship with God might serve as a source of significant influence in, or motive for, an individual's involvement with TLW.

The ways in which an evangelical or Conservative Christian faith can alter an individual's understanding of behaviors and beliefs have been recognized by a number of people studying Conservative Christians. Monique El-Faizy, author of *God and Country: How Evangelicals Have Become America's New Mainstream*, explains, "people consider their lives through the prism of their faith and speak about the role of God in their lives in the same concrete terms others use to talk about the weather"<sup>146</sup> She goes on to state, "For those of us who are not believers it is almost impossible to grasp how essential an evangelical's spiritual existence is in his or her life. God is a living, tangible, and daily presence."<sup>147</sup> Kevin J. Vanhoozer, author of "Evangelicalism and the Church: The Company of the Gospel", explains "evangelicals locate their identity in the gospel story concerning what God was doing in Jesus Christ." He states that for evangelicals the story of Christ as loving savior and teacher enjoys "epistemic and existential primacy, serving as the norm for knowledge and ethics alike."<sup>148</sup> Craig Bartholomew, author of "A Christian World-View and the Futures of Evangelicalism" explains "there is

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<sup>146</sup> El-Faizy, Monique. *God and Country: How Evangelicals Have Become America's New Mainstream*. New York: Bloomsbury USA, 2006. 7.

<sup>147</sup> El-Faizy, Monique 7.

<sup>148</sup> Vanhoozer, Kevin J. "Evangelicalism and the Church: The Company of the Gospel." *The Futures of Evangelicalism: Issues and Prospects*. Ed. Craig Bartholomew, Robin Parry, and Andrew West. Grand Rapids: Inter-Varsity Press, 2003. 51.

thus much at stake in evangelicals appropriating a biblical, Christian world-view...First, *nothing less than God's glory in his creation is at stake!*...Second...*the well-being of creation is at stake.* Creation flourishes as it fulfills its God-given intentions."<sup>149</sup>

Perhaps the best explanation for how the evangelical belief system informs the way an evangelical lives comes from Kenneth D. Wald and Allison Calhoun-Brown, authors of *Religion and Politics in the United States* and Sally K. Gallagher, author of *Evangelical Identity and Gendered Family Life*. Wald and Brown explain that "culture performs three primary functions: (1) it offers identity, (2) it prescribes norms, and (3) it defines boundaries for relationships." For Wald and Brown, the evangelical or Conservative Christian faith is a particularly potent communicator of culture because it "adds both a transcendent and immanent supernatural dimension to identity, norms and boundaries," and it does so through an intimate and personal relationship with a figure which is viewed as the savior of humanity. The statistically high religiosity of evangelicals means that this belief system is consistently reinforced through additional outside exposure to the same beliefs standards which are shared by the church community and social networks of evangelicals. Evangelicals beliefs are then the primary informers of their culture infusing the two in such a way that "people come to understand right and wrong not only because of a standard shared by the community,

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<sup>149</sup> Bartholomew, Craig. "A Christian World-View and the Futures of Evangelicalism." *The Futures of Evangelicalism: Issues and Prospects*. Ed. Craigh Bartholomew, Robin Parry, and Andrew West. Grand Rapids: Inter-Varsity Press, 2003. 200-202.

but because that which is 'Most High' has revealed its necessity." Wald and Brown conclude by asking "What better rationale can there be than God says so?"<sup>150</sup>

In *Evangelical Identity and Gendered Family Life*, Sally K. Gallagher echoes this sentiment while providing a useful stipulation to Wald and Brown's claim. She explains that in attempting to explain why they believe what they believe for evangelicals "it is not simply a struggle to put into words something that is taken very much for granted. In addition to bringing to the foreground beliefs that generally are just assumed, evangelicals reaching into their ideological tool box find multiple sets of symbols, texts, and rules." Evangelicals do not live in a vacuum, and they have a complicated task of living "in but not of the world." Their cultural tool box is thus filled with a wide array of faith-based beliefs and ideals, but it is also filled with beliefs and ideals from the world in which they live. This process is muddled because the fundamentals of the evangelical belief system are about "relationship rather than rules."<sup>151</sup> In short, although evangelical beliefs are the primary cultural informers for evangelicals, they are not the only cultural informers, and it is not always as simple as the static process of, to paraphrase Wald and Brown's claim, "God says so." Society changes, social needs change, and in some instances, what God says to evangelicals also changes. That being said, Wald and Brown and Gallagher all seem to agree that what God does say, or what evangelicals and Conservative Christians believe God says, matters a great deal, in most cases, more than anything else.

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<sup>150</sup> Wald, Kenneth D. and Allison Calhoun-Brown. *Religion and Politics in the United States*. 5<sup>th</sup> ed. New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 2007. 112.

<sup>151</sup> Gallagher, Sally K. *Evangelical Identity and Gendered Family Life*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2003. 78.

Returning now to the issue of religious motives and TLW, as illustrated above, TLW is not bashful about the centrality of evangelical and Conservative Christian beliefs to its message. Dr. Hester has emphasized that the organization does not consider pledges that remove the religious phrasing as TLW pledges.<sup>152</sup> TLW also advises teens to rely on the presence of God in their lives when tempted to break their pledges. TLW explains, “The Spirit is our power. He gives us self-control. Make it a point to be filled with the Spirit every day so you can stay true to your pledge.”<sup>153</sup>

Unfortunately and also as illustrated above, determining if and how pledgers actually understand and act out these faith-based motives in their lives is no easy task. By examining testimonials from pledgers, advice from leaders, and other publications produced by or about TLW, a better understanding of the religious component of TLW can be achieved.<sup>154</sup> There are a number of reasons for choosing abstinence referenced by those affiliated with TLW. However, most of the reasons listed fall within two basic categories. These two categories are perceptions of the body and perceptions of the fruitfulness or quality of an individual’s relationship with God. Other factors will be addressed, particularly in the practical motives section to follow, but the ways in which a personal relationship with God are perceived, and in turn influence how those

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<sup>152</sup> Mr. Hester is not naïve and realizes many pledgers are likely to make the pledge and cognitively remove the religious phrasing, but for churches or groups wishing to hold True Love Waits rallies, they want the pledge cards to be used with the original phrasing.

<sup>153</sup> “True Love Waits Students Section” 2001-2007 Accessed October 21, 2009. Retrieved from <http://www.lifeway.com/tlw/students/>

<sup>154</sup> It should also be noted that the validity of whether or not an individual can be filled with the Holy Spirit or have a personal relationship with God is not the focus of this section. Regardless of whether or not someone perceives it to be valid, it is clear that there are people who believe they are filled with the Holy Spirit and have a personal relationship with God, and that belief undeniably has an affect on their perceptions and behaviors.

involved with TLW think and act, must carry substantial weight in any examination of motives and TLW.

### Sex and a Relationship with God

Beginning with perceptions of the fruitfulness or quality of an individual's relationship with God, the vast majority of publications produced by TLW, and interviews with organizational leaders of TLW, referenced God's will for their life or their relationship with God as one of the primary reasons for their focus on sexual purity and abstinence from premarital sexual behavior. Dr. Hester recognizes this motive and he explains that, quite simply, sex before marriage is not "God's plan for your life." He explains that God designed sex to be a beautiful thing in the proper context, but that context is not before marriage. Before marriage is a period where God is working on individuals and their relationship with Him, and having sex before marriage is "not the way God designed it." He claims as leaders of TLW "We believe that one expression of their [unwed individuals, particularly teens] relationship with God is their behavior based on how they view themselves as sexual beings created by God and how they live according to His plan for creating them."<sup>155</sup> Dr. Hester also explains "sexual purity is a total commitment of sexual needs, desires, thoughts and actions to God." He cites 1 Thessalonians 4:3, which in his translation reads, ""God wants you to be holy, so you

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<sup>155</sup> Hester, Jimmy.

should keep clear of all sexual sin.”<sup>156</sup> He concludes that during life our number one priority should be to honor God and have a good relationship with him. Sexual acts outside of marriage are a huge barrier to this because of the intimacy of sexual acts and everything that they can involve.<sup>157</sup>

Similarly to Dr. Hester, Dr. Cort, youth minister at the church in Nashville where TLW was first implemented and created, explains that sexual activity before marriage is “apart from God’s plan.” He also explains that it “separates them from an intimate relationship with their Heavenly Father.” According to Dr. Cort, premarital sexual behavior is not “the kind of love God wants a man and woman to share.” It separates them from God and His plan for their lives and also causes a number of emotional and possibly physical problems.<sup>158</sup> A vivid description of this separation and the problems that an individual who participates in premarital sex can face is found in Josh McDowell’s *Why True Love Waits*. Recapping a discussion he had with an individual who had premarital sex, McDowell allows the individual to speak for himself stating “Premarital sex gave me fear as a gift...and shame to wear as a garment... My desire for church activities was ground to a pulp. It made crumbs of the trust I had known in Christ...”<sup>159</sup>

Rebecca St. James, a Christian music artist and spokesperson for TLW explains that people who are being sexually impure or having premarital sex are “not living the Christian life and are not committed to God’s way.” She recognizes that God has a plan

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<sup>156</sup> Hester, Jimmy. “First Person: Sexual Purity is the Standard.” *Baptist Press News*. Accessed January 11, 2009. Posted April 26, 2005. Retrieved from <http://www.bpnews.net/bpnews.asp?ID=20679>

<sup>157</sup> Hester, Jimmy.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> McDowell, Josh 18.

for sexuality and that God has a plan for young people's lives, but when young people don't follow that plan, they often feel separated from God and are in danger of not fulfilling the potential God has for their lives.<sup>160</sup>

In conjunction with the testimony of the teen above, McDowell shares the sentiments of Dr. Hester, Dr. Cort, and St. James, explaining that

"Christian youth...are aware that the Bible places clear limitations on sexual activity, but they consider these limitations merely old-fashioned, overly strict rules for a different time and a different culture...We must help our youth understand the reason surrounding God's rules. Behind every negative commandment in the Bible there are two loving motivations. One is to protect us, and the other is to provide for us."<sup>161</sup>

He goes on to clarify this further stating

"A Christian young person...who gets involved in sex before marriage—even once—has violated God's principles and commandments. How damaging that is to any disciple of Jesus Christ. The young person who remains in that state cannot witness effectively and cannot experience God's blessing. Christians who engage in premarital sex pay a high price in lost fruitfulness for the kingdom of God...Promiscuity taxes a young person's total being—body, mind, soul, and spirit."<sup>162</sup>

McDowell concludes by summarizing that quite simply, there is "a spiritual price tag for promiscuity."<sup>163</sup>

From the above testimonies and descriptions it is obvious that those involved with TLW put a strong emphasis on an individual's relationship with God as a motive for, and benefit of, participating in TLW. Understanding why this is the case is difficult for those who do not share the same worldview and religious perspectives of those involved with TLW, but, by transitioning to perceptions of the body and its significance

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<sup>160</sup> Roach, Erin. "At Song's Anniversary, Rebecca St. James revisits 'Wait for Me.'" *Baptist Press News*. Accessed April 19, 2009. Posted April 5, 2006. Retrieved from <http://www.bpnews.net/bpnews.asp?ID=22984>

<sup>161</sup> McDowell, Josh 7.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid, 56-57.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid, 56.

within the Christian belief system, the significance of sexual purity to those involved with TLW becomes easier to understand.

## SEX, THE BODY, AND GOD

Perceptions of the body and sexuality as incredibly significant are not unique to TLW. As Colleen McDannell, author of *Material Christianity* explains, “to shy away from discussing the role of the body...is to neglect the primary mediator of religious experience. Human beings seemingly cannot appropriate religious truths or be ‘grasped by an ultimate concern’ without involving their bodies.”<sup>164</sup> A vast amount of literature, thanks in part to the theology of the body lectures by Pope John Paul II from 1979-1984, exists to offer insights and interpretations to the significance of the body and sexuality within religious belief systems. Perceptions of the body and sexuality within this literature are quite varied and complex, even when limited to literature within the Christian belief system. In some instances the perceptions are quite extreme with authors going as far as to refer to God’s word as his sperm and to refer to STDs as sexually transmitted demons.<sup>165</sup> Despite the extreme variations, the most common perceptions center around the body and sexuality being something that carries the potential to be both something that is incredibly sacred, beautiful, and pure, as well as something that is profane, dirty, and sinful. This dual potential and ambiguity leads TLW

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<sup>164</sup> McDannell, Colleen. *Material Christianity*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995. 14.

<sup>165</sup> DeRogatis, Amy. “What Would Jesus Do? Sexuality and Salvation in Protestant Evangelical Sex Manuals, 1950s to the Present.” *Church History* March 2005.74 97-137.



participants and creators to reference the human body in a variety of seemingly contradictory ways such as “the sinful body” and “the body of Christ.”

The responsive reading created by TLW for pledge ceremonies is an excellent example of the importance of the body within TLW. The body is referenced three times in the short script. This may not seem like much, but considering God is referenced four times and Christ is referenced three times, it becomes clear that the body is an important aspect of TLW. Towards the beginning of the pledge the script requires the pledger to state “I commit my body as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto Christ, which is an act of worship.” Everyone else in the ceremony then replies “We also commit our bodies to Christ.” Then, to conclude the script everyone must say “We as the body of Christ commit to God’s foolproof plan…”<sup>166</sup>

Additionally, both of the recommended songs for the ceremony (We are an Offering and Prepare Me to be a Sanctuary) are songs referencing the desired presence of God within an individual’s body.<sup>167</sup> Although the language and references concerning the body may seem strange and contradictory, an examination of what is meant by the language and references reduces their strangeness and helps us understand what is at stake.

Those involved with TLW hold an understanding of the human body as something more than flesh and bone. They conceive of the body and sexuality as potentially divine, and as symbolically or metaphorically representing God. As one

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<sup>166</sup> “Sample Order of Worship for True Love Waits.” *True Love Waits: A Lifeway Ministry* Accessed 3/22/09 Retrieved from [http://www.lifeway.com/tlw/downloads/pdf\\_CommitmentService.pdf](http://www.lifeway.com/tlw/downloads/pdf_CommitmentService.pdf)

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

individual involved with TLW proclaimed in an interview “My body is a Temple for GOD and I will Not Defile It!”<sup>168</sup>

Those involved with TLW conceive of the Spirit of God living within the body, and they also express an understanding that the body has both the capacity to create and the capacity to destroy. With such contrasting capabilities, the body is infused with a tremendous amount of power. For those involved with TLW, this power is recognized in the Bible which “points to the divine mystery of sexuality in Genesis by teaching that the creation of male and female and their union for procreation are part of God’s created order...the Bible teaches that the two sexes are part of the ‘image of God’ intended for reproduction and dominion over the earth.”<sup>169</sup>

In other words, the body and sexuality have the potential to be a bridge connecting humanity to God and allowing humanity to participate in God’s natural order, to be intimate with God and representative of God while also being intimate with one’s spouse as God intended. They understand that, “sexuality was designed by God to be the ultimate experience of intimacy.”<sup>170</sup> John Berez, author of “Is There Such a Thing as ‘Christian’ Sex?”, explains

“In God’s Edenic environment, sexual contact was the occasion for intimacy not only with one’s opposite sexed soulmate, but with one’s Creator. Becoming “one flesh” with your soulmate simultaneously provided the occasion for becoming a cocreator with the eternal I AM. In the best of all worlds, Adam and Eve experienced uninterrupted naked intimacy with one another (even when not mating).When engaging in sexual intercourse—the pinnacle of their intimacy experiences—they “upped the ante,” by moving into the domain of divinity: creatorship. By coupling sexually, they exercised their potential to become cocreators of the human race, contributing microscopic, but

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<sup>168</sup> Abbott, Elizabeth. 398-399.

<sup>169</sup> Kraynak, Robert P. *Christian Faith and Modern Democracy: God and Politics in the Fallen World*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001. 213.

<sup>170</sup> Berez, John M. “Is There Such a Thing as ‘Christian’ Sex?” *Pastoral Psychology* 50:3 (2002): 139-146.

magnificent, bits of DNA to the process of cocreating progeny who would be similar to themselves, but never exact replicas.”<sup>171</sup>

These notions of intimacy and bodily and sexual power are reiterated throughout the Bible for those involved with TLW, and they commonly reference these body based scriptures to describe and justify the importance of the body and sexuality. Perhaps the most common and direct example is 1 Corinthians 6:18-20 which states “Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.”<sup>172</sup> In other words, TLW is even more important because premarital sexual behavior is a sin against the body, the very temple of the Holy Spirit. As one TLW church publication explains, “the reason the Bible pays close attention to sexual sin is that sex affects people like no other sin does...Most sins involve mainly your actions, but premarital sex involves your heart, mind and body as well. That kind of internal damage is very hard to get beyond.”<sup>173</sup> Choosing abstinence is choosing to “honor God with your body” and choosing to protect the dwelling of the Holy Spirit. Choosing abstinence is “to show that

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<sup>171</sup> Berecz, John M. 142.

<sup>172</sup> White, Chris. “Group Suggestions for Introduction to True Love Waits.” *Lifeway Christian Resources*. Nashville, TN: Lifeway Press, 2004.

<sup>173</sup> “5 Big Lies About Sex.” *Kingsway Church TLW Handout*. Accessed 4/23/09 Retrieved from <http://www.kingswaychurch.org/assets/files/Student/7th%20and%208th%20Grade/02.08.09.Application%20Handout.pdf>

your body is not only his creation but also belongs to him.”<sup>174</sup> It is recognizing that “you cannot ‘choose’ whether or not to have sex...because it is *not your body*.”<sup>175</sup>

A number of other biblical scriptures and metaphors referencing ideas such as the church as the body of Christ, Christ as the bridegroom of the church, the two becoming one flesh, and God’s intimate knowledge of every human body only further the significance of the body for those involved with TLW. These scriptures repeatedly illustrate the importance of the body and allow the body and sexuality to easily be interpreted as a medium through which humanity can be intimately connected and in tune with its creator.<sup>176</sup> The body and sexuality are “a mystery, an earthly picture of that heavenly intimacy and communion the persons of the Trinity share from eternity”<sup>177</sup>

On the other hand, the body and sexuality also has the potential to create a vast chasm between God and humanity. Returning to Berecz’s reference to God’s Edenic environment, he only presents the ideal situation. Tim Stafford, a write for *Christianity Today* and vocal supporter of TLW explains the picture of Adam and Even in Genesis, particularly Genesis 2:23-25, is “the ideal, the dream, as the Bible sees it: total nakedness, total unity, total love, total sexual satisfaction within marriage.”<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> Hendershot, Heather. 103.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid, 103.

<sup>176</sup> “What is so Great About Making a Pledge to Sexual Abstinence.” Accessed January 22, 2009. Retrieved from <http://www.lifeway.com/tlw/students/> (examples of scriptures include Matthew 19:6, 1 Corinthians 15:33, 1 Corinthians 10:13, Romans 12:1, Philippians 3:18-21, Matthew 25:1-10 etc.)

<sup>177</sup> Minnery, Tom and Glen T. Stanton. “Family Integrity.” *Toward an Evangelical Public Policy: Political Strategies for the Health of the Nation*. Ed. Ronald J. Sider and Dianne Knippers. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005.

<sup>178</sup> Stafford, Tim. “Why True Love Waits.” *Christianity Today*. 1997. Accessed 2/25/09 Retrieved from <http://www.christianitytoday.com/iyf/hottopics/sexabstinence/7c2038.html>

Unfortunately for those involved with TLW, the ideal did not last very long, and Adam and Eve did something to the body that God told them not to, and, as a result, they were separated from God. They went from “uninterrupted naked intimacy” to attempting to cover their bodies and hide from God. They went from bearing no shame with their bodies to bearing incredible shame with their bodies because they made a choice that separated them from God.<sup>179</sup> The result of this separation was the duality and ambiguity of the body in which it could be sacred *and* profane. The separation created perceptions of the body in which “especially in its sexual dimensions, often evokes anxieties about morality, loss of control, contamination, uncleanness, personal inadequacy, and a host of other fears.”<sup>180</sup>

Fortunately for those involved with TLW (and everyone else from their perspective), they believe that the death and resurrection of Jesus allowed for the possibility of a renewed intimacy with God. However, that possibility is dependent upon the choices that individuals make concerning their body and their relationship with God. This freedom of choice is what allows for the duality and ambiguity within understandings of the body, and it is also part of what creates the necessity for TLW. This is especially true considering the perception that in today’s society people are being bombarded socially with messages encouraging them to engage in sexual behavior freely, thus making choices that will separate them from God and his intentions for the body and sexuality.

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<sup>179</sup> Stafford, Tim. “5 Big Lies About Sex” Edwards, Ted. “Sex, Lies and the True-True Love Waits.” *West-Ark Church of Christ website*. Accessed 4/23/09 Retrieved from <http://www.westarkchurchofchrist.org/index.html>

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

The transition to choice also points to another important component involving motives and TLW. Choice is not only important concerning the body, but it is important to the faith of those involved with TLW. Everyone has the choice to believe or not to believe, and to act accordingly or not act accordingly. As such, individuals who choose abstinence and participate in TLW are perceived as individuals who have discipline and are faithful Christians. They openly express a commitment which those involved with TLW view as “counter-culture” and that commitment is not only a commitment to TLW, but more importantly, it is a commitment to God. It is a commitment to live by God’s standards, and participating in that commitment is a statement of faith identity as well as sexual identity. For TLW, it is choosing to be a responsible, faithful Christian, and choosing to do so on what those involved with TLW view as a very important battleground, the battleground of the body and sex, the battleground of the vessel which connects humanity to God. Josh McDowell sums up the significance of this choice explaining

“Sex is, in Paul's image, a joining of your body to someone else's. In baptism, you have become Christ's body, and it is Christ's body that must give you permission to join his body to another body. In the Christian grammar, we have no right to sex. The place where the church confers that privilege on you is the wedding; weddings grant us license to have sex with one person. Chastity, in other words, is a fact of gospel life. In the New Testament, sex beyond the boundaries of marriage--the boundaries of communally granted sanction of sex--is simply off limits. To have sex outside those bounds is to commit an offense against the body. Abstinence before marriage, and fidelity within marriage; any other kind of sex is embodied apostasy.”<sup>181</sup>

Stating the significance of this choice and the body and sexuality in another way, for those involved with TLW, abstinence from pre-marital sexual behavior is so important because the body and sex are symbols. They are symbols of things that are

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<sup>181</sup> Winner, Lauren F. 123.

incredibly important to those involved with TLW. They are symbols of individual self-control and discipline, the quality of an individual's relationship with God, God incarnate, the Holy Spirit, the community of the church, and of God's plan for humanity.

The power of symbols have long been recognized, and "when symbols [such as the body and sexuality] touch or imply the ultimate, they may be experienced as an eruption of the sacred...Symbols relate to the sacred dimension of society itself...symbols bear the power to bring a symbolic world, a universe of meaning, into existence." This divine power is illustrated by the connection made by those involved with TLW between sexual purity and the quality of one's relationship with God. The sexual behavior of an individual, what he or she chooses to do with their body, created in the image of God and inhabited by the Spirit of God, becomes representative of their commitment and closeness to God, as well as of the presence of God in the world. For TLW, sex and virginity and the body have become symbols indicative of how close an individual is to God. Sexual purity is perceived as a significant marker of an individual's commitment to, and relationship with, God.

The problem for those involved with TLW is that these symbols do not exist in a vacuum. The religious aspect of the symbols of the body and sexuality are being undermined as they become more "of the world", as opposed to "in it".<sup>182</sup> The

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<sup>182</sup> Gallagher, Sally K. 78.

sacredness of the symbols meets resistance as they are encountered by “forces that cripple the power of symbols...disconnecting a symbol from the sacred.”<sup>183</sup>

Those involved with TLW live in a world where the potential power and sacredness of the body and sexuality is consistently undermined by a public attitude that over the past fifty years has grown more and more tolerant and accepting of sexual behavior detached from its spiritual implications. They live in a world where “religious systems are not closed, but interact with the cultural climate in which they exist. The symbolic boundaries demarcating the sacred and the profane, the moral and the political, are subject to constant renegotiation in which symbols supplied both by religious tradition and by events in the larger culture play a role.”<sup>184</sup> As a result, TLW has taken on the responsibility of attempting to protect the symbol of the body and sexuality, and in doing so to protect the beliefs, way of life, and spiritual identity of those involved with TLW. However, the protection of these symbols and the preservation of the body and sexuality as a means for intimacy and relationship with God are not the only reasons those involved with TLW consider sex so important.

Despite the significance of faith and a personal relationship with God to the creators of TLW, practical motives also play a significant role in TLW. In some cases, the practical motives might be viewed as a less controversial way of opening the door to the more religious aspects of the program, but this should not diminish the significance of

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<sup>183</sup> Heinz, Donald. “The Struggle to Define America.” *The New Christian Right: Mobilization and Legitimation*. Ed. Robert C. Liebman and Robert Wuthnow. New York: Aldine Publishing Company, 1983. 143.

<sup>184</sup> Wuthnow, Robert. “The Political Rebirth of American Evangelicals.” New York: Aldine Transaction, 1983. *The New Christian Right: Mobilization and Legitimation*. Ed. Robert Wuthnow and Robert Liebman 183-184.



those practical motives. The practical aspects of TLW might also be seen as TLW proponents attempt to be what J. Budziszewski, author of *Evangelicals in the Public Square: Four Formative Voices on Political Thought and Action*, describes as bilingual in their faith.

Budziszewski explains that evangelicals are being irresponsible and somewhat foolish when they speak about things from a strictly faith-based perspective because it excludes individuals who are not coming from a faith-based perspective. He claims evangelicals have an obligation to be “bilingual when in dialogue with non-Christians” and be prepared to “offer a reasonable defense of their positions” because they play an important “role as interpreters of culture.”<sup>185</sup> These practical motives vary in their significance, and they often have religious undertones related to those mentioned above, but from STDs to public policy there are a wide array of practical motives that will be discussed in the next section.

## PRACTICAL MOTIVES

Practical motives are an important component in determining why sex, and people not having it before marriage, is so important to those involved with TLW. In many cases these practical motives might also have religious undertones, but they are listed here because they are not strictly based on religious beliefs. There are a variety of motives falling into the category of practical. These motives range from pregnancy and

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<sup>185</sup> Budziszewski, J. *Evangelicals in the Public Square: Four Formative Voices on Political Thought and Action*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academics, 2006. 12.

STDs to the preservation of “traditional families.” Many of these practical motives are shared by the majority of abstinence organizations, but they are somewhat unique with TLW in that the reasoning behind them often returns to the aforementioned significance of religious beliefs.

## PREGNANCY AND STDS

Beginning with STDs and pregnancy, these are two of the most commonly cited reasons for abstaining from sexual behavior until marriage found throughout TLW publications. For example, in an attempt to show that waiting is not a punitive measure from God or a strictly spiritual matter, but rather a protective and loving measure from God with practical benefits, Josh McDowell explains by biblically demanding abstinence outside of marriage, “God is protecting us from STDs, [and] pregnancy”<sup>186</sup> A section of the TLW website titled “What is so Great About Making a Pledge to Sexual Abstinence” echoes these sentiments citing the following benefits of making and keeping the TLW pledge; “You are 100% guaranteed that you won't get pregnant. It's a sure thing that you will stay STD-free!”<sup>187</sup> Another article titled “Sex is Awesome (Unless You Are...)”, lists a number of reasons that would prevent sex from being awesome. The first two reasons on the list are pregnancy and STDs.<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> McDowell, Josh 208-244.

<sup>187</sup> “What is so Great About Making a Pledge to Sexual Abstinence.”

<sup>188</sup> “Sex is Awesome (Unless You Are...)” Accessed 4/23/09 Retrieved from <http://www.lovematters.com/awesome.htm>

Prominent spokespeople for TLW also proclaim avoiding STDs and pregnancy as reasons for participating in and supporting TLW. Lisa Bevill and Michael W. Smith, two Contemporary Christian music artists who were selected to be on an album created for and by TLW, wrote an article titled "True Love Waits" and claimed "In a moment of love, in the heat of passion, sex happens. So does pregnancy. And AIDS. And a number of other diseases...Sometimes irreversible consequences."<sup>189</sup> Another TLW spokesperson wrote a poem for TLW about the dangers of premarital sex. The poem is titled "The Party's Over" and in its most pointed verses reads:

"It was back at Franklin High School  
Where he first laid eyes on her  
A sassy little senior, Jeannie gave his heart a stir  
Johnny wanted Jeannie more than any girl he had before...  
The party's over  
It was fun while it lasted,  
But it ain't fun no more...  
Jeannie called up Johnny, she said, 'Hey, I've got bad news'  
Johnny said, 'Don't worry, baby, I'll take care of you'...  
He used to say I love you till their marriage fell apart  
Now he says, 'Hey, Jeannie, baby, give me back my heart'  
Jeannie's holding Junior and she says, 'Johnny, thanks a lot'  
Now Johnny's got his freedom and Jeannie's got a kid  
And Jeannie's always dreamin' 'bout the things she never did"<sup>190</sup>

It is obvious at this point that those involved with TLW recognize pregnancy and STDs as significant reasons for not having premarital sex. Although these two reasons are not surprising and are shared by virtually every abstinence organization, their importance to those involved with TLW should not be understated. Those involved with TLW realize the dangers of STDs, and they are aware of the statistics estimating 25%-33% of men and women have one. They understand the potential devastation out of

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<sup>189</sup> Bevill, Lisa and Michael W. Smith.

<sup>190</sup> Marks, Kenny. "The Party's Over." *Campus Life* Ed. Michael W. Smith and Lisa Bevill (July/Aug 1994).

wedlock, particularly teenage, pregnancy can have, and they are aware that over the past fifty years the number of out of wedlock teenage pregnancies has increased substantially. They recognize that STDs and pregnancy can drastically change a person's life.

## PSYCHOLOGICAL AND EMOTIONAL HEALTH

After pregnancy and STDs, the psychological and emotional health of teens is the most commonly cited practical motive for the existence of TLW. Similarly to pregnancy and STDs, this is a common reason cited by many abstinence groups. There are few people who would contend the claim that sex has the possibility to be psychologically and emotionally dangerous for young people. The significance of this motive is heavily connected to the aforementioned understanding of sex as something that was designed to be incredibly intimate. Dr. Cort explained,

“Teenagers who have premarital sex suffer from a number of anxieties in life that they are not prepared for. Students who just have sex and no additional complications still have to cope with this intimate act...In 99.9% of these sexual encounters they are not committed to the person they are sexually active with. This lack of commitment creates feelings of anxiety, insecurity and confusion which inadvertently effects their social, family, spiritual and academic lives. Students who are raised in church especially carry an enormous amount of guilt with them once they decide to be involved in a sexual relationship.”<sup>191</sup>

One of the TLW handouts supports Dr. Cort's conclusions explaining “many people experience deep remorse after having sex before marriage. There is often the feeling of being used...There's also guilt.” The handout goes on to say “People are not

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<sup>191</sup> Cort, Alex. Personal Interview. February 9, 2009.

things. Uncommitted sex treats them as if they are. It hurts them, and wrecks their self-respect – as well as your own. If you treat others as sex objects and you exploit them for pleasure, you’ll corrupt your character and degrade your own sexuality...”<sup>192</sup>

In addition to remorse and guilt, the handout and other TLW sources warn of the consequence of a broken heart. They believe the intimacy of sex makes it impossible to have truly casual sex without any emotional and spiritual attachments. The handout explains, “When sexual relationships end, there’s often a broken heart.

A testimony from Josh McDowell’s *Why True Love Waits* paints a vivid picture of the emotional and psychological consequences of premarital sex:

“If only I had waited. I see now how uncluttered my life would have been, how my mind would have been free from this burden that besets me even years later. If you want to know what it is really like, get two pieces of paper and glue part of one to the other. After it has dried, pull them apart. What you have in your hands is a vivid picture of two people after a premarital sexual relationship—both torn, both leaving part of themselves with the other.”<sup>193</sup>

McDowell expounds on these consequences later from a more positive perspective explaining that God’s commandments about sexual purity and waiting to have sex are meant to protect people, not to be overbearing rules. He explains, “God is protecting us from guilt, performance based sex, misleading feelings about sex and love, addiction to sex, the hardships of breaking up, poor self-image, and providing us with emotional wholeness in future marriage with maturity and genuine love, self-respect, dignity...”<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> Cort, Alex.

<sup>193</sup> McDowell, Josh 23.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid, 248-268.

Lastly, TLW publications explain “sex...can lead to deep depression, hopelessness, and even suicide.”<sup>195</sup> They claim that these emotional and psychological responses are often perceived to be the result of breaking up, but that in reality, they are the result of a number of factors stemming from premarital sex. For example, in addition to the consequences of breaking up, “the consequences of losing your virginity, getting AIDS, getting a VD, conceiving a baby outside of marriage...hurting your reputation, ruining someone else’s reputation, and disappointing those who trusted you can all lead to depression, and worse...”<sup>196</sup>

TLW publications cite studies such as one by family counselor Clayton Barbeau to support their claims about the potential psychological and emotional results of premarital sex. In Barbeau’s study he attempts to determine what factors might be present in suicidal teens. In the study he found that in almost every case, sexual issues were a major cause of the suicidal teens “anxiety, despair and self-hatred...”<sup>197</sup>

As with pregnancy and STDs, the potential negative psychological and emotional effects for those having premarital sex are not something that is heavily debated. The reality of these practical dangers is cited by numerous abstinence organizations such as the abstinence clearinghouse and the National Abstinence Education Association as well as more unbiased organizations such as the Center for Disease Control and American Public Health Association.<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> “Sex is Awesome (Unless You Are...)”

<sup>196</sup> Cort, Alex.

<sup>197</sup> Barbeau in “Sex is Awesome (Unless You Are...)”

<sup>198</sup> National Abstinence Education Association Retrieved from <http://www.abstinenceassociation.org/research/index.html> Accessed 3/22/2009 , Abstinence Clearinghouse

## FAMILY

The practical concern of TLW that is perhaps most unique to TLW is family.<sup>199</sup> Concerns about family, more specifically, the “traditional family” and “traditional family values” are somewhat present, though not always directly, in TLW publications and interviews with those involved with TLW. This should not be surprising as this has been a primary concern of evangelicals and Conservative Christians (which the founders and organizers of TLW are) over the past several decades. Sally K. Gallagher deals with this concern throughout her previously mentioned work on Evangelical Identity, Gender, and Family life. Gallagher explains that in large part, families are incredibly significant symbols representing the broader social climate. She states that “persistent and voluminous debate suggest that families, and what we think about them, are a barometer for our worries about larger issues. Because concern about family values is really concern about social values, debating and defending the family becomes a way to both critique and defend our culture as a whole.”<sup>200</sup>

With Gallagher’s understanding in mind, the question becomes how TLW and premarital sexual behavior relate to families and gender. The answer is relatively

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Retrieved from <http://www.abstinence.net/media/> Accessed 4/13/2009, Retrieved from <http://www.familyfirstaid.org/sexually-active-teens.html> Accessed 4/25/2009

<sup>199</sup> As an extension of this, it could be argued that gender and maintaining gender roles is another practical motive of TLW, but from the interviews and TLW publications it would be a stretch to claim that maintaining gender roles is an actual motive of TLW. Some people have made these claims, the most notable being Heather Hendershot in *Shaking the World for Jesus*, but from the materials I found it appears that TLW operates from an understanding of gender which is Biblically based and motivated, but that gender is not an actual motive or focus of TLW. In other words, they operate from assumptions that women and men are different, and have different understandings and experiences of sex, abstinence, and purity, but the conveying of those gender assumptions does not appear to be part of the TLW platform. The ideas about gender are present, but only as a byproduct of the beliefs of those involved, not as a goal.

<sup>200</sup> Gallagher, Sally K. 3.

simple, but it must begin with the stipulation that for those involved with TLW, the word family has a particular meaning. For those involved with TLW, there are “traditional families” espousing “traditional family values” and there are “broken” and “non-traditional” families espousing the values that TLW believes are wrong and/or sinful.<sup>201</sup> Traditional families are composed of a husband and wife who are Christians and who attempt to instill their faith into their children.<sup>202</sup> The husband is the leader of the home (as Gallagher points out in belief more often than in practice), but he has a loving and respectful relationship with his wife that allows them to co-facilitate the running of their home. In a very real sense, traditional families are a symbol which should model the relationship between God, as parent, and the body of followers or believers, as children.

Operating from this understanding of families, part of why TLW was created was because premarital sex among teens has been escalating and this escalation is perceived as one of the most significant threats to the traditional family. Along with the increases in sex, there have been increases in pregnancy outside of marriage, abortions, divorce, and a variety of other factors all of which are perceived to break down the traditional family.<sup>203</sup> As Dr. Hester explained to me in our interview, one of the original motives for TLW was that parents needed a way to talk to their kids about sex from a Christian perspective. They believed kids were making sexual choices that were leading to their being broken not only as families, but also as individuals and, most importantly, as Christians. Further, the problem would be exponential in that the choices kids were

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<sup>201</sup> Shelley, Bruce and Marshall Shelley. *Consumer Church: Can Evangelicals Win the World Without Losing Their Souls?* Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1992. 129

<sup>202</sup> What it means to be Christian varies, but for the sake of this paper in this context the term will be left as broad and vague applicable to anyone self-identifying as Christian.

<sup>203</sup> Shelley, Bruce and Marshall Shelley. 129



making were not only affecting their current family, but they would also inevitably have an effect on their future families (some of which were not so far in the future in cases where teens became pregnant).<sup>204</sup>

Stepping back from this more narrow understanding of familial significance and returning to the broader symbolic value of families as referenced by Gallagher, preserving the traditional family is also important to TLW because it once again provides evidence for the type of person you are. Using Gallagher's analogy of the barometer, the success of TLW, and the resulting successful preservation of traditional families (or the preservation of the idea that traditional families are better than non-traditional families), represents a success for TLW in ensuring the way of life and beliefs of those involved are preserved. The success of TLW and preservation of traditional families means individuals are making the correct spiritual choices. Returning to the aforementioned importance of individual choice and self-control, the practical benefit of preserving traditional families is potentially perceived as directly correlated to individual's relationships, and the quality of those relationships, with God. It is about maintaining the individual boundaries necessary to "enhance family structure and promote...intimacy."<sup>205</sup> Dr. Cort reiterated this notion in our interview explaining that TLW is not just an individual commitment. TLW and its pledge are about selfless and sacrificial love as modeled by God and described in 1 Corinthians 13. They are a commitment not only to yourself, but a commitment to God, to family, and to one's

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<sup>204</sup> Hester, Jimmy

<sup>205</sup> Berecz, John M. 143.

future mate and future children. They are a commitment to “be sexually abstinent until they enter a **Biblical** marriage relationship.”<sup>206</sup>

Once again, premarital sexual behavior and concerns surrounding it are about more than just the act of sex itself. In addition to everything else, TLW and abstaining from sexual behavior is about the maintenance of the traditional family structure. It is about the preservation of the traditional family in a society whose actions those involved with TLW believe is breaking down the concept of a traditional family, and worse yet, breaking down the values of faith, discipline, and strict morality that they see as a huge part of their identity. Put another way, “When sex is properly orderly in marriage, it strengthens family life. That, in turn, strengthens the life of the church and society. Bringing sex into proper order involves individual self-control, mastery over desires. From a Christian standpoint, this is a positive ideal.”<sup>207</sup>

The leadership of TLW and many of those involved with the organization understand the practical dangers of premarital sexuality not only from a practical public health perspective, but also from a religious perspective. Those involved with TLW are fully aware that a number of organizations preach abstinence, safe sex and birth control as solutions for the problems of pregnancy and STDs. As Dr. Hester said in our interview, “we’re not the only game in town.”<sup>208</sup> However, Dr. Hester explained it is the religious dynamic and the positive message that really sets TLW apart from other leading abstinence organizations.

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<sup>206</sup> Cort, Alex.

<sup>207</sup> Clark, Stephen B. “Sexual Purity: Beyond Legalism, A Pastoral Strategy for Parents, Teachers, and Pastoral Leaders.” *Faith and Renewal*. 1989.

<sup>208</sup> Hester, Jimmy.

As this section has shown, sex was significant to TLW for a variety of reasons. Creating TLW with its focus on sex had its deepest roots in the spiritual significance of sex to those involved with TLW.<sup>209</sup> That being said, spiritual motives were not the only motives at play. In part because of the spiritual significance of sex, but also in part because of the social significance of sex and the effects sex has on other aspects of society, TLW attempts to use sex to achieve a variety of goals. For TLW, sex acts as a symbol that is representative of so much more than the act itself. It represents a relationship with God, maintaining the proper understanding of the body, psychological, emotional, and physical health and well-being, and preserving God's plan for the family. From the perspective of those involved with TLW, "although using contraceptives and policing your partner's sexual activity is a laudable attempt at stopping the spread of a disease, one very important element missing from the safe sex solution is values."<sup>210</sup> These religious values of self-control, discipline, and making responsible and wise choices are an essential piece of the puzzle of why TLW exists, and why it targets sex.

Those involved with TLW have stated they believe America is saturated with sex, and sex has the potential to have some incredibly devastating consequences. In choosing to engage in premarital sexual behavior, an individual is choosing to risk the plans God has for his or her life by risking pregnancy or STDs and their psychological and emotional health. In choosing to have premarital sex an individual is also choosing to risk their relationship with God and all of the intimacy and beauty they believe that

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<sup>209</sup> This public health aspect is very significant, and TLW has even expanded to Africa in an effort to help combat AIDS, but just as in the U.S., the religious component is non-negotiable, it must be present.

<sup>210</sup> Corpus, Lelani. "Virginity in Vogue." *The Forerunner*. (1997). Retrieved from [http://www.forerunner.com/forerunner/X0865\\_Virginity\\_in\\_Vogue.html](http://www.forerunner.com/forerunner/X0865_Virginity_in_Vogue.html)

relationship can entail. In choosing to defend virginity and abstention from premarital sexual behavior TLW is choosing to defend all of these aspects of identity that they perceive society at large to be challenging. TLW is defending the powerful symbols associated with sex, and, in doing so, TLW is defending what it understands to be the way God intended for life in America, and the world, to look like. Put more simply, “sex is a symbolic boundary...demarcating the good from the deviant.”<sup>211</sup> In the next and final section of this paper I will analyze the efforts of TLW in an attempt to determine if it was a success or failure. I will provide insight into if and how TLW has influenced the understanding of, and attitudes towards, sex and abstinence in America.

### **DOES TRUE LOVE WAIT, AND DOES IT REALLY MATTER?**

Thus far in this paper TLW, status politics and symbolic crusades have been introduced. The notion of a symbolic crusade has been separated from that of status politics and then shown to be a lens through which it is valid to view TLW. The motives of those involved with TLW have been examined in an effort to better understand why it is that sex matters so much. In this final section, I will examine if the efforts of TLW have been a success or failure, particularly when viewed from the perspective of a symbolic crusade, and offer some final thoughts and conclusions about TLW and its future.

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<sup>211</sup> Regnerus, Mark 158-159.

Determining if the efforts of TLW have been a success or failure is a process that takes place on two levels; practice and perception. Regarding practice, the statistical results of individuals abstaining from premarital sex must be examined to see if TLW has caused significantly less people to participate in premarital sexual behavior. In other words, has TLW changed people's sexual practices concerning premarital sexual behavior and abstinence. Regarding perception, as demonstrated by the literature on status politics and symbolic crusades, the political and social effects of the movement must be examined to determine if TLW has changed or influenced societal perceptions of those involved with the movement and the ideas of virginity and abstaining from premarital sexual behavior. In other words, has TLW changed people's perceptions of sex, specifically how those who choose to abstain from sexual behavior until marriage and express their beliefs about that choice, are perceived.

## PRACTICE

With regards to practice, the success or failure of TLW hinges on statistics and studies about people's sexual behavior. Unfortunately, studies and statistics about people's sexual behavior vary significantly in their findings and the results are interpreted in different lights by different audiences. As Laura Beil, a writer for Newsweek who spent a year studying abstinence education through a media fellowship explains "Conservatives seem to want to brand all comprehensive sex education, which includes detailed discussions of contraception, as a conspiracy to encourage teen sex.

Liberals just want abstinence education to go away. Both sides profess to care deeply about the country's youth, and I believe them. Sadly, each side seems to operate in its own universe, while our children live in only one."<sup>212</sup>

Beil's claim is important to consider because researchers are susceptible to the same influences and beliefs that Beil describes. Those conducting studies supporting and condemning virginity pledges and sexual abstinence, even when striving for objectivity, inevitably operate from an internal bias. This leads studies about premarital sex, virginity, abstinence, and virginity pledge programs to have varying conclusions and be interpreted differently by different people. The most comprehensive (in size) study on virginity pledgers, "Promising the Future: Virginity Pledges and First Intercourse," recognized this potential ambiguity and authors Peter Bearman and Hannah Bruckner discuss that the different findings about pledging provide fuel for both critics and proponents of TLW.<sup>213</sup> As one researcher of virginity pledges responding to Bearman and Bruckner's article explained "some studies show a positive effect for virginity pledges or abstinence programs and some data do not."<sup>214</sup>

This ambiguity about the success of TLW and other virginity pledges also stems from a multitude of factors outside of personal bias including the difficulty of uniformly defining sex and abstinence, the difficulty in ascertaining how much of an influence pledges have versus other factors such as family history, race, class, geographic location, etc., and the reality that the pledges may influence more than simply whether or not an

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<sup>212</sup> Beil, Laura. "Just Saying No to Abstinence Ed." *Newsweek*. (October 18, 2008): Retrieved from <http://www.newsweek.com/id/164525>

<sup>213</sup> Ibid and Ko, Marnie. "Promises Help." *Report Newsmagazine*. 28:3 (02/05/2001): 56-57.

<sup>214</sup> Mebane, Felicia E. et al 584.

individual chooses to have premarital sex. Unfortunately, the first two issues have yet to be adequately addressed with any consensus by the community of researchers studying adolescent sexuality.<sup>215</sup> In contrast, the issue of other influences abstinence pledges may or may not have has been studied by a number of researchers. Granted, whether or not the pledges keep people from participating in premarital sexual behavior has been of primary importance in studies (and will be discussed shortly), but the pledges' additional effects have also been studied and lend support to arguments both for and against virginity pledging.

Studies about virginity pledgers found that those participating in virginity pledges were less likely to use prophylactics than the general population and that virginity pledgers waited, on average, between 12 and 18 months longer than the general population to participate in premarital sex the first time. A study performed by researchers at Northern Kentucky University also found that, of virginity pledgers who refrained from premarital sex, 55% participated in premarital oral sex but did not consider it sex.<sup>216</sup> Bearman and Bruckman support this in their study claiming virginity pledgers are more likely to engage in alternative sexual behaviors such as oral and anal sex.<sup>217</sup> However, another study by Harvard public health professor Janet Rosenbaum counter this notion while also claiming that pledgers are very likely to deny having taken the pledge as they get older, and that personal informal pledges are more effective than

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<sup>215</sup> The issue of where the pledge ranks in comparison to other social factors will probably never be resolved with any consensus because of the complexity involved. As more peer-reviewed research becomes available

<sup>216</sup> Winner, Lauren F.

<sup>217</sup> Uecker, Jeremy E., Angotti, Nicole, and Regnerus, Mark D. "Going most of the Way: 'Technical Virginity' among American adolescents." *Social Science Research*. 37 (2008): 1200-1215.

formal organizational pledges.<sup>218</sup> Additionally, the Bearman and Bruckner study found that the pledges are only effective when less than approximately 30% of individuals in a particular social group (for Bearman and Bruckner that social group was the different high schools where they conducted research) pledge. Lastly, studies have found that TLW and virginity pledgers had nonmarital sex less often and with fewer partners than non-pledgers.<sup>219</sup>

All of these additional effects influence the way the study results are interpreted, and thus the way the studies are presented to the public. Groups supporting the pledge movement emphasize the delay in first intercourse and claim the delay is actually incredibly significant. They explain that the difference between a 15 year old and a 16 or 16 ½ year old having sex for the first time is substantial because of differences in emotional stability and maturity. They claim pledgers who abstain from or delay sex will be psychologically and emotionally healthier. Supporters also emphasize that pledgers participate in non-marital sex less and with fewer partners than non-pledgers, thus reducing their potential encounters with STDs, pregnancy, or other potential consequences of non-marital sex.<sup>220</sup>

On the other hand, critics of TLW and virginity pledges cite the lower use of prophylactics to illustrate the failings of TLW, virginity pledges, and abstinence only education. They claim pledgers will be more likely to face pregnancy or STDs because of their lack of knowledge or unwillingness to use prophylactics if they do participate in

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<sup>218</sup> Rosenbaum, Janet. "Patient teenagers? A comparison of the sexual behavior of virginity pledgers and matched nonpledgers." *Journal of Pediatrics* 123 (2009).

<sup>219</sup> Bearman, Peter S. and Hannah Bruckner.

<sup>220</sup> This is despite the fact that studies have found no statistically significant difference in STD or pregnancy rates among pledgers and non-pledgers.



sexual behavior. They also cite the 30% ceiling found by Bearman and Bruckner as evidence that virginity programs and abstinence only education are destined to fail. As Bearman and Bruckner explain in their study, both critics and proponents of TLW and virginity pledging can “find solace” in the “contextualizing” of TLW and virginity pledging’s effectiveness.<sup>221</sup>

Despite these different interpretations of findings, it is becoming more and more difficult to challenge the claim that those participating in pledge movements still participate in premarital sex, and that they do so at rates somewhat similar to those of the general population. While there is variation in studies about the general population, most studies place the percentage of the general population that participates in premarital sex between 60%-85%.<sup>222</sup> Studies about TLW pledgers are far fewer, but the largest study by Bearman and Bruckner places the rate at approximately 62%.<sup>223</sup> In addition, the 2001 study by Northern Kentucky University supports these findings placing the rate of virginity pledgers in general participating in premarital sex at 61%.<sup>224</sup>

If you take the high end of the studies about the general population and the low end of the studies about pledgers, individuals who pledge are 24% less likely to have premarital sex than those who do not. If 24% is accurate, then it is certainly statistically

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<sup>221</sup> Bearman Peter S. and Hannah Bruckner 862.

<sup>222</sup> The substantial variation between the two percentages illustrates the difficulty of accurately measuring sexual behavior, particularly as people define sex differently and approach their studies from different perspectives which might lead them to word questions in leading ways.

<sup>223</sup> Bearman, Peter S. and Hannah Bruckner. 62% is an average rate, Bearman and Bruckner categorize pledgers as consistent and inconsistent, and consistent pledgers rate is 56% while inconsistent pledgers rate is 68%.

<sup>224</sup> Lipsitz, Angela. Et al. “Virginity Pledges: Who Takes Them and How Well Do They Work?” *Presentation at the Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association*. (May 2003).

significant, and it could be viewed as a substantial success by TLW and other abstinence organizations.

Unfortunately for TLW, the statistical significance is clouded by the reality that 24% appears to be the best case scenario and an average of 12%-14% would be a more plausible statistic to report. Additionally, one could argue that at least a portion of the abstaining pledgers would likely be due more to other factors such as family or social environment rather than the pledge itself. It is also reasonable to conclude that an additional portion of abstaining pledgers have participated in other sexual activities such as oral sex while maintaining their “technical virginity.”<sup>225</sup>

Technical virginity is a concept that was created to identify the notion that 85%-90% of the unmarried general population has participated in some form of sexual activity, even when vaginal sex has yet to take place.<sup>226</sup> This is significant considering TLW is clearly opposed to any form of technical virginity as it directly contradicts the TLW mission of sexual purity. The TLW commitment card pledges a “lifetime of sexual purity including sexual abstinence.” This “sexual purity” is further described as “saying no to sexual intercourse, oral sex, and even sexual touching.” In other words, with technical virgins being in breach of the commitment card, then the largest possible percentage of 24% becomes even less plausible and it becomes clear that although TLW

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<sup>225</sup> Uecker, Jeremy E., Angotti, Nicole, and Regnerus, Mark D. “Going most of the Way: ‘Technical Virginity’ among American adolescents.” *Social Science Research*. 37 (2008): 1200-1215.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid*, 1200-1201.

may be having an effect, the majority of teens who take the TLW pledge are still participating in premarital sexual behavior.<sup>227</sup>

In conclusion, if the primary goal of TLW is to encourage sexual purity and prevent unmarried individuals from participating in premarital sexual behavior, then it would appear the movement has certainly made a difference and/or achieved small goals, but failed to make widespread changes. However, if the primary goal of TLW is understood as a symbolic battle over status and acceptance in which the goal is to alter the social landscape to preserve the status and significance of those choosing sexual purity and abstinence from sex until marriage, then we must look elsewhere to determine its success or failure.

## PERCEPTION

Perception and the symbolic aspect of the TLW movement can be understood through examining the political and social effects of TLW. In short, the goal is to determine if TLW managed to preserve the status of its participants and its ideals concerning premarital sexual behavior. Success on a symbolic level is difficult to measure because cause and effect cannot be isolated. The battle is not over something that can be easily measured like behavior, but rather on perceptions of ideas. Further complicating matters, TLW does not exist in a vacuum and it can be difficult to

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<sup>227</sup> The possibility that TLW delays first sexual encounters should not be overlooked or viewed as insignificant, particularly as new research shows how much teens' minds are developing during that time period, but despite this positive effect the broader goal of preventing premarital sexual behavior still seems to be generally disappointing.

determine the effects of TLW as opposed to the effects of other organizations fighting to achieve similar goals.

This ambiguity about the symbolic is the very thing mentioned above which allows personal biases to influence findings from studies about the practical effects of TLW and other abstinence organizations. However, by examining the available material and letting the evidence speak for itself some of this ambiguity can be overcome and it becomes possible to draw some conclusions about the success or failure of the symbolic aspects of TLW. In this study, the evidence is found by evaluating news media, popular press, and legal and political battles following the emergence of TLW to discern if and how TLW influenced and shaped public attitudes towards premarital sexual behavior, and, perhaps more importantly, public attitudes towards those involved with TLW. In doing so, it is possible to attain a reasonable understanding of the general symbolic success or failure of TLW.

Perhaps the most conclusive evidence of the symbolic influence of TLW is an article by Felicia E. Mebane et al titled "Sex Education and the News: Lessons from How Journalists Framed Virginity Pledges."<sup>228</sup> The article was written to evaluate the power that journalists have in shaping public opinion and policy. The example the authors chose to evaluate was the way journalists covered two topics: virginity pledges from 1987-2001 and a public health study of teen sexual behavior taking place from 1997-2001. The study is unique in that it provides insight to the symbolic influence of TLW without TLW being the initial target of the study. TLW only became an emphasis of the

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<sup>228</sup> Mebane, Felicia E. et al 583-606.

study once the authors found it was by far the most mentioned virginity pledge program in the media. They found that from 1987-2001 (a time period during which TLW did not exist for the first six years) 68% of references to virginity pledges in the media were referencing TLW, and in turn, made TLW the unofficial representative for virginity pledge abstinence organizations. This illustrates that once TLW began it created quite the media storm placing itself in the center of media discussions and presentations about virginity and abstinence. This is particularly significant when considering “news outlets are an important source of policy information because they reach large audiences, and news messages can influence how the general public and other political actors view policies on issues such as sex education.”<sup>229</sup>

In analyzing journalists presentations of teen sexuality the study utilized the idea of journalistic frames through which the journalists present the story in varying lights. The authors created 5 categories of journalistic frames and named them: 1) “abstinence is ‘in’” 2) “social movement” 3) “faulty education” 4) “lack of trust in teens” 5) “faulty pledges.” The names speak for themselves to a degree, but to clarify, articles placed in the first frame presented virginity pledges and/or the add health study in a manner that supported abstinence and virginity pledge movements and considered abstinence and virginity as growing in popularity and as a healthy and intelligent decision for teens to make. The second frame presented virginity pledges and/or the add health study as evidence for abstinence as a significant and growing social movement within the US that is or could change society and its attitudes towards sex. The third frame presented

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<sup>229</sup> Mebane, Felicia E. et al 585.

virginity pledges and/or the add health study as evidence supporting the idea that abstinence and virginity rather than comprehensive sex education should be taught and that to teach comprehensive sex education is to encourage kids to have sex. The fourth frame presented virginity pledges and/or the add health study as evidence that adults have given up on teens falsely assuming teens will have sex and that teens should be taught abstinence and trusted to be responsible. The fifth and final frame presented virginity pledges and/or the add health study as evidence that abstinence programs ignore the facts and fail to properly educate children and that scientific evidence shows comprehensive sex education is a wiser and more responsible choice.

The study placed the articles in whichever frame(s) were appropriate. Of all of the articles, the study found that 52% fell within the social movement frame, 32% fell within the lack of trust in teens frame, 25% fell within the abstinence is in frame, 12% fell within the faulty education frame, and 22% fell within the faulty pledges frame. Only 12 of the articles were written about the add health study, and of those 12, 10 fell within the faulty pledges frame and 8 fell within the social movement frame. Further, of the articles about add health that were within the faulty pledges frame, the majority of them actually presented virginity pledges in a positive light in the most notable portions of the text (headlines, bold print, etc. eg “Virginity pledge helps teens wait”) and saved the criticisms and information questioning the success of virginity pledge movements for later in the body of the article.<sup>230</sup>

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<sup>230</sup> Mebane, Felicia E. et al. 596-597.

In addition to the overwhelmingly positive presentation of abstinence and virginity in the media study by Febane et al., government policy, spending and Congressional sessions also serve as evidence supporting the conclusion that TLW had a very real symbolic impact in influencing social and political attitudes towards virginity and abstinence. Federal financial support for abstinence began in 1981 with the Adolescent Family Life Act. However, it wasn't until 1996, three years after TLW burst onto the scene, that spending on abstinence, particularly abstinence only education, began growing at an incredibly fast rate. The passage of the Welfare Reform Act in 1996 dedicated \$50 million annually to Title V abstinence-education grants. The wording of the legislation stipulated the money must be spent on programs supporting "abstinence from sexual activity outside marriage as the expected standard for all school-age children." In 2000, following the election of George W. Bush, federal support for abstinence-education was furthered with the creation of Community Based Abstinence Education grants which extended federal funding beyond states (Title V funding was for states) to faith-based organizations and community groups.

Both of these programs prohibited "disseminating information on contraceptive services, sexual orientation, gender identity, and other aspects of human sexuality." Further, they established the following 8 point definition of abstinence education for any states seeking the federal funds:

"abstinence education is defined as an educational or motivational program that:

- (A) has as its exclusive purpose, teaching the social, psychological, and health gains to be realized by abstaining from sexual activity;
- (B) teaches abstinence from sexual activity outside marriage as the expected standard for all schoolage children;
- (C) teaches that abstinence from sexual activity is the only certain way to avoid out-of-wedlock pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases,

and other associated health problems;  
(D) teaches that a mutually faithful monogamous relationship in the context of marriage is the expected standard of human sexual activity;  
(E) teaches that sexual activity outside of the context of marriage is likely to have harmful psychological and physical effects;  
(F) teaches that bearing children out-of-wedlock is likely to have harmful consequences for the child, the child's parents, and society;  
(G) teaches young people how to reject sexual advances and how alcohol and drug use increases vulnerability to sexual advances; and  
(H) teaches the importance of attaining self-sufficiency before engaging in sexual activity."<sup>231</sup>

From 2001 to 2007 funding for abstinence education programs based on this definition of abstinence education increased from \$80 million to just over \$200 million annually, and since 1997 approximately \$1.5 billion in federal money has been spent on abstinence education.<sup>232</sup> In 2007, the definition of abstinence education was further clarified by the federal administration for Children and Families with grantees "must not promote contraception and/or condom use," must not "promote or encourage the use of any type of contraceptives outside of marriage or refer to abstinence as a form of contraception," and must teach that "contraception may fail to prevent teen pregnancy and that sexually active teens using contraception may become pregnant."<sup>233</sup> Santelli points out that the language used in the federal definitions is strikingly similar to the language used by the countries' most prominent abstinence program directors.<sup>234</sup>

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<sup>231</sup> Section 510 of Title V definition of abstinence education reproduced on page 841 of Santelli, John S. "Abstinence-Only Education: Politics, Science, and Ethics." *Social Research* 73:3 (Fall 2006). 835-858.

<sup>232</sup> Kliff, Sarah. "The Future of Abstinence: The Evolution of Birth Control" *Newsweek* (October 27, 2009).

<sup>233</sup> Ohl, Joan E. "ACF Grant Opportunities" *US Department of Health and Human Services: Administration for Children and Families*. Posted March 1, 2007. Accessed November 21, 2009. <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/grants/open/HHS-2007-ACF-ACYF-AE-0099.html>

<sup>234</sup> Santelli, John S. 842. And Santelli, John S. et al "Abstinence-Only Education: A Review of U.S. Policies and Programs." *Journal of Adolescent Health* 38 (2006): 72-81. Obviously Santelli is referring to more than TLW, but TLW is one of the nation's largest abstinence organizations and the positions of the U.S. government on abstinence following the emergence and tremendous popularity of TLW definitely echo the positions of TLW on abstinence. For example, the TLW website explains that abstinence is the only way to 100% guarantee against pregnancy or sexually transmitted diseases, the website lauds the



The landscape of public attitudes and perceptions towards abstinence did not only change at the federal level, but also at the state and local level as different states chose to accept federal funding and change their sex education curricula. For example, in 1988 two percent of secondary school teachers taught abstinence as the only way to prevent pregnancy and STDs. By 1999, that number had grown to 23 percent. Further, by 1999 25 percent of sex education teachers said they were prohibited from even teaching about contraception.<sup>235</sup>

Supporting these results, a study of public school districts conducted by David J. Landry et al. found that in 1999 of the 70 percent of public school districts that had a specific sex education policy, 35 percent taught abstinence only education, 51 percent taught abstinence first or emphasized abstinence while also mentioning or teaching other sex education methods such as contraception, and 14 percent have a comprehensive approach teaching abstinence as one of several options.<sup>236</sup> In addition, nearly 85 percent of schools developed their policy in the mid to late 1990s (after the emergence and success of TLW and other abstinence programs).<sup>237</sup> Further, “Data from the School Health Policies and Programs Study in 2000 found that 92% of middle and junior high schools and 96% of high schools taught abstinence as the best way to avoid pregnancy, HIV, and STDs. Only 21% of junior high and 55% of high school teachers

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emotional and psychological benefits of abstinence, and it states that abstinence is God’s expectation for people and thus should also be societies’ expectation of people and that a mutually faithful monogamous relationship is God’s standard for relationships. All of these points are echoed in the U.S. government’s position on abstinence, but were mainstays of the TLW mission long before the creation of the federal standards for abstinence education.

<sup>235</sup> Santelli, John S. 851.

<sup>236</sup> Landry, David J. et al “Abstinence Promotion and the Provision of Information about Contraception in Public School District Sexuality Education Policies.” *Family Planning Perspectives*. 31:6 (1999) 280-286.

<sup>237</sup> Landry, David J. et al. 284.

taught the correct use of condoms.”<sup>238</sup> Landry et al’s article points out that despite increasing evidence showing abstinence only education is no more effective than other sex education methods U.S. policymakers “at the federal and state levels” continue to promote educational efforts that “focus narrowly or exclusively on abstinence promotion.”<sup>239</sup>

John Santelli, a researcher on adolescent health issues for the CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) for 13 years, argues that not only did the government support abstinence education and programs like TLW despite a lack of evidence supporting their effectiveness, but also that federal, state, and local governments have actively censored research that opposed abstinence only education. He explains that in February of 2006 he was set to present at a panel at the National STD Prevention Conference with 3 others who were all opposed to abstinence only education. A Congressman from Indiana voiced his opposition to the balance of the panel and two of the four members were replaced with panelists who supported abstinence only education.

The statement released explaining the situation stated “those who organized the panel had an anti-abstinence agenda and it was the CDC’s responsibility to reach out to those with other views.”<sup>240</sup> In agreement with Mebane et al’s claims about the framing of issues, Santelli explains that those who support abstinence have positioned

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<sup>238</sup> Santelli John S. et al 77.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid 280.

<sup>240</sup> Santelli, John S. 835-858.

themselves very well in and through the media and politics and are thus able to play a very large role in shaping the public conceptions of the issue.<sup>241</sup>

While a direct correlation cannot be made between TLW and federal and local governmental support for abstinence only education, the timing of the two events should not be overlooked or deemed as mere coincidence either. Much of the political shift towards abstinence preferred and abstinence only education took place following the emergence of TLW. Further, Mebane et al's article shows that the public debate was fueled by very positive media representations of abstinence and virginity which often focused on TLW and its tremendous success and very public displays. At the very least, this positive media in conjunction with the growth and success of TLW would have had some influence in the federal decision to support abstinence only education. Further, the similar language between TLW (language that is also used by other abstinence promoting organizations and groups) about abstinence, and federal qualifications for funding for abstinence only education, makes the connection between the two even harder to ignore.

In other words, while it can't be said that TLW caused the changes in federal policy, it can certainly be said that TLW's efforts to redefine public attitudes towards sex and virginity, and it's successes in doing so, would have inevitably influenced policymakers in their decisions concerning policies dealing with sexuality and sex education. Further, from the perspective of symbolic crusade theory as long as those involved with TLW were able to believe their efforts were having a positive effect

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<sup>241</sup> Santelli, John S. 838-839.

towards shifting the media's and government's stances towards them then the question of if, or to what degree, TLW was actually responsible for the shift is somewhat irrelevant. With that in mind, a quick highlight of some of the more public and symbolic efforts of TLW illustrates just how directly they do believe their actions effect the perceptions of those around them.

Although it is always referenced secondarily to the importance of individual teens and the importance of their pledge and their spiritual life, it is clear that influencing public perceptions of the people, ideas, and beliefs associated with TLW is important. In an effort to achieve this goal, TLW has not been bashful in its public actions and displays. Dr. Ross was most explicit in his description of this aspect of TLW explaining that while most importantly, the public displays and efforts of TLW "have convinced teenagers who embrace purity that they are not alone," the public displays and efforts have also made "an impression on decision makers. Leaders in government, education, health care...From local school boards to Congress in Washington, knowing students will consider the abstinence message builds momentum..."<sup>242</sup>

Dr. Cort put forth a similar sentiment in his interview explaining "that the public displays of any caliber...are necessary in order to let the world and the church know that there are teenagers out there taking a stand for truth and for purity." He claims that the world is "sex saturated" and that teens are encouraged to "do whatever they feel like doing" rather than "God's plan." He asks, "Why shouldn't the world know that not every student is willing to 'buy the lie.'"

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<sup>242</sup> Ross, Richard Personal Interview February 13, 2009.

The TLW website also places a premium on public displays and perception with a substantial portion of its history section dedicated to events concerning how the public perceives TLW. Out of 48 events listed in the history section covering the period from 1987 (when the Christian sex education project that would become TLW began) through the present, 25 of the events are focused on public displays and perceptions of TLW. These events include several “seize the net” days in which teens across the country signed the TLW pledge via the internet, the ever-increasing number of media contacts held by TLW (growing from 0 to 400 by October of 1994 and 600 by September of 1996), the launch of “TLW takes the town” in February of 2005 (a focused emphasis of TLW to “encourage cities and towns to take a unified, community-wide approach to promoting sexual abstinence until marriage by involving schools, government, businesses, churches, health organizations, and others”), attending the National Leadership Summit on Abstinence sponsored by the Medical Institute for Sexual Health to help continue the growth of the abstinence movement in 1997, the presentation of TLW reports to U.S. Senators and Representatives, the Surgeon General, and governors and other state leaders in 1998, the issuing of a Statement for the Congressional Record as part of Congressional hearings on sexual issues and trends sponsored by the Empowerment Subcommittee of the Small-Business Committee, US House of Representatives in 1998, Dr. Ross appearing on Nightline to an audience of 15 million viewers in 1995 and the Today Show in 1993, and the creation of the TLW music project through which Christian music artists could record songs about sexual abstinence and purity.<sup>243</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> “True Love Waits History: Highlights From Our Past” accessed February 21, 2009. Retrieved from

In addition to all of the above public efforts, one of the most interesting aspects of TLW is the large scale public displays of pledge cards that have taken place. These displays involved gathering massive amounts of TLW pledge cards in a public area in an attempt to publicly proclaim the significance of TLW and teens taking a stand for sexual purity.

The first display was at the Southern Baptist Convention in Orlando, Florida in June of 1994. At this display 102,000 pledges were displayed on the front lawn of the Orland Convention Center. Then, in July of 1994, another display took place at the National Mall between the Capitol and the Washington Monument in Washington D.C. At this display 210,000 cards were placed on the wall of the National Mall. On August 1-6<sup>th</sup> of 1995 a display of 220,000 cards was placed at the Baptist World Congress in Argentina. On February 11, 1996, 340,000 cards were stacked on a string extending from the floor through the roof of the Georgia Dome at a TLW youth rally. On October 2, 1999 a display at the Golden Gate Bridge was altered for safety reasons but still took place. The initial plan was to line teens up across the entirety of the bridge holding display cards, but due to safety reasons they lined up the distance of the bridge on an open space by the bridge called the Marina Green. Following this lineup, 1,500 teens then carried 100,000 pledge cards across the bridge. Finally, on August 22, 2004, in the largest TLW display to date, 460,000 pledge cards were displayed at the Dora Stratou theater in Athens, Greece during the Summer Olympic Games.<sup>244</sup>

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<http://www.lifeway.com/tlw/history.asp#>

<sup>244</sup>“TLW History: Highlights From Our Past” Accessed April 22,2009.

<http://www.lifeway.com/tlw/history.asp#>

Dr. Hester explained that the displays publicly supported teens and let them know it was acceptable to be abstinent. It conveyed to teens who believed in the ideals of TLW that they were not alone, while also getting the message of TLW out into the world. He explained that the displays let the world know that the messages of sex and doing whatever makes you happy that are portrayed by the media, are not the only messages out there. It reminded the world that there were people with strong moral values and Biblically based beliefs who were willing to take a stand for their beliefs. He explained for those involved with TLW the displays reaffirmed their beliefs while also broadening it and making a “public thing” that “sent messages to government, sent messages back to other people...”<sup>245</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

Having successfully examined the motives and reasoning behind the TLW movement through the lens of Gusfield’s theory of status politics and symbolic crusades, I will now take a step back and put things into a broader perspective. First, concerning the smaller scale level of TLW itself and why it continues to exist, although TLW has failed to make substantial gains in the practical goal of reducing premarital sexual behavior, it is clear that TLW has been successful in reshaping the ways those involved with TLW are presented to and perceived by the outside world, as well as the

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<sup>245</sup> Hester, Jimmy.

ways in which they perceive themselves.<sup>246</sup> TLW has done more than influence teens' decisions about their sexual behavior. TLW has recreated a social space in which those involved with TLW can feel comfortable making decisions which, for at least some of the program's participants, are an essential part of their identity.

While it may be ironic that as all of this has taken place, the actual sexual behavior of teens has changed relatively little, what has changed is still incredibly important. The status of TLW participants who wished to proclaim themselves as virgins and express their beliefs about premarital sexual behavior was changed for the better by TLW. For those involved with TLW, sexual abstinence and virginity were transformed from a stigma to something they felt was accepted and, thanks to the TLW community, even respected, regardless of whether or not more teens actually remained virgins before marriage.<sup>247</sup> Granted, teens' sexual behavior is still incredibly significant to those involved with TLW, but from the above comments of TLW's founders and those involved in the program it is clear that reinforcing Conservative Evangelical religious ideals about teen sexuality is also incredibly important, and in that arena the program has been a tremendous success.

TLW was created because they believed sex was no longer being treated as sacred, and it was being made clear to the movement's founders that teens felt uncomfortable living their sexual lives how they believed they were supposed to. Teens were embarrassed and ashamed of what they perceived as a lack of sexual experience

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<sup>246</sup> *True Love Waits: Essays and Criticisms* 10-11. Mary in "True Love Waits: True Teen Stories of Sex. Forgiveness, Promises and Purity." Geoff in "True Love Waits." A True Love Waits blog. Accessed April 14, 2009. Retrieved from <http://www.freewebs.com/truelovemustwait/truelovewaitsclub.htm>

<sup>247</sup> *True Love Waits: Essays and Criticisms* 10-11.



relative to their peers, and those feelings reflected what the creators of TLW understood to be an unacceptable societal shift. The notion that teens would hid their virginity, and by extension their faith, because they feared being ostracized by their peers was abhorrent to the founders and leaders of TLW. They believed teens should be able to embrace their virginity and sexual purity as a reflection of their dedication to their faith and God, and they sought to use TLW as a medium through which those beliefs could be realized.

TLW's success in this endeavor can be measured by the incredibly positive media reception as mentioned earlier. The majority of media representations of TLW presented it in a positive light.<sup>248</sup> TLW's success is also highlighted by the testimonials of those involved with TLW who sing the organization's praises and express how much easier TLW has made it for teens not only to embrace their virginity, but also to have a "platform to share their beliefs with other teens."<sup>249</sup>

For example, a testimonial from a TLW participant explains "having made a stand and wearing the ring has given me many great opportunities to declare both my beliefs and my faith."<sup>250</sup> Supporting this idea, a 2010 TLW rally pamphlet explained the program is so successful because it is "newsworthy" and it "utilizes positive peer pressure" in which teens are shown abstinence from premarital sexual behavior is something to be proud of and shared with friends.<sup>251</sup> A testimonial from a young female TLW participant explains "I think this type of program is great. It has helped me a lot to

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<sup>248</sup> Mebane, Felicia E. et al. 583-606.

<sup>249</sup> Hester, Jimmy.

<sup>250</sup> "True Love Waits Students Feedback Section"

<sup>251</sup> Purdom, Kenneth. "2010 True Love Waits Rally Info Pack." *His Way Productions*. Retrieved from [www.truelovewaitsrally.com/.../2010%20TrueLoveWaitsRally%20info%20pack.pdf](http://www.truelovewaitsrally.com/.../2010%20TrueLoveWaitsRally%20info%20pack.pdf)

stand up to the pressures of society.”<sup>252</sup> She goes on to say, “my ring is like a statement...it has shown all my friends I am staying pure” and it says “Don’t even think about putting the moves on me, you’ll only be wasting your time.”<sup>253</sup> Another testimonial from a TLW participants’ parent explained that the program was such a huge success with helping the teens embrace their virginity that the parents “expressed their regret that something similar was not presented to them” when they were teens.<sup>254</sup>

Elizabeth Abbott, author of *A History of Celibacy*, writes about TLW stating “thanks to True Love Waits, virgin geek has metamorphosed into virgin chic.”<sup>255</sup> Perhaps most significantly, Dr. Hester explained that TLW has been so successful in changing perceptions about virginity and premarital sexual behavior that the organization has now shifted its focus towards developing more sustained programs within local communities so that teens feel supported long after the initial TLW ceremony takes place.<sup>256</sup> This shift in TLW’s focus transitions nicely into speculation about what the future of TLW might hold.

Concerning the future of TLW, it has been so successful in its efforts to reshape societal perceptions of those involved with the movement that it is now at a bit of a crossroads in that the organization is no longer getting significant media attention because it has become such an accepted part of society. Dr. Hester explained there are certain media outlets who remain in touch on an annual basis, but that the movement is

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<sup>252</sup> “True Love Waits: True Teen Stories of Sex, Forgiveness, Promises and Purity.”

<sup>253</sup> Ibid.

<sup>254</sup> “True Love Waits Leaders Feedback” Testimonial from a TLW participant named Jeff. Accessed April 2010. Retrieved from <http://www.lifeway.com/tlw/leaders/feedback.asp>

<sup>255</sup> Abbott, Elizabeth. 398.

<sup>256</sup> Hester, Jimmy.

now primarily a grassroots movement where TLW helps local churches and organizations use the TLW materials to hold local rallies and TLW ceremonies in an attempt to have a more sustained TLW presence (TLW allows this providing the local groups retain the “Christian” dimension of the movement). TLW’s initial success has also given the organization freedom to pursue further expansion by developing TLW programs in other countries, with a primary emphasis on TLW in Africa. According to Dr. Hester and Dr. Cort, these programs have received a very positive response and they anticipate the programs having a very successful future.<sup>257</sup>

In terms of what the future might hold for TLW within the U.S., it is never easy to predict the ebbs and flows of societal trends, but the integral nature of sex as a symbolic marker for Conservative Evangelical Christians in conjunction with the concerted effort of TLW to establish a more sustained presence in local communities makes it seem unlikely that TLW will disappear anytime in the near future. While the Obama administration’s cutting of funding for abstinence programs could be seen as a sign of the impending doom of organizations like TLW, the evidence in this paper suggests that, if anything, the funding cuts will re-energize the U.S. based TLW movement.<sup>258</sup>

What should be more concerning to those involved with TLW is that it is conceivable that over time abstinence from premarital sexual behavior could follow the same path as the Temperance movement. Just as alcohol was a symbolic marker for the Temperance movement, sex is a symbolic marker for those in TLW. Just as alcohol consumption continued despite symbolic victories for Temperance adherents,

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<sup>257</sup> Hester, Jimmy and Cort, Alex.

<sup>258</sup> Valenti, Jessica. “The Virginty Movement, Rebranded” *The Nation* (July 6, 2009): 22-24.

premarital sexual behavior continues despite symbolic victories for TLW adherents. However, there is one particular property that sex has as a symbolic marker now that alcohol lacked in Gusfield's presentation of the Temperance movement which definitely bodes well for the future of TLW. This property is the directly religious nature of sex.

As this paper has illustrated, TLW approaches sexual abstinence from a religious background first and foremost. Unlike with the Temperance movement, for those involved in TLW, abstinence from premarital sexual behavior is not overtly about class, race, or even an individual's work ethic, but rather it is about an individual's relationship with God. Other motives might be expressed and used as justification, but the primary motive and backbone of TLW is the religious dimension of abstinence from premarital sexual behavior. As such, even if status is regained and the issues of class, race, work ethic, etc. are theoretically resolved, the religious dimension and importance of sex does not go away. The issue of abstinence from premarital sex does not become diminished if TLW succeeds or fails.

According to Gusfield, with Temperance, if status was protected then the issue of drinking itself was not as significant. Drinking was symbolic of social status. In contrast, sex is important to those involved in TLW first and foremost because it is a part of their religious identity. Sex is symbolic of religious status. In other words, for TLW or programs like it to fail, the religious identity of those involved with it would have to first shift in such a way that abstinence from premarital sexual behavior was no longer viewed as important. Granted, this is certainly possible and has happened with other

social issues, but if it is going to happen it will likely be a gradual shifting of social mores that takes place over a long period of time.

#### TLW AS A SAMPLE OF OTHER SOCIAL GROUPS

Stepping back further this analysis of TLW is useful on a broader scale in that it provides us with a deeper understanding of the motivations of religious social groups and their movements and organizations. Gusfield's analysis was brilliant in that he illustrated that social status is about more than tangible things. However, this paper has illustrated that in some cases Gusfield's theory should be modified to allow for the reality that at the everyday level and in smaller scale organizational efforts by religiously motivated social groups (and perhaps in larger efforts as well, although that wasn't the focus of this paper) religion should be given even more of a priority as a motive for people's actions.<sup>259</sup> Other sociological factors may play a secondary or even subconscious role, but in terms of concretely expressed thoughts and feelings religion has to be considered the primary and most important motive concerning the majority of those involved with TLW.<sup>260</sup> It is important to resist the urge to reduce people's thoughts, beliefs, and feelings to motives which are not immediately felt by those people. It is also important to allow for the possibility that religion is at least equally, if not more, important than other sociological factors that are often significantly easier to

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<sup>259</sup> Lakoff, George. *Moral Politics: How Liberals and Conservatives Think*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002.

<sup>260</sup> This notion may be better understood through the identity framework established by Wayne H. Brekhus in *Peacocks, Chameleons, Centaurs: Gay Suburbia and the Grammar of Social Identity*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003. In this work Brekhus discusses three primary categories of identity expression. Peacocks are those who adopt one primary identity as a master status. Chameleons move back and forth between different identities. Centaurs combine multiple identities into one self balancing each of them relatively equally. Within this framework TLW would be viewed as Peacocks whose religious identity is their primary identity that motivates the vast majority of their decisions first and foremost.

measure. For those involved with TLW, and I would contend for a large number of religious individuals, their “basic moral/religious convictions are...the principal ground of [their] political deliberation and choice. To ‘bracket’ such convictions is therefore to bracket – to annihilate – essential aspects of one’s very self.”<sup>261</sup>

As the founders of TLW all made clear, TLW would not exist apart from religion. If you stripped religion from TLW it could still be an organization encouraging premarital sexual abstinence, but it would no longer be TLW. As such, the first and primary lens through which TLW should be viewed by sociologists, academics, and any other outsider is the lens of religion. As this paper has shown, to understand TLW, you have to understand the way Conservative Evangelical Protestant beliefs affect and dictate the lives and worldviews of those involved with TLW. To ignore those beliefs and evaluate TLW independently of them would lead to a drastic misrepresentation of TLW and why it exists, regardless of the end result of what decisions people do or do not make about engaging in premarital sexual behavior.

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<sup>261</sup> Perry, Michael J. *Love & Power: The Role of Religion and Morality in American Politics* New York: Oxford University Press, 1991. 4.

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