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Medieval Courtesy Books and Contemporary Conservative Christian Self-Help Books: A
Textual Analysis and Psychological Implications

The early afternoon light filters through the gauzy white curtains of the ballroom. Outside, Lisa Wilson supervises a large wooden cross being unloaded from an idling SUV. A group of girls as young as seven, all wearing matching white dresses, carry a cross on their shoulders. Around the crucifix centerpiece, the girls begin rehearsing their dance which will be performed for the attendants of the Purity Ball later that evening. Lisa Wilson explains, “We just wanted elegance, and romance, and something so extravagant that it would touch the intrinsic soul of a young girl.” This scene, from the 2008 documentary, “The Virgin Daughters,” depicts a Purity Ball, an event in which fathers pledge to protect their daughter’s chastity.

The idea of policing a woman’s chastity is not new; it appears in medieval texts from four hundred years ago. Though the language may change, the ways that medieval texts and contemporary conservative fundamentalist Christian texts view women has not evolved. From medieval texts, we can follow the threads now woven into the patriarchal tapestry of contemporary Christian discourse. Three concepts track from the Middle Ages to modern times: the idea that evil originates in women and their bodies are inherently sinful, the God/ Husband/ Father complex, and the persistent view of women as social and economic capital. These concepts culminate to build Purity Culture- a movement that deems sex before marriage a sin and that promotes women’s chastity through ceremonies like Purity Balls. Even the common

tradition of fathers walking their daughters down the aisle stems from purity culture.

Purity-driven concepts championed since the Middle Ages by the patriarchy have resulted in measurable psychological damage, represented by RTS, or Religious Trauma Syndrome.

Additionally, psychological studies show that higher purity culture concept endorsement is positively correlated with higher Rape Myth acceptance endorsement. Purity culture has dangerous implications on the mental health of young women.

Both Bestsellers: Medieval Courtesy Books and Contemporary Self-Help

This study focuses on the similarities between modern Christian self-help books marketed towards women, and their counterpart from the Middle Ages, courtesy books.

According to Matthieu Boyd of the Oxford Dictionary of the Middle Ages, courtesy books, “prescrib[ed] forms of outward behavior...Partially inspired by monastic rules and customs, conduct literature proliferated throughout Europe in the later MA and afterwards” (Boyd para. 1). The “proliferation” that Boyd describes, as well as the various translations and retellings of courtesy books exemplifies the popularity of the genre. The book this study focuses on, “The Book of the Knight of the Tower,” was written in 1372 by the French knight Sir Geoffrey de la Tour Landry. Marquard vom Stein, the Landvogt of Montbéliard, then translated de Landry’s text for his own two daughters in 1460 (Barnhouse 9). Scholar Rebecca Barnhouse notes that Sir Geoffrey’s text was a bit of a re-telling itself, much of it being copied from “The Mirror for Good Women,” another courtesy book written by a friar in the late 1200’s (Barnhouse 17). Courtesy books dictated to young girls and women acceptable behavior, most often in terms of what would make a “good wife,” a “good daughter,” and a “good Christian woman.” These books conveyed rules for dressing, speaking, acting, moving, and thinking itself. Barnhouse

directly correlates the courtesy book and the self-help genre, writing, “Conduct books were a medieval bestseller, just as self-help books are today” (Barnhouse, 19).

Self help books today focus on a range of personal issues, from weight-loss to time management to professional success. Titles like “Atomic Habits: Tiny Changes, Remarkable Results,” “The Subtle Art of Not Giving a F*ck,” “7 Habits of Highly Effective People” litter the bestseller lists. A sub-genre of Self-Help promises women specifically the answers to their problems- most frequently problems in the relationship and weight-loss arena (For example- “Rock Bottom is where Bad Bitches are Built” and “Stop Sabotaging Your Weight Loss.”) A smaller subset of even this category caters to Christian women. These books are popular, and their broader genre, religious books, made up an industry that had 705.1 million dollars in revenue in 2021 (Watson).

“Passion and Purity” by Elizabeth Elliot (originally published in 1984), and “Sex and the Single Girl” by Dr. Juli Slattery (2017) are a part of the genre of self-help books directed at Christian Women . “Passion and Purity” and “Sex and the Single Girl” certainly have the same religious foundation as medieval courtesy books. Elliot’s book focuses on her pre-marital relationship with her first husband, Jim Elliot. She writes of their courtship; how her future husband and herself were often apart for extended periods, one or the other doing mission work in South America. Later, Elizabeth joins him and they get married. “Sex and the Single Girl” provides an interactive guidebook for young women who want to live with “sexual integrity.”

Evil Originates in Women

Medieval courtesy books and contemporary Christian teachings have the same base assumption : the idea that evil originates in women. The root of this outlook grows from the

fertile soil of the Garden of Eden. In her book, “The Fourth Estate: A history of women in the Middle Ages” Šûlammîť Šaḥar writes, “The Church Fathers repeatedly described women as the daughter and heiress of Eve, burdened by the yoke of the Original Sin, and as the gateway to Satan. It was she who succeeded in seducing man when Satan had proved powerless to do so...” (Shahar, 23). Eve’s main offense: disobedience. She takes fruit from the tree of Good and Evil. She was not only disobedient, but seductive- more seductive than the devil himself. She goes down, and takes Adam along with her. As a consequence, Barnhouse clarifies, the “natural place” of women below men is, “only fair because after all, women are the cause of all the evil in the world. Why? Because Eve disobeyed God” (Barnhouse 86). Thus begins the blame of women that will continue on for centuries. Theology proves women inferior, and the proof transfers to societal and personal scales. Women are described in less-than-favorable terms (“nagging,” “shrill,” “hysterical,” “prude,” “whores,” and “weak,” just to name a few) in both eras as a result of this reasoning. In these examples an odd dichotomy becomes apparent- women are both weak and in need of supervision (Eve took the fruit because Adam was not there to prevent her from doing so,) and at the same time they are seductive temptresses, able to overpower a man and must be “kept in line” through abuse. The dichotomy allows a patriarchal society to choose which women to grant pardon and which women to burn at the stake (often a divide made along lines of class and race.)

De Landry includes “The Nine Follies of Eve” in his book, which Barnhouse eloquently summarizes on page 176. The first mistake that Eve made was disobeying her husband. The second, making her own decision without her husband’s input. The third infraction: giving the serpent “the opening he needed to cajole Eve with flattery, just as men do when they try to get women’s love dishonorably” (Barnhouse, 177). The fourth folly, “foolish beholding,” when Eve

dared to even look at the forbidden fruit (looking leads to “temptation...and thence into all kinds of trouble, including fornication and even murder” (Barnhouse 177)). The fifth and sixth follies of Eve were touching and tasting the forbidden fruit, and the seventh was doubting God when he said she would die. The eighth folly was actually that of Adam, for listening to Eve. Barnhouse mentions, however, that “Sir Geoffrey quickly shifts the focus back to women, who should counsel their husbands wisely, instead of giving foolish advice” (Barnhouse, 178). The ninth, final and most grave: “when God asked her why she broke his commandment, she made excuses and blamed the serpent” (Barnhouse 178). De Landry foreshadows (pretty heavily), the allocation of responsibility in his book, through his clear outlining of Eve’s mistakes.

The Original Sin sets the expectation that the evil of men is always due to an earlier instance of a woman’s wrongdoing, and women are inherently responsible for preventing men from sinning. In even the prologue of his courtesy book De Landry ascribes to this designation of responsibility. He explains his reasoning for writing his book, thinking about “when [he] was young and rode with [his] fellow soldiers in Poitou” and because of the soldiers, “many ladies were dishonored.” (Barnhouse 31). He continues, writing, “I fear that some men are still like this now. Therefore I have concluded that I would have a little book made wherein I would have written the lives, manners, and deeds of reputable women who are honored for their virtues and bounty” (Barnhouse 32). Though men should treat women well, they sometimes will not. This is not the fault of the man, however, but the fault of the woman, for failing to be virtuous and reputable enough. The responsibility for *not* being mistreated lies with the women.

From his introduction to his tales, De Landry keeps the theme of women inspiring sin. In his tale “How a good woman ought not to stryue with her husband” the concept is well-explored. De Landry writes of a wife arguing with her husband in front of people, speaking

shamefully. Her husband, becoming enraged, “angrily hit her with his fist, knocking her to the ground, and kicked her in the face, breaking her nose... and because she was quarrelsome and troublesome she got herself a crooked nose and much harm” (Barnhouse 92). We would assume that the lesson would be for the husband, telling him that his actions are disproportionate. We would be wrong. De Landry summarizes, “A woman should never argue with her husband nor answer him in a way that gives displeasure, like the way the wife of a burgess did” (Barnhouse 92). The wife spoke back to her husband, and in return, he physically assaulted her. The responsibility of the assault does not lie with the man who swung his fists, but rather with the woman and her innate evil, the inability to hold her tongue. The husband did certainly commit a sin, but his wife essentially made him do it. The “moral” of this tale is shocking, and even more so when we remember the speaker and the listeners. A father, telling his daughters to accept abuse from men, because if they are abused, it must be their fault anyways.

His next tale, “Of the daughter of Iacob that was depuceled or her maydenhod taken from her,” (Barnhouse 130), repeats the same concepts. In this story, the daughter of Jacob, in her “frivolity and lightness of heart left the house of her father and brothers” (Barnhouse 130), to go look at the fashions of a neighboring town. On the way, a great lord in the land rapes her. Her brothers avenge her death, killing the lord and most of his kin. The lesson that De Landry asserts his daughters take? To “see how many evils and misfortunes are caused by foolish women” (Barnhouse 131). The rapist is not free from blame, shown by his early death at the hands of the girl’s brothers, but the greater blame belongs to the girl herself. She failed to prevent her assault by leaving the safety of her father’s house. Again, De Landry directs the lesson at his own daughters, rather than at the perpetrator. Sin is the result of this character’s frivolity- the sin of the rape but also the blood on the hands of her brothers.

Notably, De Landry chooses to identify the cause of frivolity to be fashion. According to Barnhouse, in the France of Sir Geoffrey, moralists related imprudent fashion with “moral decay” (Barnhouse 118). Though De Landry himself likely wears extravagant fashions, (evident from a painting from the earliest French manuscript of his book, according to Barnhouse, 116), he warns his daughters against the evil of excessive attire. “How a hooly bisshop reprints and taught many laydes” speaks of a sermon that a good bishop gave, after he had noticed several of his congregants wearing the fashions of the day. De Landry writes, “He told them the gathering of the waters in the days Noah took place because of the pride and over-elaborate clothing of men and especially of women” (Barnhouse 122). One of the fashions at the time was headdresses with two horns. De Landry makes his thoughts about this particular style known, writing “the women’s horns mock God... When women come to church and holy water is cast on them, they cast their faces down. Why? ‘The devil,’ said the bishop, ‘sits between their horns and forces them to bow their heads for fear of the holy water’” (Barnhouse 122). Women, especially women and their fashion, are rarely a good sign in De Landry’s book. The fashion of women causes lewdness in men and directly insults god as well.

It is clear that De Landry believes women to be the root of evil. Barnhouse notes the “The Parisian Book of Housekeeping,” written in the 1390’s, also supports the concept of women being the root of all evil. The idea was popular, appearing in different source texts of the time. Barnhouse states that the Householder’s wife was expected to keep a very cozy home for her husband, “to make sure her husband is so comfortable that he will never seek out the company of other woman. If he does, the Housekeeper seems to imply, she only has herself to blame” (Barnhouse 98). The responsibility for infidelity in a marriage should lie with the partner who

committed adultery, but yet again, the fault lies back with the woman herself, who was not virtuous and did not provide an environment in which her husband would not cheat.

The thread of evil originating in women picks up in contemporary Christian self-help books. In both “Sex and the Single Girl,” and “Passion and Purity” this concept is present, although in different ways. “Sex and the Single Girl” was published in 2017, and the differences in tactics by the two authors represent a shift from an inflammatory, direct approach to an equally insidious but quieter message.

“Passion and Purity,” originally published in 1984, takes the direct and incendiary approach. In the chapter, “The Mess We’ve Made” Elizabeth Elliot details the confusion that has occurred because of the “reversed roles” (Elliot 110), dating back to Adam and Eve. This section of her book harkens back to the nine “follies” of Eve that De Landry outlines. The biblical story, four hundred years later, continues to be the basis of the assertion that evil originates with women. Elliot notes that Eve took the initiative in the situation and offered Adam the forbidden fruit, (something women should not do- take the initiative, apparent by their very biological design as “receptors,” Elliot writes previously the very same page) and Adam, in turn did not protect her, and “sinned along with her” (Elliot 110). The sin of Adam occurred after Eve took the forbidden fruit. She committed the first infraction, and as a result she took her husband down with her. Elliot continues, writing that the confusion of roles has also resulted in sins such as “Homosexuality, teenage pregnancy, divorce, abortion, the new ‘house-husband’ role” (Elliot 110). Not only was the first sin committed by a woman, but “It’s been chaos ever since” (Elliot 110). Women are portrayed as innately evil and responsible for every “confusion” that has resulted from the “reversal of roles” since the dawn of time. Sure, Adam should have protected

Eve from sinning, but he did not. The blame resides in the earlier instance of a woman's wrongdoing.

The division of blame does not only extend to non-God-fearing women who go to work and leave their husbands at home to do the dishes, but implicates Elliot herself as well. After Jim and Elizabeth have gone on their first date to a missionary meeting. Jim sends Elizabeth a letter, "confess[ing] to having been in some way out of line on the evening of our date" (Elliot 46). Elliot continues, writing, "It was a bit obscure to me, but I felt I might have been at fault." I doubt the two could have gotten too "out of line" at a missionary meeting, but Elliot immediately accepts Jim's framing and turns the blame onto herself. Later in the chapter, she gaslights herself, writing, "But I am overreacting. I am dramatizing the commonest experience. What are these silly matters of the heart, compared to real tribulation" (Elliot 84)? It is no coincidence that the "silly matters of the heart" are what Elizabeth worries about, while Jim, dedicated to God, seemingly strives to fix the "real tribulation." These examples are from Elizabeth Elliot's intimate relationships, but she supports the concept that women are to blame on a much larger scale as well.

On page 98, Elliot begins her chapter entitled "What Women Do to Men." In this chapter, Elliot reveals the large-scale blame of women. The chapter begins,

"Women are always tempted to be initiators... It appears to us that men often ignore and evade issues... Women respond to this tendency by insisting on confrontation, communication, showdown... we nag, we plead, we get attention by tears, silence or withholding warmth and intimacy. We have a large bag of tricks" (Elliot 98).

Elliot takes the blame and settles it squarely on the shoulders of women. If men do not want to talk about an issue, Elliot declares the issue as non-important anyway, and she thinks it rather silly that the woman would want to address it in the first place. Elliot continues, writing of a situation she received a letter about from a fan. The young woman wrote that she had feelings for a young man, and told him directly about them. The man was not interested, and said he would rather pursue a friendship with the woman. The woman agreed, and sent him a few letters, none of which were returned. She wrote to Elliot, “In none of my letters or calls have I attempted to push myself on him.” Elliot writes, “She had no business in the first place ‘tactfully’ making her feelings known... A woman taking that kind of initiative is not tactful” (Elliot 100). On the next page, her thoughts are painfully summarized when she writes, “I protest. Women expect too much of men” (Elliot 101).

The following chapter is entitled, “What Do Men Look For?” In this chapter Elliot describes a conversation she and Jim had with single Christian men, about what they expect out of single Christian women. The answers given included, “Femininity. Affirmation. Encouragement. Tenderness. Sensitivity. Vulnerability... to present some kind of challenge... Maternal. That’s important” (Elliot 106). After this laundry list of desirable traits, Elliot writes, “I was glad we had invited no women that evening. They would have had a hard time keeping their mouths shut” (Elliot 106). Had the women been invited, they may have found this list unfair, and perhaps sexist. Elliot reframes their protests, and rather than being a fair critique of the men, they showcase an innate evil of the women: the inability to hold their tongues, as we saw earlier in De Landry’s “How a good woman ought not to stryue with her husband.”

Dr. Slattery chooses a quieter and more “acceptable” language and tone with which to discuss purity and chastity. This language may be more harmful than the language used by Elliot,

because it is not as easily recognized as Purity Culture propaganda. If not recognizable, the language could be accepted by groups that are not necessarily conservative and fundamentalist. Slattery discusses “sexual integrity”- when, “your sexual choices are a consistent expression of your relational and spiritual commitments” (Slattery 40). The term “integrity” implies a right and wrong way to use your body to honor God. On the following page, she gives examples of what living with sexual integrity as a Christian woman would look like. “If you sleep with a guy you are dating you lack sexual integrity... If I chose to have sex with a man other than my husband... my life would lack integrity... I would also lack sexual integrity if I stopped having sex with my husband” (Slattery 42). She writes that for a Christian woman, “If Jesus is her Savior, her body (including her sexuality) no longer belongs to her but should be used for God’s glory” (Slattery 42). Having integrity equals “good”, and lacking sexual integrity equals “evil”. The evil innate in women lies in direct connection to the “proper” use of a woman’s body.

Slattery uses “battlefield” language throughout the text in order to continually raise the stakes. Just as having sexual integrity, “good” and “winning” the battle are all connected thematically, so are not having sexual integrity, “evil” and “losing” the battle against Satan. Slattery writes in her introduction, “I view sexuality as a spiritual battlefield...sexuality appears to be in Satan’s bullseye.” (Slattery 8). A woman’s body is, in and of itself, a risky thing- both the field on which the war is being waged and God’s greatest weapon. On page 51 she writes, “Your sexual choices and attitudes represent a continual battlefield”, and again on 64, “Behind your sexuality is a greater spiritual battle.” At the beginning of week three, day three of the study, with “Sexuality has put God on trial” (Slattery 69), she uses a different metaphor but continues the moralizing of a woman’s body and choices. She clearly titles week five of the study “Battling Temptation” (Slattery 100), and in the following pages she writes, “We are not

playing a game, we are in a war” (Slattery 103), and “The crossroads of temptation is not just a choice between sin and righteousness, but between life and death... the loss of your dignity” (Slattery 106). Slattery quotes the words of Paul in Ephesians 6:10-18, where he advises Christians to “put on the full armor of God” and warns that “our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities” and to “stand firm.. With the belt of truth... the breastplate of righteousness... the shield of faith... the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit.. Be alert and always keep on praying” (Paul, qtd. in Slattery 110).

The discussion so far has framed the woman’s chastity as a prize to be won, the field on which the war is fought- nothing which conveys choice. Breaking this framing, Slattery writes that in order to stay safe, “[women] need to develop a lifestyle, expecting that our enemy is on the prowl...” (Slattery 108) Slattery warns that if the battle is lost, the woman, who has had no agency up until this point will be blamed in the end. All of these quotes represent the concept that a woman has an innate danger to her, present in her body, and carried from the time of Eve and the Original Sin. The stakes are high, with every decision, and even every thought, (Dr. Slattery writes on page 87 that, according to Jesus, “we should be faithful to our marriage vows even in our thinking), a choice between God and Satan. A woman’s chastity and choice do not belong to her really, they are a reason for which men go to war, and win or lose she will always be implicit in the evil of Satan.

A Moment of Silence for Purity Balls

Amy S. Kaufman, author of, “‘His Princess’: An Arthurian Family Drama,” writes, “Modesty movements in the United States have begun to rely on a fragmented and bowdlerized pastiche of Arthuriana to enforce the chastity of adolescent girls and elevate the status of fathers”

(Kaufman 1). The 2008 documentary “The Virgin Daughters” by filmmaker Jane Treays picks up the thread of Medievalism again. Purity Culture uses symbols that call back to medieval times. In one scene, a young girl reads from a storybook titled, “The Princess and the Kiss” which depicts a medieval princess who has received a kiss from God, passed to her by her father, the King. The father warns, “use wisdom... save the kiss for the man you will marry” (Treays, 10:53). In another scene, the camera pans over a statue that one of the fathers of the girls has in his living room- a knight in shining armor with a wide stance, a sword planted in between his feet. A baby girl sits behind the sword. (Treays, 35:29) The same father later says, “if I had a picture of knighthood, and you know, chivalry and manliness, I want her [his daughter] to have all of that...” (Treays, 38:00). Later in the night, at the ceremony itself, the fathers sign a “Purity Covering and Covenant,” which is written on a piece of paper made to look like parchment, and written in a Medieval font. The daughter also signs this pledge, although she does so simply as a witness (Treays, 37:25). The last facet of the ceremony involves the girls and their fathers walking underneath an arch of swords held aloft and laying a white rose at the base of a cross (41:45). One cannot help but notice the similarities between these scenes and those that would be present at a wedding. The girls wear brand-new gowns to the ceremony, (approved by their fathers, of course) and the two sign a covenant. Sometimes the father will give his daughter a “purity ring” to wear on her wedding finger, signifying that her chastity belongs to him until a different ring replaces his. We find our thread yet again as we exit the purity ball, bringing us back to our Middle Ages textual analysis, to find the origin of the God/Husband/Father complex.

Heavenly Father, Dad or Daddy?

The God/Husband/ Father complex is a phenomenon that relates and blurs the lines between three relationships in a Christian woman’s life: the relationship between her heavenly

Father, her biological father, and the father of her children. The intermingle can be seen in many different source texts from both the Medieval and contemporary periods. De Landry wrote “The Book of the Knight of the Tower,” according to Barnhouse, “to teach his daughters how to be good wives and good Christians” (Barnhouse, v). On the very first page of the prologue, De Landry outlines the God/Father/Husband complex. The girls’ father mixes his expectations with those of their future husbands’, as well as with the expectations of their heavenly Father. Barnhouse explores two other titles that contain evidence of the Father/God/Husband complex, Christine de Pizan’s 1405 “Book of Three Virtues,” and “The Parisian Book of Housekeeping” (Barnhouse, 13-14). This text was written by a husband for his wife, although Barnhouse writes, “He was in his fifties, she was fifteen.” (Barnhouse, 14). She continues, “The great difference in age between the Householder and his wife causes him to address her almost as paternally as Sir Geoffrey addresses his daughters” (Barnhouse, 15). The complex is certainly present in the structure of the texts- who they are written by and who they are written for. The intermingle of the Heavenly Father, biological father, and husband continues into the substance of the text itself.

In one of the opening “lessons” of his book, Landry writes “of twoo doughters of the Emperoure that one synfull And that other deuoute” (Caxton, 15). In this tale, there are two daughters, one sinful and the other devout. They both fall in love with “two good, noble knights” (Barnhouse, 49) and plan a wholly unapproved midnight tryst. The devout daughter has prayed for those who have died, and they appear as phantoms when the first knight arrives and scares him off, effectively protecting the devout daughter’s chastity. The sinful daughter ends up with child by the second knight, after which the Emperor “commanded his daughter to be drowned during the night, and the knight to be flayed alive” (Barnhouse, 46). The devout daughter received no such punishment, instead marrying a “great king of Greece” (Barnhouse, 47). (After

her father gives his blessing.) De Landry conflates the Heavenly father, the biological father, and the husband. The Emperor is both the sinful daughter's biological father as well as substituting for her Heavenly Father, who punishes her eternally for her transgressions. Of course, it is no mistake that the young suitors, and soon to be husbands are knights, precisely like the teller of the tale, Sir Geoffrey himself, once was.

Another tale that Landry tells repeats the dichotomy of a devout and sinful daughter. In this fable, the sinful daughter did not fast properly, a key component of religion in the Middle Ages. Barnhouse's translation reads that the sinful daughter, "as soon as she had said a little Mass... she had a bad habit of going into the garderobe and eating soup or some tasty thing..." (Barnhouse, 55). The sinful daughter manages to get married, but her husband finds her late one night in the garderobe, "with his clerk and two servants, all eating and playing and making an uproar, the men together with the women." (Barnhouse, 55). The husband goes to hit one of his servants, and accidentally blinds the sinful daughter. He quickly revokes his love, and the sinful daughter, blamed for her own blindness, ends up alone. The main moral of this story concerns the practice of fasting, but as Barnhouse notes, readers will get another lesson as well, "women should be obedient to their parents and their husbands" (Barnhouse 56). The sinful daughter has disobeyed her biological father by failing to fast correctly. She has disobeyed her husband, by continuing to impiously eat, but additionally by being alone with his clerk and two servants as well. Notice, he does not go after his wife at first, he goes to hit one of his servants. This infraction of the rules would hurt the husband specifically, as he would be branded as the husband of a whore. The daughter has also disobeyed her heavenly father as well, with the breaking of her fast and suggested infidelity.

The untangling of the Heavenly Father, the father and the husband must take longer than four hundred years, because the same conflation is present in Christian self-help books today. Elliot writes of the struggle that she and Jim faced when she remained behind at college and he went on his mission trip. She says, “[Jim] spoke of the story he had read in Bible study that morning— the story of Abraham’s offering up of the most precious thing in his life: his son Issac. ‘So I put you on the altar.’ He said” (Elliot, 61). Jim effectively melds the biological father and husband. On page 90, Elliot writes of the sacrifices she has made for God, doing things that she’d prefer she didn’t, because of the love she has for Him. “Therefore, in your heart, you can be very honest when you tell him you really *prefer* to do what He wants, because, more than your own pleasure, you want His. When obedience to God contradicts what I think will give me pleasure, let me ask myself if I love Him” (Elliot 90). In this passage, Elliot could just as easily be speaking about her future husband’s wishes, rather than God’s. Throughout the book, Jim cites God as the reason why the two cannot speak, and then cites him again as the reason why they can. Elliot writes at various points, “Jim committed himself to bachelorhood for as long as the will of God required” (Elliot 53,) “Jim told me he felt that God had given the liberty to start a correspondence” (Elliot 119,) “Jim hinted then that he was beginning to believe that God was going to allow us to be together someday” Elliot 150). Jim dictates to Elizabeth what God wants, which seemingly stands as an excuse for what Jim himself wants. Later in this section, Elliot fulfills the Father/father/husband trilogy by mentioning an important lesson her niece taught her once. Elliot writes of the struggles her Heavenly Father puts her through, and compares them to her niece struggling with the sleeves of her dress. Her niece, after Elliot offers her help, says, “‘Papa usually lets me struggle.’” To which Elliot responds in her book, “What kind of a father is

that? A wise one” (Elliot 91). This comment effectively conflates Jim with God, and both with a tough but fair father of a child.

“Sex and the Single Girl” makes the conflation between Heavenly Father, earthy father, and husband in a much more subtle way. Dr. Slattery does not directly relate the biological father into the equation, but rather states that God is an intimate part of any good Christian’s marriage. She writes, “Marriage and sexuality were always intended to teach us about intimacy with God” (Slattery, 20) and “Sex is never just about sex. Our sexual opinions and choices ultimately reveal something much deeper about us and our relationship to God” (Slattery 25). Her argument effectively links the Heavenly Father and husband- the relationship with one in direct correlation to the relationship with the other.

Goods to be Traded

The last concept that both medieval courtesy books and contemporary Christian self-help books support is the idea that women’s bodies, sexuality, and chastity are a form of commerce to be bought and sold by and to other men. Commerce may take place in terms of economic capital, as is the case with a woman’s dowry, or may take place in terms of social capital. If a woman has had sex before marriage, or in any way defies the rule of obedience that she is expected to keep in regards to her husband, she has become less valuable- “damaged goods.” The very structure of conduct books –who they were written by and who they were written for–supports this idea, just as was the case in the Father/ Husband/ Heavenly Father complex. The Parisian Book of Housekeeping, discussed earlier, was written by a 50-year-old husband for his fifteen-year-old wife. Barnhouse writes, “Expecting to die before her, he knew she would probably marry again. His own honor depended on what kind of wife she would make the second time around”

(Barnhouse 14). His social capital depended on his wife, making her a sort of currency. We see bartering of women's bodies throughout the content of medieval courtesy books. Barnhouse writes that of medieval women, "their speech, their dress, even their physical movements could affect their reputations, which could in turn have huge implications for their marriage prospects" (Barnhouse 77). De Landry's tale, "How the doghters of the kyng of denmarke lost their hosbonde by cause of theyr maners" describes the three daughters of the King, and how a particular suitor came to choose the youngest to marry. De Landry writes, "although the oldest was the fairest, she often looked around her..." (Barnhouse 180), and the second "spoke too much" (Barnhouse 180). The third, though she was "hardly the prettiest" (Barnhouse 180), did not have the same traits her sisters did, and was chosen for marriage. The first two daughters did not carry as much social capital for their future husband, (because they looked around and spoke-indefensible acts) and were therefore rejected.

In "How a woman sprange vpon the the table" De Landry describes how obedient a wife should be to her husband, and relates the woman's obedience to commerce. In the tale, three merchants are traveling together when one suggests, "Let's have a wager- he wins whose wife obeys her husband best and does his bidding quickest... They agreed, waging a jewel" (Barnhouse 93). The first husband tells his wife to jump into a basin, she questions him, and he hits her. The second husband asks the same of his wife, she says no, and she is "beaten like the first wife was" (Barnhouse 93). At the third house, the merchants suspend the wager in order to eat dinner. The third husband asks his wife if there is salt on the table. Mishearing, and "fearing to disobey" (Barnhouse 93), the wife leaps onto the table ("In medieval French the word *sal*" can mean both "salt" and "jump" (Barnhouse 94)). The husband wins the wager, and his wife was "more praised than the other two" (Barnhouse 93-94). The husband has, through his wife's

obedience, gained both economic capital (the jewel), and social capital (the praise of his wife by the other men). The concept of a woman's obedience in this tale, and in the medieval period generally, was inherently linked to her chastity. Obeying the husband's orders to jump on the table is akin to the order of retaining your virginity.

In contemporary Christian self-help books, the rhetoric has remained largely the same. In "Passion and Purity" Elizabeth Elliot writes about the strength that it took her and Jim to abstain and keep their vow of chastity. She says that it took a man of strength to keep his promise, and she "assumed that those men would also be looking for a woman of principle" (Elliot 129). Elliot makes a woman's chastity part of a man's social capital, and her following analogy connects women to being economic capital. She writes, "I did not want to be among the marked-down goods on the bargain table, cheap because they'd been pawed over. Crowds collect there. It is only the few who will pay full price. 'You get what you pay for'" (Elliot 129). Here, Elliot says exactly what she thinks- sex equates to "being pawed over," and as a good, a woman should try to retain her highest price.

Later, when Jim and Elizabeth are separated in South America during their mission work, Elizabeth writes that while on the bus, "I was propositioned by a huge swarthy man who sat beside me" (Elliot 167), she writes to Jim about this. He writes back, saying, "I found the little ball muscles at the jaw bulge and my teeth clench hard as I pictured it... it was probably better that I wasn't along... It would be maddening but for the trust that I have in God for you" (Elliot 168). Jim is angry that Elizabeth could have been hurt, surely, but he is also angry that his prize, his perfect and pure bride, may have been spoiled by someone other than him. His ego is hurt; his social capital put into jeopardy. He assuages himself, writing that it was probably good he wasn't there after all, in order to recover the masculinity that he feels has been threatened. The

next sentence further removes the agency from Elizabeth. Jim does not trust Elizabeth herself, but rather God to keep her safe and unblemished. The agency falls out of her realm of control and belongs to the father/ husband figure of God.

Women are treated as currency not only by their fathers or by their husbands, but also are regarded as currency and capital by God himself. Elizabeth references several times throughout her book that she wanted to remain valuable to God, by remaining chaste, pure, and obedient. In chapter two of her book, “The Life I Owe,” she writes, speaking to the reader, “Have you forgotten... you are not the owner of your body! You have been bought, and at a price!... The price was paid in precious blood...the blood of Christ” (Elliot 26-27). A common phrasing throughout Christianity is that as a sinner, Jesus has paid the debt of sins that you owe. This construct is not in and of itself harmful, but when connected to restriction of a woman’s sexuality, the idea that her body is not her own, it becomes harmful. Throughout the book, Elliot includes excerpts of her journal at the time she was beginning her relationship with Jim. On April 2nd, she wrote, “I am seized with fear that my own will will be given place, and I will thus ruin my usability for God” (Elliot 40). Again, one’s own will or desires are placed juxtaposed with those of God. Like the previous example, this is not an inherently damaging idea, and may lead to benevolent acts of charity, a focus on community, and the like. Be that as it may, the “usability,” once linked to Elliot’s sexuality, becomes a removal of agency.

In the same vein Dr. Slattery reflectively questions her readers, “What do you most want out of your life, happiness or holiness” (Slattery 77)? Dr. Slattery repeats throughout her book that her readers have the opportunity to turn over a new leaf. She notes, “Because of decisions you have made, you may feel like ‘damaged goods,’ but God does not see you that way... Nothing is beyond His healing and forgiveness” (Slattery 54)! The woman is a commodity, and

debt that she builds up with her sexual actions can be wiped clean by God. At the end of the book, which again and again notes the hopefulness of the situation, Dr. Slattery recommends that readers take a look at Luke 7:36-50. This biblical passage tells the story of a sinful woman coming into a house, washing Jesus's feet, drying them with her hair, and anointing them with perfume. Jesus says to the witness, "Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little" (Luke: 47). In the reflection questions, Slattery asks readers to consider "What was this woman's reputation? How do you imagine she earned that reputation?... What new reputation did Jesus give her" (Slattery 139)? The woman has a reputation that has tarnished not only her relationship with God, but her value as a commodity. The restoration of her market value rests in God.

Beyond the Text

Contemporary Christian self-help books clearly carry the same patriarchal, misogynist, purity-driven ideologies as Medieval Courtesy books. The consequences of these teachings do not stop when a reader puts down the book. Religion has been researched in terms of being a protective factor or helping tool in the treatment of other forms of trauma. However, the phenomena of religious trauma- trauma as a result of religious teachings and practices- has not been extensively researched. Dr. Marlene Winell has discussed this phenomena, labeling it "Religious Trauma Syndrome" in "CBT Today: The Official Magazine of the British Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Psychotherapies." In the September 2011 issue, she describes the "key dysfunctions" of RTS, broken down into four categories. 1) "Cognitive: Confusion, difficulty with decision-making and critical thinking, dissociation, identity confusion" 2) "Affective: Anxiety, panic attacks, depression, suicidal ideation, anger, grief, guilt, loneliness, lack of meaning" 3) "Functional: Sleep and eating disorders, nightmares, sexual dysfunction,

substance abuse, somatization” 4) “Social/cultural: Rupture of family and social network, employment issues, financial stress, problems acculturating into society, interpersonal dysfunction” (Winell 17). These consequences of religious teachings that have a focus on purity and demonize female sexuality lie at an individual level; there are women who have grown up with these ideas accepted as true and moral. Winell includes quotes from her clients in this article, which exemplify the human suffering that accompanies Religious Trauma Syndrome. One client says, “I’ve spent most of my life trying to please an angry God and feeling like a complete failure. I didn’t pray enough, read enough, love enough, etc” (Qtd. in Winell, 24). Another says, “I’ve spent literally years injuring myself, cutting and burning my arms, taking overdoses and starving myself, to punish myself so that God doesn’t have to punish me. It’s taken me years to feel deserving of anything good” (Winell, 24). Religious Trauma Syndrome may affect a person’s ability to trust others, as well as themselves. It may lead to dissociation and depression, anxiety, grief and guilt. Individuals are suffering in silence in the church, or suffering after leaving the church, facing the fallout.

The ideas of purity culture do not only result in Religious Trauma Syndrome, but Owens et. al. (2021) has connected the tenets of purity culture to rape myth acceptance. Their study examined 99 self-identified Christian participants and utilized the Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale-Short Form (IRMA-SF; Payne et al., 1999), the Purity Culture Beliefs Scale (PCBS, Ortiz, 2018), and several rape vignettes that depicted marital rape, date rape, and acquaintance rape. Measures on the Purity Culture Beliefs Scale align with the main messages of both “The Book of the Knight of the Tower ” and the christian self-help books discussed. The measures of the PCBS include Guilt and Shame (ex. “Sex outside of marriage will make you damaged goods” (Owens et. al., 410)), Gender Roles (ex. “It is the woman’s fault if sexual boundaries are crossed in a

dating relationship” (Owens et. al., 410)), and Idealization (“You lose a piece of yourself every time you have sex with someone new” (Owens et. al., 410). The study showed “individuals who endorse purity culture beliefs are likely to have higher acceptance of rape myths” (Owens et. al., 412). Additionally, “individuals who endorse purity culture beliefs are likely to incorrectly label marital rape and acquaintance rape as consensual sexual encounters” (Owens et. al., 412). Both of these self-help books are authored by women, displaying the extent to which Purity Culture Beliefs are internalized by women as well as men. Women who have nothing to gain and everything to lose from these types of messages are telling other women to believe them. Themes of the purity culture that are so present in many fundamentalist Christian churches are positively correlated with rape-supportive messaging, and women are advocating for the advancement of these themes.

Klemet and Sagarin’s 2016 thematic analysis of Christian Dating Books also found evidence of rape-supportive messaging. Additionally, they posit that one of the reasons women do not report sexual assault or violence in Christian communities is because they do not recognize it as an issue that should be reported. They write, “When erroneous beliefs about sexual violence are widely held within a community or culture, such violence may appear inevitable and ubiquitous” (Klemet & Sagarin, 2016). If an individual grows up with these concepts being taught by their church, they become more than normal, they become moral. Defying purity culture, questioning the Heavenly Father/ Biological Father/ Husband complex, refuting the concept that women are commerce, and challenging the notion that evil originates in women all become more than disrupting the status quo, they become sinful acts.

Choice in the Matter?

In “Passion and Purity,” Elliot quotes William Wilberforce in “Real Christianity,” “true Christians consider themselves not as satisfying some rigorous creditor... theirs is not the stinted return of a constrained obedience, But the large and liberal measure of voluntary service” (Qtd. in Elliot, 133). Elliot agrees, focusing on the aspect of “voluntary service.” Similarly, Slattery writes, “Your new identity in Christ is about inviting Him to redeem your brokenness. It means being open with the Lord and allowing Him to turn your sinful heart into a loving heart” (Slattery 138). These terms; “inviting,” “being open,” “allowing,” and “voluntary service” suggest a choice in the matter. How much of a choice do young vulnerable women have when they are being told that the alternative is eternal damnation in the fiery pits of hell? One of Dr. Winell’s clients being treated for RTS said, “If I give up my belief system, I’ll go to hell. Even though my whole life has been so unhappy in the church...” (Qtd. in Winell, 23). Additionally, many women have been attending church from a very young age, and the indoctrination of purity culture beliefs runs deep. A key aspect in preserving purity culture is manipulation, presenting in many different forms in Christian self- help books.

Authority and an At-Risk Population

The citations in Elizabeth Elliot’s book are all from the bible or from religious sources (except one- “The Inevitability of Patriarchy” by Stephen Goldberg, which proves, according to Elliot, that, “‘matriarchal’ societies, it seems that they are legendary. Not a single one has been found” (Elliot 109).) (See Elanor Leacock’s, Joan Huber’s, and Frank B. Livingstone’s reviews of the book- links are available in worlds cited.) While Elliot’s book certainly touts damaging

messages, she does not set up the pretext that she has any more authority than the bible or scripture can lend her.

Dr. Slattery includes in her book a few other citations that are not directly from the bible. The letters “PhD” before her name generate a type of power dynamic between the author and the reader, and citations are likely assumed by readers to be legitimate. The power dynamic leads to a manipulation of readers via citations. It is important to have Christian psychologists, in order to reach Christian clients, and ensure that they feel comfortable. A Christian clinician may have a better understanding of thought patterns of their Christian clients, and may be able to assuage guilt and shame through those understandings. Working with cultural beliefs rather than against them is a key component of helping someone- restructuring negative cognitions often cannot be done while at the same time questioning someone’s cultural understandings. However, Dr. Slattery’s book fails to encourage discussion and facilitate a safe and shame-free space.

In Week one, she cites the study, “A New Generation of Adults Bends Moral and Sexual Rules to Their Liking” conducted by The Barna Group. According to the Barna Group website, “The Barna Group, Ltd. (which includes its research division, The Barna Research Group) is a privately held, for-profit corporation that conducts primary research, produces media resources pertaining to spiritual development, and facilitates the healthy spiritual growth of leaders, children, families and Christian ministries” (www.barna.com). Needless to say, a private, profit-driven corporation may not have the most scientific- driven research practices. Dr. Slattery also cites Pastor Kenny Luck’s article, “The Deadly Deception of Sexual Atheism in the Church.” This article touts the exact message of Dr. Slattery, and makes the same assumptions of the basis of truth. Dr. Slattery seems to lean into the “scientific” backing of her teachings- on page 37, she writes that the crash of JFK Jr. was caused by a pilot trusting his view from the plane rather than

the panel of instruments in front of him. She compares the view out of the window to a woman's thoughts and emotions, and the instrument panel to the word of Christ. She writes, "I want to be an 'instrument rated' Christ follower, not swayed by the chaos of changing culture, but rooted in truths that are unchanging. What about you" (Slattery 37)? According to this analogy, a reader might think that Dr. Slattery believes in science, but only a page previous, she blames Darwin's theory of evolution as the root of a dismantled society. (Slattery 36).

Manipulation through Book Genre

Along with manipulation through content and manipulation through citations, Dr. Slattery's book contains manipulation through the book's very genre. "Sex and the Single Girl" provides individuals or youth groups with a study guide. Slattery's techniques used in "Sex and the Single Girl" reflect her knowledge of psychology. The strategies employed are manipulative, and serve to further entrench an at-risk population (the group that would pick up and read this book in the first place, or be handed a copy at Bible study) into purity culture. At the end of each teaching, Slattery has a section labeled "reflect and respond" in which participants are given a blank space to write their own thoughts to questions such as "Explain in your own words: how is sexuality a metaphor for intimacy with God? For your longing to know Him" (Slattery 24)? And "Today you read 1 Corinthians 6:19-20. If you are going to take this verse to heart, what needs to change" (Slattery 28)? These questions do not encourage any debate on the central issue of whether the teachings are right or wrong. Slattery makes the assumption that the conclusion she draws is correct, and it is the responsibility of the participant to figure out where she is going wrong. On page 27, Slattery provides a table, reproduced below.

LIST 5 PHRASES THAT DESCRIBE YOUR SPIRITUAL IDENTITY: (1 Peter 2:9; 1 Cor. 6:18-20)	LIST 5 WORDS THAT DESCRIBE WHAT YOU BELIEVE ABOUT YOUR SEXUALITY:
Example: I'm a temple of the Holy Spirit.	Example: My body is my own– I can do what I want with it.

Are your spiritual identity and your sexual beliefs consistent or at odds with one another?

The distinction of what a woman should be and where she lacks could not have been made clearer. In the example provided, Dr. Slattery sets up the expectation that the column on the right will likely not reflect the “correct” attitudes on the left. In individual use with this book, the blank slots are likely to encourage women to question their own beliefs about their sexuality as opposed to those supposedly ordained by God. If this chart is used in a group setting, such as a Bible study, women are likely encouraged to share with one another or fill the chart out in front of others, perpetuating shame and the desire to please others as well as the group leader.

Dr. Slattery uses another technique of structural manipulation similar to the blank chart. In sections labeled “pulling it all together,” Dr. Slattery writes,

“Below are key truths you have read about this week that also answer the questions posed at the start of the week. Now is the time to ask yourself, ‘How much have I embraced these truths in my life?’ After each statement, circle the number (1-5) that represents the power of these truths in your life” (Slattery, 31).

Again, the assumption is that the statements that follow are “truths.” One of the “truths” that Dr. Slattery states is, “My sexuality involves more than just having sex. The deeper purpose underneath my sexuality is the drive and desire to be known and loved” (Slattery 32). Dr. Slattery does not encourage discussion as to whether or not these “truths” are indeed true, but rather discussion focuses on how the women measure up. (In this case, through a quantifiable scale.) Just like the blank chart, the numbers from 1-5 below the statements serve as an instrument of shame for participants. The statements are true- how well have *you* accepted them?

In this same vein of structural manipulation, Dr. Slattery encourages participants in the section “The Invitation,” to “Fill in the blanks with your own name, because this truth applies to you” (Slattery 29)! Below, a form reads, “*God demonstrates His own love for _____ in this: while _____ was still a sinner, Christ died for _____!*” One cannot help but draw the connection between this “contract” and those that girls as young as seven will sign with their fathers at Purity Balls. Additionally, this practice “binds” young women to the teachings and conclusions that they come to as a result of this book- making any later rejection all the more traumatic.

Changes in Media Consumption

Though this study focuses on textual analysis of contemporary Christian self-help books, no discussion would be complete without acknowledging the shift that content has made in recent years from print to online media. Instagram Christian influencers Tovares and Safa Grey (@godlydating101) have 717,000 followers, and according to Whitney Bauck’s 2021 article, “hashtags like #christian, #jesus, and #saved — drove more than 169 million engagements in 2020” on the social media platform TikTok. Many of these influencers attended the “Passion”

conference this year, held in Atlanta, Georgia, attracting 55,000 attendees (at a ticket price of \$119 each). The Christian self-help book industry is an important part of the purity movement, but research should be done regarding online outlets.

Recognition of Harm

Textual analysis of medieval courtesy books and contemporary Christian self-help books shows that the main concepts of both genres remain the same. The idea that women are the root of evil, the intermingle of Heavenly Father, Biological Father, and husband, and the view of women as commerce has not altered in the centuries between the two. Women raised in purity culture may struggle with Religious Trauma Syndrome, aspects of which include difficulty trusting oneself, depression and anxiety. Purity Culture beliefs are also positively correlated with Rape Myth Acceptance. While the tenets of certain conservative fundamentalist Christian denominations reflect those found in the Middle Ages, one major aspect has shifted- the recognition and the admittance that purity culture may have harmful effects on women. In the Middle Ages, there was no “outside” of the church. These ideas could not be questioned in any slice of society publicly. Privately, there seems to be no questioning either. Christian de Pizan, in the prologue of her courtesy book, “The Book of the City of Ladies” writes,

“And I finally decided that God formed a vile creature when He made woman, and I wondered how such a worthy artisan could have designed to make such an abominable work which, from what they say, is the vessel as well as the refuge and abode of every evil and vice. As I was thinking this, a great unhappiness and sadness welled up in my heart, for I detested myself and the entire feminine sex...” (de Pisan 2).

If de Pisan is any example of the larger society, women in the Middle Ages suffered and lamented their position. Today, questioning these concepts still may lead to exile from one's friends, family, or the community they have always known. The difference today? There are people outside of the church. Individuals who have guilt and problems that emerge after leaving the church will be acknowledged and helped by others who have done the same, and felt the same.

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