

**PROMOTING SEXUAL PURITY IN A CALL-OUT CULTURE ERA:
ONE PURITY MOVEMENT LEADER’S STRATEGIES IN NAVIGATING CRITIQUES
OF THE #METOO/#CHURCHTOO MOVEMENTS**

by

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ABSTRACT

While a sizable body of research has examined the impact of purity movement rhetoric on its target audience (e.g., Bearman & Brückner, 2001; Brückner & Bearman, 2005; DeRogatis, 2015; di Mauro & Joffe, 2009; Diefendorf, 2015; Doan & Williams, 2008; Freitas, 2008; Gardner, 2011; Gish, 2016; Kieser, 2014; Klein, 2018; Lord, 2010; Manning, 2015; Moslener, 2015; Price, 2011; Regnerus, 2007; Rosenbaum, 2009; Schermer Sellers, 2017; Williams, 2011), to date, no studies have explored purity leaders' responses to critiques of the movement. In this project, I explore communication tactics one purity movement leader uses to respond to criticism of purity movement teachings during the rise of the #MeToo and #ChurchToo movements. Using a multimethod crystallized approach (Ellingson, 2009), I conducted ethnographic participant observation; in-depth, semi-structured interviews; and analyses of blog posts, formal and informal speeches and interviews, social media posts, and several best-selling books. All data were analyzed via an inductive and iterative process, and open and axial coding was employed to identify dominant strategies that Dannah Gresh uses to mitigate criticism (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Results suggest that Gresh exercises a four-part system of strategies (which I call a "Framework of Strategic Curation") to mollify critiques directed toward her role within the movement: (1) curated erudition, (2) curated imperfection, (3) curated moderation, and (4) curated deflection. The findings imply that while Dannah Gresh does respond to critiques, her responses are curated in such a way as to reinforce and bolster the same messages she has promoted for the duration of her ministry and that any content-level changes she makes are largely cosmetic in nature.

DEDICATION

*I dedicate this dissertation
to all the younger versions of myself—
especially those versions who,
being so steeped in the central messages
of evangelical Christian sexual purity thought and teaching,
learned to stifle, belittle, diminish, and extinguish
the inherent, intuitive wisdom within
and, thus,
struggled with chronic internal torment
on the road to understanding self and the surrounding world.
May all of the younger versions of Christine, and those
who are traveling or who have traveled paths like hers,
ease restfully and confidently into the knowledge
that you are worthy as you are,
and that you deserve to actively take up
physical, emotional, spiritual, sexual, and intellectual space.*

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

Evangelical Christian culture is under mounting scrutiny as revelations of sexual impropriety and abuse of power by pastors and lay leaders come to light. Headlines in evangelical Christian publications, as well as in mainstream secular news sources, reveal that heightened awareness and concern created by the October 2017 wave of the #MeToo movement is now erupting within evangelical Christian churches and organizations through the hashtag #ChurchToo (e.g., Andrews, 2018a, 2018b; Burton, 2017; Butler, 2018; Gjelten, 2018; Graham, 2017; Shellnut, 2017, 2018; Smith, 2018; Stetzer, 2018). Whereas the #MeToo movement draws worldwide attention to the ways in which women, primarily, have experienced sexual assault, sexual abuse, and sexual and gender discrimination in largely work-related environments, the #ChurchToo movement criticizes evangelical Christian churches, church-affiliated organizations, and faith leaders for cultivating, excusing, and normalizing misogyny, sexism, and sexual harassment, as well as sexual abuse of, and illegal sexual associations with, minors (Paasch, 2017; Quackenbush, 2017). #ChurchToo hashtags appear in tandem with anecdotal posts on social media, detailing personal stories of physical and emotional harm as a result of church leaders' actions and teachings.

Those who study sexual offenses committed within protestant church contexts note an absence of longitudinal, empirical data documenting the frequency of such occurrences (Denney, Kerley, & Gross, 2018; Hesse, 2019; Johnson, Zurlo, Hickman, & Crossing, 2016). Some suggest this statistical dearth exists because many religious communities have historically handled sex-related incidents internally, thereby failing to generate official reports (e.g., Klein, 2019; Kwateng-Clark, 2017). Because evangelical Christian faith communities are largely self-governed, they have historically underreported incidents of sexual abuse to local law

enforcement, making it difficult to establish just how often such acts occur within protestant church contexts. Historically, researchers examining this topic have relied solely on the findings published in a 2007 Associated Press article in which the prevalence of sexual abuse within protestant religious settings is officially acknowledged. Using documents released by three faith-based insurance companies, the Associated Press reported that between the years of 1987 and 2007, a total of 7095 claims (for an average of 260 per year) were filed, alleging that sexual abuse had been experienced at the hands of clergy, church staff, congregation members, and/or volunteers (Denney et al., 2018). More recently, a February 10, 2019, joint investigation by *The Houston Chronicle* and *The San Antonio Express-News* revealed that within the Southern Baptist denomination, since 1998, “roughly 380 Southern Baptist church leaders and volunteers have faced allegations of sexual misconduct...leaving behind more than 700 victims” (Downen, Olsen, & Tedesco, 2019). Aside from these news pieces, however, little-to-no empirical data establishes just how pervasive or wide-spread incidents of sexual assault and harassment are within church settings.

The Genesis of #ChurchToo

Perhaps this lack of data accounts, in part, for why the #ChurchToo hashtag seems to be striking such a resonant chord and continuing to reverberate. #ChurchToo offers not only a searchable term by which to organize and tally allegations of sexual impropriety within church-related contexts, but it also makes clear that no corner of modern society is untouched by sexual scandals that contribute to the devaluation of another’s worth and dignity—not even those corners often presumed to be the safest of all. In the words of Emily Joy Allison-Hearn, “#ChurchToo proves that there is a problem with sexual abuse in the church,” and it demands

that evangelical Christian ideologies and theologies be critiqued, interrogated, and reformed in order to cultivate healthier teachings and attitudes about sex and sexuality (Chastain, 2017).

When #ChurchToo co-founders Hannah Paasch and Emily Joy Allison-Hearn first used the hashtag on Twitter, they were not seeking to start a viral movement. Allison-Hearn recounts how several weeks after actress Alyssa Milano first tweeted the hashtag #MeToo in October of 2017 (tapping into a ten-year-long “me too” conversation initiated in 2006 by black activist Tarana Burke), starting an avalanche of “allegation after allegation [surfacing] against powerful men in Washington and Hollywood,” she found herself empowered to go public with her story of sexual abuse at church (Chastain, 2017; Paasch, 2017). On the evening of November 20, 2017, through a series of tweets, she recounted how when she was 16 years old, her then 30-something church youth leader began to pursue a secretive romantic relationship with her. In telling the story of how she was groomed and manipulated, Allison-Hearn named her abuser as well as the church where the events unfolded (Paasch, 2017). Within several hours, Allison-Hearn and Paasch observed that people outside their tight-knit community of Twitter friends were responding with stories detailing similar experiences. They soon realized they had something big on their hands. The two debated how to best validate, organize, and invite responses. After some deliberation, they settled on #ChurchToo, an obvious play on #MeToo. In the early-morning hours of November 21, 2017, Paasch retweeted Allison-Hearn’s original tweets of condemnation, issued a call-to-action, and for the first time, the #ChurchToo hashtag was used in the Twittersphere: “As @emilyjoypoetry puts it, a day of reckoning is coming for the church, as it is with Washington & Hollywood. Share your story on #churchtoo.”

The next morning, Paasch and Allison-Hearn awoke to find that #ChurchToo had gone viral. Worldwide, women and men were sharing their own stories of experiencing sexual abuse

in churches, “particularly in evangelical houses of worship” (Andrews, 2018a). Within 24 hours, #ChurchToo became the subject of an online *TIME Magazine* article (Quakenbush, 2017).

Almost immediately, other mainstream news outlets (including *Teen Vogue* and *FOX News*) followed suit, though it would take a full week before *Christianity Today* (known as evangelical Christianity’s “flagship magazine”) would even mention the #ChurchToo phenomenon (Quakenbush, 2017; Rearick, 2017). By mid-spring of 2018, #ChurchToo was credited with the exposure and ousting of numerous prominent evangelical church leaders for their roles as perpetrators, facilitators, or apologists of sexual abuse (e.g., Andy Savage, Bill Gothard, Bill Hybels, and Paige Patterson, to name just a few). In the words of *Mother Jones* Assistant News Editor Becca Andrews (2018a):

#ChurchToo has opened the floodgates...[and has] created a virtual place for a conversation about sexual abuse in the church...on a scale that’s larger and more open than anything we’ve seen in religious spaces since the pedophilia scandal in the Catholic Church in the 1990s and early 2000s.

But the formation of a church-focused, call-out movement in which perpetrators and organizations are named publicly, and then held accountable, is only part of the co-creators’ goal. According to Paasch, she and Allison-Hearn hope #ChurchToo is a forum for healing. Much like Tarana Burke reminds #MeToo advocates that the goal of the movement she founded is to help “survivors on their journey to healing” (Gabbara, 2018), the #ChurchToo hashtag is intended to serve as a virtual space “where survivors are heard, believed, seen and surrounded” (Paasch, 2017). To be certain, #ChurchToo calls for an end to practices that erase and camouflage abuses occurring in sacred places. However, if one spends any length of time studying Allison-Hearn and Paasch’s social media accounts, the subject matter of their speaking

engagements, their published writings, and the transcripts of their media interviews, it quickly becomes clear that they seek to expose something else—something they consider to be the underlying issue at the core of the #ChurchToo movement. This “something,” Allison-Hearn and Paasch believe, creates an atmosphere in which sexual abuse, sexual assault, and sexual harassment flourish in evangelical churches. This phenomenon is “purity culture.”

Purity Culture

For Paasch (2017), the eruption of the #ChurchToo movement is a “culmination of years of speaking out against and unlearning the strictures of evangelical purity culture.” Allison-Hearn explains that purity culture is “essentially the sexual education (or really lack thereof within the [evangelical] church) that promotes abstinence...cuts out any other kind of sexual education, and says that sex has to exist within heterosexual marriage only” (Chastain, 2017). Rice (Doug, 2018) notes that it can be extremely difficult to comprehend what purity culture is unless one has spent time steeped within it. To assist those attempting to understand the concept, Weddle Irons and Springer Mock (2015) describe purity culture as “a large and imposing structure that has helped shape the evangelical conversation about sex and sexuality, and has also helped shape the ways many are led to think about their bodies” (p. 88).

The term “purity culture” is used as a sense-making device in that it is used as a means to talk about the phenomenon from outside of the phenomenon—by those who are not participating members within the culture. Allison-Hearn (Doug, 2018) clarifies this notion, saying that purity culture can be explained as a religious corollary to rape culture. Whereas rape culture is a sociological concept used to identify and discuss societal norms, attitudes, behaviors, and practices (like victim blaming, slut shaming, and rape denial and trivialization) that contribute to settings in which rape is pervasive and normalized (Attenborough, 2014; Herman, 1994), purity

culture is a term used to identify and discuss norms, attitudes, behaviors, and practices (like strict gender roles, modest attire, and complete sexual abstinence until heterosexual marriage) that contribute to religious contexts in which sexual traumas are compounded through dismissing, covering up, and excusing inappropriate sexual behavior (Allison-Hearn, 2016; Doug, 2018). The “No Shame Movement” (n.d.), an online platform established in 2013 as a space “for sharing stories [about] leaving behind conservative Christian beliefs about sexuality,” offers this insight about purity culture:

Those within purity culture must adhere to a strict heteronormative lifestyle that forbids most physical contact with significant others, as well as engaging in self pleasure or holding lustful thoughts about another person that is not a spouse. This view is generally enforced and policed by the family and church community.

Offering what is likely the most comprehensive definition of purity culture, Allison-Hearn (2016) describes it as an interconnected web in which: (1) everyone exists by God’s design as either male or female within a rigid gender role binary, (2) complete abstinence from all sexual activity until legal heterosexual marriage is God’s plan, (3) if it is not in God’s design for you to marry, you are to remain sexually chaste until you die, (4) if you do not remain sexually abstinent, you can expect to encounter a number of issues that will render your life and your personhood as broken and damaged, (5) women and girls must dress modestly in order to keep men and boys from lusting after them, (6) women are not designed for preeminent leadership within the church, and (7) women are to defer all of life’s major decisions to “godly” men in an obedient spirit of submission.

Andrews (2018a) notes that purity culture is “a product of the way sexual purity and traditional gender roles are asserted in Christian circles.” Allison-Hearn (Doug, 2018) identifies

and explains how the concepts of sexual purity and traditional gender roles are conveyed within those circles: “Mandatory abstinence before heterosexual marriage—or else.” She expands her three-part definition in the following way: *Abstinence* means refraining from sexual intercourse and sexual activity of all kinds, including private self-pleasure or masturbation. Some who teach and promote purity-focused messages allow for pre-marital kissing; others do not. Likewise, some teach that physical touch along the lines of handholding is appropriate, while others warn that absolutely no physical contact should be experienced until after marriage. *Marriage* is defined narrowly and conservatively. Allison-Hearn (Doug, 2018) notes that, from an evangelical Christian sexual purity perspective, marriage is only marriage if it is legally recognized, meaning that the purity paradigm, on the whole, excludes participation from those who would consider themselves anything other than potential candidates for a marriage between cisgendered, heterosexual individuals. The *or else* is the notion that if one does not abstain from sexual activity, bad things will happen. The continuum of bad things could be at worst damnation to hell; at best ending up in a bad marriage. “Whatever it is,” Allison-Hearn asserts, “it will be bad” (Doug, 2018).

The Sexual Purity Movement

The concept of sexual purity is inculcated and advanced through various organizations and efforts that make up what is commonly referred to as the “sexual purity movement.” For well over 30 years, Christian leaders and organizations have attempted to combat a culture of what they purport to be sexually permissive messages through a variety of measures including faith-based abstinence-focused programming in churches, as well as working at the political level to implant abstinence-only education within American school systems (Carpenter, 2005; Doan & Williams, 2008; Moslener, 2015). While these initiatives fall under the umbrella of “the

sexual purity movement,” sometimes interchangeable terms are used. Faith-based initiatives may be identified as part of “the virginity movement,” “the purity pledge movement,” “the sexual modesty movement,” “the chastity movement,” “the sexual morality movement,” or “the sexual integrity movement.” “Abstinence-only sex education” as a label persists as well, but synonymous terms include: “abstinence-centered education,” “abstinence-only-until-marriage education,” “sexual risk avoidance education,” or “youth empowerment sex education.” Additional abstinence-focused enterprises that sit squarely within the realm of the sexual purity movement include: the Quiverfull Movement, the Stay-at-Home Daughter Movement, the Patriarchy Movement, and the Christian Courtship Movement. While there is a continuum on which these efforts lie and how they are taught, sexual purity movement initiatives, on the whole, promote repudiation of a hyper-sexualized culture by endorsing abstinence before marriage for all unmarried people and by negatively framing premarital sex, birth control, abortion, and lesbian, gay, and bisexual relationships (Williams, 2011). Within this system, sexual chastity, abstinence, and modest dress are viewed as means of securing moral standing and, as such, they serve as a form of symbolic and social capital (Kieser, 2014).

Political scientist Jean Calterone Williams (2011) asserts that the political stakes of evangelical Christianity in this movement “cannot be overstated” (p. 428) and religious studies scholar Amy DeRogatis (2015) refers to the sales of books, event tickets, pledge curricula, purity rings, branded workshops, weekend retreats, and clothing as a part of a “purity industry” (p. 42). Though it is nearly impossible to determine an exact number of ministries, initiatives, and resources that are devoted to promoting abstinence until marriage, one need only scroll through the results of a basic online search for the term “sexual purity” to recognize that the topic has significant currency and prominence. A cursory Google search in April of 2019 yielded well

over 25 million hits, and an Amazon.com book search generated a list of nearly 500 titles. Those promoting sexual purity ideals have relied on various rationales to justify the need and urgency for encouraging abstinence-only-until-marriage practices. Over the years, champions of sexual purity programming have justified their efforts by citing social ills such as: AIDS, sexually transmitted diseases, and other associated health problems (Barber & Machado, 2015; Doan & Williams, 2008); out-of-wedlock pregnancy, teen pregnancy, and abortion (di Mauro & Joffe, 2009); one-parent households (Dowland, 2017); teen depression (Gresh, 2017b); and sex trafficking, the use of children in pornography, and children accessing pornographic materials (Diefendorf, 2015; McKeegan, 1992).

Critiques of the Sexual Purity Movement

To say that the sexual purity movement is controversial is an understatement. Myriad scholars, journalists, medical and mental health professionals, former movement participants, armchair philosopher bloggers, and even pastors and theologians express concern about the potentially harmful physical and psychological consequences that can result from participation in faith-based sexual purity initiatives (e.g., Beaty, 2013; Brown, 2017; Burgess, 2018; Burmeister, 2018; di Mauro & Joffe, 2009; Doan & Williams, 2008; Easter, 2016; Evans, 2013; Gregoire, 2016; Hobbs, 2017; Khazan, 2016; Kieser, 2014; Lemke, 2017; Martino, Elliott, Collins, Kanouse, & Berry, 2008; Paik, Sanchagrin, & Heimer, 2016; Poupard, 2016; Robb, 2009; Rosenbaum, 2009; Santelli, 2017; Schermer Sellers, 2017; Valenti, 2009, to name just a few). Those who study the impact and implications of the movement contend that sexual purity teachings disparage single parenthood (Solinger, 2000); stigmatize children born outside of marriage (Odem, 1995); endorse unhealthy power dynamics by promoting restrictive and antiquated gender stereotypes (Lord, 2010); dehumanize those who identify as lesbian, gay,

bisexual, transgender, and/or queer (Charlton, 2013); support racist practices and ideologies (Barber & Machado, 2015; Moslener, 2015); decrease the use of measures to protect against pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections and diseases (Brückner & Bearman, 2005); encourage young evangelical Christians to constantly think and talk about sex (DeRogatis, 2015); cultivate long-lasting shame issues related to sexual desires (Bolz-Weber, 2019; Klein, 2018); and promise what, in fact, cannot be guaranteed—a healthy marriage, a committed spouse, and a robust and satisfying sex life (Gardner, 2011). Allison-Hearn, citing observations in a now-deleted succession of tweets written by Rachel Virginia,¹ highlights ways in which purity culture is racially coded:

There are definite racist undertones to purity culture...The ideal woman does not just have a gentle and quiet spirit, she's also this...submissive, small, white, middle-class [person]...If you even just look at the pictures in modesty books, you get the sense that there is only one specific kind of woman that is "correct." [So] ultimately we are talking about a system that prioritizes men over [and] against women and fem identifying people, that prioritizes adults over children, that prioritizes white folks over black folks, that prioritizes people with privilege over people with less privilege. We're talking about power dynamics that make abuse ripe to be harvested. (Chastain, 2017)

The "No Shame Movement" (n.d.) website adds these critiques of abstinence-driven purity culture:

Many people don't hold marriage as their goal; many people are legally barred from getting married, or are unable to do so for financial reasons; [purity culture] is based on a

¹ Rachel Virginia is a North Carolina-based author whose works focus on religion, spirituality, identity, culture, and politics (Bullard, 2018; Generous Pine, 2019).

narrow definition of the Bible that the authors assume everyone holds; and it is simply a choice that is unsustainable for many people. The biggest problem with this is that the general assumption is that people are incapable of making healthy decisions on their own, and need blanket rules for what they should and shouldn't do with their own bodies.

Yet despite the mounting evidence that purity teachings are, at best, limited in their effectiveness and, at worst, filled with a history of and continued potential for significant harm, the faith-based sexual purity movement not only persists, it flourishes.

As the dates on many of the heretofore cited sources indicate, critiques and activism aimed at dismantling purity culture did not suddenly emerge because of the #MeToo and #ChurchToo movements. Paasch notes in a December 2017 interview with Blake Chastain of the #Exvangelical podcast (“#ChurchToo with Hannah Paasch and Emily Joy”) that accusations, concerns, and attempts to discuss the harms of purity are not new: “These are topics I’ve been talking about for a decade.” During the April 2018 keynote speech at the “After Purity: Faith and Sexuality Beyond the Boundaries” conference in Hiram, Ohio, Allison-Hearn agreed, claiming that people have been attempting to draw attention to abusers for years: “It’s not like this conversation hasn’t been occurring before. Prior to naming abusers online, people have been attempting to call [them out]. People have been trying for a long time...but no one seemed to be listening” (Doug, 2018).

Scope of this Dissertation Study

However, some purity movement leaders have, in fact, been listening. Indeed, evidence suggests that several purity movement leaders are aware of critiques of the movement and that they are considering the claims of those who say they have been harmed by purity culture’s teachings. This is illustrated in the titles of some purity leaders’ blog posts (e.g., “Why ‘I Kissed

Dating Goodbye’ Didn’t Ruin Our Lives,” *Girl Defined*, 2016), it is demonstrated in the content of some of their publicly delivered speeches and interviews (e.g., “The truth about sexuality with guests Nancy DeMoss Wolgemuth and Dannah Gresh,” Basham, 2018b), and in the case of one now-reluctant, yet nonetheless mega-star purity leader (Joshua Harris), it has manifest in (1) a speaking circuit and a documentary in which the thoughts of detractors and supporters are chronicled and considered (Van Der Wyngaard & Russell-Jones, 2018) and (2) a decision to cease publication of three best-selling books advocating the practice of Christian courtship² (Joshua Harris, 2019).

Nevertheless, those involved in calling out the purity movement and its leaders are dubious. In fact, ten years ago, feminist writer and journalist Jessica Valenti (2009) observed a shift and a restructuring within the abstinence movement, noting that “abstinence organizations are...getting organized. Well aware that their cause is in trouble and unpopular, purity proponents are revamping their image to appear more mainstream.” Indeed, the current images, language, and ground rules of the purity movement appear to be evolving away from the style employed in the 1980s and 1990s. The leaders, and their organizations, tend to be less overt in their promotion of rigid black and white, right and wrong rules; in fact, they are even more nuanced in how they define and discuss the term purity, and they most certainly are more mainstream in appearance than ever before.

² In October of 2018, following the official release of the documentary *I Survived I Kissed Dating Goodbye* (Van Der Wyngaard & Russell-Jones, 2018), Joshua Harris issued a formal statement indicating that he would discontinue publication of three books focused on Christian courtship because he had come to view the books as flawed for emphasizing concepts (e.g., not dating, not kissing, and the promise of “a happy ever-after ending—a great marriage, a great sex life”) “that are not in the Bible” (Joshua Harris, 2019). The discontinued books include: *I Kissed Dating Goodbye: A New Attitude Toward Relationships and Romance* (Harris, 1997), *Boy Meets Girl: Say Hello to Courtship* (Harris, 2000), and *Sex is Not the Problem (Lust is): Sexual Purity in a Lust-Saturated World* (Harris, 2003).

Allison-Hearn calls these shifts in the purity culture a “softening” (Doug, 2018). But she asserts that underneath it all, there remain inherent harmful messages that are not being acknowledged, addressed, changed, and/or eliminated. In essence, the allegation is that even though somewhat of a sympathetic re-branding and re-packaging effort has emerged, ultimately purity movement leaders continue to reinforce and re-articulate many, if not most, of the same purity messages that were first emerging nearly 30 years ago.

Valenti and Allison-Hearn’s claims may well be true; however, there is exceptionally little evidence to substantiate them. Additionally, popular literature and academic writing all but ignore how purity movement leaders have responded to critiques launched against the movement as a whole, as well as against their particular roles in the movement—especially the period out of which #MeToo and #ChurchToo were born. Thus, it is the communication climate in which #MeToo and #ChurchToo have emerged with which I, as a communication scholar and a former purity movement participant, am concerned. As these two hashtag movements continue to gain momentum, and as critiques of evangelical Christian purity culture continue to mount, leaders of the purity movement are facing public scrutiny like never before. The emerging practice of publicly calling out offenders, as well as those whose actions directly or indirectly support them, offers an opportune setting within which to observe and study sexual purity movement leaders as they navigate a groundswell of critique. For me, questions emerge about leaders’ attempts to shore up the perceived legitimacy of the movement: How are leaders responding? What does their communication look like during this time when their central messages face condemning criticism? Do they dig in their heels and remain unwaveringly committed to their cause? Do they capitulate? If so, how do they maintain credibility with their followers? What kinds of rhetorical calisthenics do they employ? Questions such as these provided the impetus for my dissertation

study and guided me toward the specific subject of interest whose purity literature and programming I analyzed for this research endeavor: Dannah Gresh and her organization “Pure Freedom Ministries.”

Dannah Gresh and Pure Freedom Ministries. Dannah Gresh is a bestselling author who has written nearly 30 books that encourage “modesty, purity, and sexual wholeness” (DeMoss & Gresh, 2008, back cover). She refers to herself as a mother-daughter relationship coach who believes a strong parent-child bond is essential if girls are going to embrace a life of sexual purity. Many of Gresh’s publications, speeches, and branded events focus on promoting the importance of the mother-daughter bond, as well as offering suggestions for nurturing it. For instance, a number of her books and blog posts consist of ideas for mother-daughter date activities, including sharing thoughts on Bible passages, shopping, and baking. Her “Mom Moments” (60-second podcasts which are housed on her YouTube channel and website and are aired on over 100 Christian radio stations across the United States) are touted as being “full of Biblical truth, wisdom, and practical parenting advice” (Dannah Gresh, 2019a). Pure Freedom Ministries, co-founded by Dannah and her husband Bob, is the umbrella organization under which these and other resources are produced. While Bob Gresh is intimately involved with the efforts of Pure Freedom Ministries, it is Dannah who is the “front person” for the organization. The banner of their website gives evidence of Dannah’s central role with its clarifying text heralding: “Dannah Gresh’s home for connecting moms and daughters” (Pure Freedom, 2018c).

The most popular resource that is produced and managed by Pure Freedom Ministries is Secret Keeper Girl. A compendium of branded products and events (books, study guides, online Bible studies, etc.) revolves around the Secret Keeper Girl World Tour, which was developed after Dannah Gresh wrote and published *Secret Keeper: The Delicate Power of Modesty* in 2002

and began hosting Bible studies focused on the book's contents. The tour in its current iteration³ is a two-and-a-half hour long, high-energy, concert-style event (peppered with skits and audience participation) and is promoted as a place to learn "How to Become a Better Mom in 2½ hours" (Gresh, 2017b) by "[learning] the secrets of modesty and true beauty, [connecting] with your daughter [by] digging into God's word...[and discovering] that you are a masterpiece created by God, and [that] every masterpiece must be protected" (Secret Keeper Girl, 2018a). Since 2009, Dannah Gresh's live event for tween girls and their mothers has been held over 600 times, with an overall attendance totaling more than 356,000 (National Religious Broadcasters, 2019). In fall of 2017, Pure Freedom Ministries debuted a touring event for fathers and sons, The Born to Be Brave Tour, created by Bob and Dannah Gresh (and headlined by Bob). The husband-wife team also lead a four-day event called the Pure Freedom Master Class during which Dannah and Bob teach attendees about "sexual theology," explaining their "biblically based views" on "the purposes of sexuality [and] the boundaries of sexual expression...in the age of a Gender Revolution" (Pure Freedom, 2018b). Promotional materials for the Pure Freedom Master Class bill the event as an opportunity to be mentored by the Gresh pair:

Are you eager to impact the formation of sexual values in your own community? Are you in a place of influence to help others heal from sexual pain? Are you convicted that the Bible is the authority for sexual values and activity? If so, we would love for you to join us...Our Pure Freedom Master Class is not just a conference, workshop, or set of educational opportunities but an organic networking experience for leaders interested in learning more about sexual theology and sexual healing...We seek to accelerate the

³ The 2018-2019 Secret Keeper Tour event is dubbed the "Masterpiece World Tour." In years past, the event has traveled under various labels including "The Purple Party Tour" and "The Crazy Hair Tour."

sexual theology, teaching, coaching and healing capabilities of leaders through collaboration and education. We'll mentor you through the tough topics that you're facing in your churches, classrooms, and ministries. (Dannah Gresh, 2019b)

Project Rationale and Preview of Study

My goal in this dissertation project was to make sense of how a high-impact purity movement leader responds to critiques—critiques of the movement and critiques of her ministry—at a time when the role of the purity movement in evangelical Christianity is experiencing unparalleled attention and scrutiny. I employed a multimethod approach comprised of ethnographic participant observation, in-depth, semi-structured interviews, and analyses (of blog posts, formal and informal speeches, social media posts, and several best-selling books). After a back-and-forth Facebook messenger conversation with Bob Gresh (from April 30, 2018 to May 7, 2018), a phone call with Dannah Gresh (on May 7, 2018), and after submitting a formal application for their review, I gained permission to attend the June 14-17, 2018, Pure Freedom Master Class held in State College, Pennsylvania. In early June of 2018, the ethnographic and interview components of this project received Institutional Review Board approval, and on June 15, 2018, Dannah Gresh, Bob Gresh, and their Secret Keeper Girl brand manager each signed informed consent statements confirming their agreement to be interviewed for this project. My interview questions, subsequent discussions, and field notes all focused on the critiques they and their ministry efforts have encountered both before and in the wake of the #MeToo and #ChurchToo movements. Additionally, from September 28-30, 2018, I attended the True Woman Movement 2018 Conference via livestream, where Dannah Gresh served as a panel facilitator, an emcee, and a mainstage keynote speaker. Further, on November 4, 2018, I attended Dannah Gresh's Secret Keeper Girl Masterpiece World Tour event at Countryside Christian

Church in Wichita, Kansas. Because of the exploratory nature of this project, I used inductive and iterative techniques to analyze data via open and axial coding. This allowed me to observe reoccurring and patterned themes that emerged from the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

My aim for this project was three-fold: First, I aspired to expand the body of scholarly literature examining evangelical sexual purity mindsets, teachings, and practices. Most, if not all, of the existing literature is focused on purity practices that were in vogue when the movement first emerged: purity pledges, father-daughter purity balls, and other acts in which an official intention of sexual abstinence is promised, documented, and ritualized. Current research examining purity movement practices all but ignores contemporary efforts. Thus, I sought to address this gap in the scholarship. As a part of my aim to contribute to scholarly understanding of current, more mainstream manifestations of the sexual purity movement, I specifically aimed to expand communication-focused scholarship devoted to this topic. As I identify in Chapter 3 of this dissertation, of the scholarship I surveyed for my literature review, only two scholars approach this subject using communication perspectives (Gardner, 2011; Manning, 2015). Through my project, then, I aspired to partially fill that void and to identify additional ways in which communication scholarship might be applied in future scholarly undertakings. Second, I aimed to contribute to a theoretical understanding of strategies that are employed in faith-based, crisis-driven responses to critique and criticism. In this particular project, I highlighted the ways such responses can simultaneously challenge critics, reassure a committed base, and set the stage for currying favor with those who may straddle the line. Moreover, I examined how the strategic use of language can be muddied in such a way that those who adhere to radically different philosophical and theological worldviews have the potential to find certain messages (as well as

the accompanying merchandise and worldview) not only palatable, but also desirable. The goal of any study is, of course, to gain understanding about a particular phenomenon. It is my third, and ultimate, hope that this dissertation project makes clear how messages embedded within a phenomenon that at the outset may appear healthy, empowering, and benign can simultaneously reinforce antiquated efforts to control women's ambitions, autonomy, agency, and bodies while exploiting target audience members' desires for security, health, well-being, and belonging.

Chapter Summary

In the present chapter, I have provided an overview of the contemporary context in which purity culture is being critiqued and questioned. In the following chapter (Chapter 2), I use scholarly insights written about the purity movement to situate my own experiences within purity culture. I explain factors that drew me to my topic, as well as factors that have shaped my desire to more fully understand why and how purity culture persists. Using reflective, autoethnographic accounts of my own experiences with evangelical culture, with the policing of sexual activity, and with purity culture, I situate my dissertation work as somewhat of a personal odyssey—one that reacquaints me with a topic in which I was once immersed as a believer and an adherent-practitioner. I narratively frame several stages from early in my life to make sense of how my understanding of sexual purity and purity culture has shifted and changed. In Chapter 3, I build on this understanding by providing an overview of evangelical Christianity and by identifying and explaining two specific topics pertinent to evangelicalism that emerge as central themes in the scholarly literature that investigates purity culture: (1) muscular Christianity and (2) biblical womanhood.

In Chapter 4, I describe the methods used to collect and to analyze my data—a multimethod crystallized approach (Ellingson, 2009) comprised of ethnographic participant

observation, in-depth, semi-structured interviews, and analyses (of blog posts, formal and informal speeches, social media posts, and several best-selling books). I provide an overview of these methods and I explain how they assisted me in examining the communicative strategies employed by Dannah Gresh and her Pure Freedom Ministries. At the close of Chapter 4, I describe how a grounded practical theory approach helped me make sense of my observations and my findings.

In Chapter 5, I detail my results and I identify a system of strategies, which I call a “Framework of Strategic Curation,” that Dannah Gresh uses to mitigate criticism aimed at her purity-focused efforts. Finally, in the concluding chapter (Chapter 6), I discuss how the findings of the previous chapter complement, challenge, and extend the scholarly conversation about evangelical sexual purity culture and the evangelical Christian sexual purity movement. I explore potential theoretical and practical implications of the study’s findings, of its limitations, and of its conclusions.

CHAPTER 2: AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC CONTEXT AND LITERATURE REVIEW

I came of age in the early-to-mid 1990s, just as the evangelical sexual purity movement was launching itself with force into conservative Christian youth culture in America. The year I graduated from high school (1991), Richard and Reneé Durfield initiated a trend referred to as a “virginity pledge,” an oath made by young people who profess to God and to witnesses that they will not participate in any form of sexual activity until they are married (Gish, 2016). In the Durfields’ (1991) book, *Raising Them Chaste: A Practical Strategy for Helping Your Teen Wait Till Marriage*, they counsel parents to present their teenage children with a key ring during “the sex talk.” The key ring is meant to symbolize a child’s promise to remain sexually abstinent until marriage, and it is to be given as a gift to one’s spouse as a part of their wedding day ceremony or festivities (Balswick & Balswick, 2008). Building on the Durfield’s (1991) purity pledge concept, a number of organizations, campaigns, and programs emerged with their own spin on the notion of promising or pledging to remain chaste until marriage. Two efforts that achieved a cult-like status include “True Love Waits” and the “Silver Ring Thing.”

In the fall of 1992, Richard Ross proposed a Christian sex education campaign concept to the management of LifeWay Christian Resources, a nonprofit company affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention, described as “one of the world’s largest providers of Christian resources” (LifeWay Christian Resources, 2019). Ross, and his friend Jimmy Hester, justified the need for a faith-focused, abstinence-education curriculum pointing to several factors they believed were contributing to “a culture of promiscuity” among America’s youth. Such factors included reports from teenagers saying they believed adults expected them to be sexually active (Gardner, 2011) and a statement by the United States Surgeon General claiming that the “American teenager is incapable of controlling his or her sexual behavior” (Barber & Machado,

2015). Almost immediately after hearing Ross and Hester's pitch, LifeWay began publishing the True Love Waits curriculum.

Several months later, the True Love Waits pledge concept was demonstrated for the first time during a commitment ceremony that was held before an assembly of pastors at the 1993 Southern Baptist Convention in Houston, Texas. At the event, 300 teenagers signed commitment cards after reciting the following words aloud: "Believing that true love waits, I make a commitment to God, myself, my family, my friends, my future mate and my future children to be sexually abstinent from this day until the day I enter a biblical marriage relationship" (Carpenter, 2005). Integral to the True Love Waits program is the belief that refraining from "sexual intercourse," "oral sex," "sexual touching," and "pictures that feed sexual thoughts" will all but guarantee a rich, satisfying, and long-lasting future marital relationship (Robb, 2009, p. 2).

Though much of the 1990s-era True Love Waits merchandise remains available for purchase on the LifeWay website, the campaign has been rebranded under the label of "Authentic Love." The current (2019) True Love Waits website front page states:

Following in the line of True Love Waits resources, *Authentic Love* continues in this legacy of helping students understand issues pertaining to sex and purity through the lens of Scripture. Every day we are invited into a world where we can create, customize, and even change our identity. We become consumers in a culture that tells us we can have whatever we want whenever we want it. Speaking directly to the hearts of guys and girls, *Authentic Love: Christ, Culture, and the Pursuit of Purity* exposes culture's distorted messages about purity and love and reveals how God has created us for a lifestyle of personal holiness. (True Love Waits, 2019)

In 1996, Denny Pattyn and his wife Amy, founded the Silver Ring Thing based on a wide-spread concern that incidents of teen pregnancy were on the rise. Proponents of Silver Ring Thing contend that complete abstinence from sexual activity until heterosexual marriage is the sole method for maintaining physical and emotional health (Williams, 2011). The Silver Ring Thing teaches this abstinence-focused message through a high-impact, multi-media stage performance. The Silver Ring Thing website uses the following descriptors for its two-hour stage event: “high energy music, videos, skits, special effects, and comedy delivered in a concert-style approach with which teenagers can respond and relate,” youth are challenged to “live bold and set apart from the celebration of immorality all around us,” to defy “the meet-up, hook-up, break-up mindset of today,” to be inspired “to a pure life centered in Jesus Christ...going way beyond a call to abstinence” (Silver Ring Thing, 2018b). According to rhetorical communication scholar Christine J. Gardner (2011), Silver Ring Thing events are “part rave, part *Saturday Night Live*, and part Saturday night revival” (p. 8). The 2018-2019 Silver Ring Thing “Unaltered Tour” features one dozen 20-something mainstage performers at events that are scheduled on an invitation-only basis throughout the contiguous United States. According to the Silver Ring Thing website, the Unaltered Tour “defines the original purpose of love, sex and life and inspires teens to live with integrity and influence” (Silver Ring Thing, 2018a). Lawyer and professor of women’s and gender studies, J. Shoshanna Ehrlich (2006), explains that during the event, teenagers take a vow, receive a Bible, and place a ring on their left ring finger to symbolize their commitment to abstinence until they enter a marriage covenant (p. 180). Through her observational research, Williams (2011) finds that, at Silver Ring Thing events, attendees can even opt to hear appeals encouraging them to vote “for legislators who support abstinence education” (p. 429).

Though I was not familiar with the names of these purity movement events or curricula, at the time of their founding and initial implementation, I was an active participant in the culture to which their initiatives and teachings contributed. Despite my lack of awareness of these names and efforts, I internalized a “sexual purity moral code” at a fairly young age. I established myself early on as a “good girl” in my small-town Kansas community. During junior high and high school, I was known for not swearing, not drinking alcohol, and not going to parties. In fact, on nights out with my friends, it was always assumed that right before the partying and drinking began, I would be dropped off at home where my mother would be perched on the couch, waiting just inside the front door and requiring a full report of the goings-on of the evening. My mother kept a very close eye on my wardrobe and insisted it be “tasteful, classy, and timeless.” This meant any clothes I might wear should amply cover cleavage and should not hug or reveal my developing curves in ways that might be perceived as intentionally or unintentionally sexually provocative. If an item of clothing made it through her stringent tests, but still drew attention from boys, I self-censored and eliminated the offensive article of clothing that drew too much attention to my body and sent the “wrong” message. Rarely was I allowed to spend time alone with someone of the “opposite sex.” If I wanted to spend time with a boy, it was important that it happen under adult supervision or in the public presence and watchful eye of others. Hence, most of my high school dating experiences occurred in the form of double dates or at functions where numerous people were in attendance (e.g., a school athletic event or a church youth group meeting). Finding a “good Christian husband” was a goal worthy of pursuit, as was remaining a virgin until my wedding night.

These aspirations, convictions, and practices were inculcated through the teachings of those responsible for my spiritual formation (e.g., pastors, youth pastors, church friends, youth

groups, church camps, mentors, family members, and a restrictive diet of Christian magazines and romance novels). Of course, on the road to remaining sexually chaste, I developed emotionally and physically, and I naturally found myself experiencing normal sexual impulses. I did what I could to attempt to quell them.

The Purity Box

When I was 16, I drove 70 miles to the nearest Hobby Lobby, purchased a small, octagonal wooden box, painted it white with an overlay of clear sparkle paint, and used a glue gun to affix white roses, fake pearls, and lace to the tops and sides. When my glue and paint creation dried, I was pleased that it looked exactly as I had envisioned—like the traditional wedding dresses I had seen at the ceremonies of numerous family members and friends. I opened a large bag of clear glass marbles and placed them in a clear glass jar. For the next two years, my “purity box” and the marble jar occupied a prominent spot on the dresser in my bedroom. Anytime I sensed or knew that someone wanted to have sex with me, or outright asked to have sex with me, I said, “No,” and plunked a marble in my box. My plan was to give the box and the accompanying jar with the remaining clear glass marbles to my future husband, showing him metaphorical (and, of course, unverifiable) evidence of how I had waited to have sex and had saved my virginity for him. While I did not recite an oath, or sign a pledge, my purity box and jar of marbles were clearly a form of a virginity promise.

Historian Hanne Blank (2007) estimates that over 80 religious denominations or organizations have used a modified virginity pledge as an attempt to encourage sexual abstinence until marriage. In fact, the virginity pledge concept became so common that some public schools began using the pledge portion of “Sex Respect,” an abstinence curriculum developed for Catholic trainings, seminars, retreats, and schools (Jackson, 2006). The “Sex Respect” virginity

pledge reads:

I, [the undersigned], promise to abstain from sex until my wedding night. I want to reserve my sexual powers to give life and love for my future spouse and marriage. I will respect my gift of sexuality by keeping my mind and thoughts pure as I prepare for my true love. I commit to grow in character to learn to live in love and freedom. (Blank, 2007, pp. 246-247)

In 2008, Martino et al. estimated that, in the United States, one in six Americans between the ages of 12 and 28 had taken a purity pledge. Brewster, Valle, and Harker Tillman (2013) note that the 2006-2010 National Survey of Family Growth revealed that 12 percent of female respondents and seven percent of male respondents under the age of 25 “reported pledging to remain a virgin until marriage.” In their attempt to approximate the number of people who have made purity pledges over the years, Bearman and Brückner (2001) learned that “movement organizers claim disinterest in the number of adolescents who have taken a pledge. They keep no formal records, and they have few formal mechanisms in place to coordinate the efforts of participating organizations” (p. 860).

Although abstinence-focused organizations’ record keeping has been sporadic, researchers and analysts have been more systematic in keeping tabs on the activities of the participants engaged in the abstinence/purity movement. Research reveals that the efficacy of virginity pledges is limited. While Bersamin, Walter, Waiters, Fisher, and Grube (2005) acknowledge that those who initiate a pledge promise on their own (rather than being forced or strongly encouraged by others) are more likely to honor a vow, Brückner and Bearman (2005) find that there is no statistically significant difference in sexually transmitted disease infection rates between pledgers and non-pledgers. Martino et al. (2008) assert that while purity pledge

participation may lead some to postpone the start of sexual activity by a few months or years, pledges are not a successful method for convincing adolescents to delay the initiation of sexual intercourse until marriage.

On April 28, 2008, at a hearing on the effectiveness of abstinence-only education, witnesses from the American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Public Health Association “testified to the ineffectiveness of such approaches” (di Mauro & Joffe, 2009, p. 74). Similarly, in a relatively recent study, Landor and Simons (2014) discovered that while virginity pledgers with high levels of religious commitment are more apt to follow through on a pledge to remain abstinent until marriage, Johns Hopkins researcher Janet Rosenbaum’s findings from 2009 persist: there is negligible statistical difference between virginity pledgers and non-virginity pledgers in terms of sexual behavior, the age at which they become sexually active, and the number of sexual partners they have. Where a statistical difference does emerge is in the rate of condom use and other forms of birth control. In fact, Rosenbaum (2009) found that not only are pledge breakers less likely to protect themselves from unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases and infections, but interestingly, “five years after the pledge, 82 percent of pledgers [deny] ever having pledged” (p. e110).

My Brother’s Baby News

I remember the sweltering, hot spring day in May of 1989 like it was yesterday. I was helping my mother with record keeping and cleaning at the small-town tire shop my parents owned and operated. The week before, I had assembled my purity box. My mom, making small talk, casually mentioned that she had seen the box and jar of marbles in my room and asked what they were about. I told her, and, to my surprise, she was ecstatic about the concept and even suggested that I think about making a few as kits that she might sell to interested tire customers

to give to their daughters.

Several hours later, my older brother and his fiancé walked through the shop door for an unexpected, surprise visit. I loved their visits, as I loved my future sister-in-law. She was fun and attentive; she treated me just like the older sister I had always wanted during my growing up years. I found her to be the perfect addition to our family. She met all the tacit requisite Crouse family standards, she was: kind, fun, raised in a small conservative town in Kansas much like our own, and a devout Christian who attended church almost as often as we did. So, when my mother, father, brother, and not-yet sister-in-law all stood in the shade outside of my parents' tire shop after bidding farewell to the final customer of the day, and my brother and his girlfriend told us they were expecting a baby in December of 1989, I remember feeling confused and hurt. They were excited to tell us their news—elated even. As they pulled out sonogram photos and handed them to us, I could feel my heart plummet. In my view, this was an unfortunate and “out of wedlock” teen pregnancy. My brother and I had been raised in a church community in which an ethic of sexual purity was taught and embraced. Certainly, I was brought up with the understanding that “other people” deviated from the prescribed path, but definitely not a member of the Crouse family. We were stringent rule followers, and we always took care to maintain a pristine, “above reproach” public image. I was certain that news of this pregnancy would mar that image. When the family meeting ended, I was able to have some time alone with my brother's fiancé, and I learned that neither she nor my brother had been aware of birth control or other protective measures that they could have employed while being sexually active. In fact, nearly 15 years after this “family meeting,” and after the birth of their fifth child, I learned both my brother and his wife were unfamiliar with the basics of sexual reproduction, including the role that ovulation plays in achieving pregnancy.

My brother and sister-in-law's experiences affirm studies demonstrating that abstinence-only, purity-focused approaches to sex education can contribute to a limited understanding of how sexual reproduction functions and occurs. Findings from the ongoing National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health (Add Health, 2017) show consistently that abstinence-only education measures are ineffective and that they contribute to greater occurrences of unhealthy sexual behavior, thereby placing young people at higher risk for contracting disease and experiencing unintended pregnancy.

While abstinence-only movement leaders of the late 1980s and early 1990s justified their efforts due, in part, to high teen pregnancy rates, in recent years, comprehensive sex education has been lauded for successfully addressing and diminishing such concerns. The national teen birth rate has declined 41 percent since 2010 and, in 2016, teen pregnancies and births "hit a record low in the United States" (Chuck, 2017). Many credit this statistical dip to the Obama-era federal grant Teen Pregnancy Prevention Program, which at its peak provided 81 organizations a total of \$89 million per year to support evidence-based, comprehensive sex education. However, Paik et al. (2016) note that abstinence-only programming remains strongly intact at state and local levels: "Currently, 25 states still require that abstinence be stressed in sex education, and 19 states mandate content promoting sexual behavior only within marriages" (p. 547).

A Hypocritical Question

Two weeks before my fiancé, Christopher, and I were to be married, my sister-in-law arrived for an overnight stay at my apartment. She had called several weeks earlier explaining that she was attending a two-day work-related conference in the city where I lived and she needed a place to crash. Eight years had passed since she and my brother had married. They now had two children with another one on the way. Over the years, my relationship with my brother

and sister-in-law had become less affectionate and more superficial. As they grew into married adulthood, they became more steeped in the activities and dogma of church life, while I (though still attending church and active in church life) had begun verbalizing questions about the rigid rules and logic of Christianity. Still, I was looking forward to my sister-in-law's visit. She planned to leave the kids in the care of grandparents so there would certainly be space for uninterrupted talk. In anticipation of her visit, I imagined that our post-work, suppertime conversations would be light, easy, and fun. Topics might include the floral arrangements she was crafting for my wedding reception and maybe a few light-hearted insights on married life.

After we ate supper, we settled in on the living room couch to chat and drink tea. I noticed my sister-in-law had a small paper grocery sack by her side and I casually asked her what was in it. I suspected it contained a sample boutonniere and that we were about to discuss whether those she was making for the wedding would need more or less greenery. Instead, she pulled out a tube of K-Y Jelly and said, "I want to talk about sex." I was mortified. I did not want to talk about sex with her. For me, sex was a very private topic and I only wanted to discuss sex-related issues with my fiancé, Christopher, and my doctor. But she continued, "I need to know, are you a virgin?" I felt a mixture of emotions, but mostly I felt a raw and hot anger that she believed she had a right to this information. For a split second, I considered ending the conversation and going to bed, but I felt emboldened to tell her the truth. After all, she hadn't been a virgin at the time of her wedding ceremony. So, with an air of confident nonchalance, I told her. "No. I'm not." She immediately donned a crestfallen face and her voice took on an emotionally tormented tone: "I am so disappointed. This is not what God intended. Your relationship with Christopher will suffer and your witness has been damaged. Worst of all, you will never be able to serve as a role model for my children."

With nearly 22 years of distance from this conversation, I now understand that my sister-in-law was speaking through a lens shaped by rigid internalization of and adherence to the purity pedagogy she was learning through the conservative evangelical Christian church she and my brother attended. At the time she uttered her words of judgment; however, I could focus only on my anger toward her for being intrusive, hypocritical, and illogical. What I would learn over time through researching and reading, though, is that a number of sexual purity movement leaders have, in fact, engaged in pre-marital sexual activity, and they use their “failure narrative” as a clarion call for others to learn from their mistakes. Three examples in particular stand out. The first is found in the testimony of best-selling Christian children’s author Jennie Bishop. While on tour to promote her fairy tale books that teach children as young as four about the subject of sexual purity, Bishop reveals to the hosts of the Canadian Christian talk show *100 Huntley Street* that she and her husband had “sexual moral failures” prior to their marriage. She refers to her premarital sexual activity metaphorically as having “burned her toast.” Bishop contends that just because she burned her toast does not mean that she cannot “teach others how to cook”: “We all make mistakes and we can train [others] from our failures as well as our successes” (*100 Huntley Street*, 2009).

A second example can be found in a documentary produced in 2015 called *A Courtship*. In the story line that unfolds, middle-aged husband and wife team Ron and Dawn Wright agree to mentor 30-year-old Kelly Boggus as she seeks to find a Christian husband. Wright claims that when he and Dawn were first married, their relationship was based only on a preoccupation with sex. He believes this is why they suffered an “emotional divorce” after three years of marriage and he suggests premarital Christian courtship (a dating alternative that generally involves a couple never engaging in physical touch or unsupervised time alone until they are married) as a

means of ensuring that others do not experience the same struggles he and Dawn faced (Kohn, 2015).

A final example is located in the story of Dannah Gresh, a prominent leader in the current contemporary iteration of the sexual purity movement and the focus of this dissertation. Gresh incorporates her own virginity loss narrative into most of her public presentations and writings. She laments how this action kept her from giving her husband, Bob, a “precious gift” on their wedding night and she frequently recounts how, out of shame, she kept her status as a non-virgin hidden from him until they had been married for several years (Gresh, 2015c). She describes how she chose to tell Bob about the situation under the cover of darkness—in the middle of the night, how she refused to let him see her face during her time of confession, how it took her three hours to tell him, how he forgave her, and how she then confessed her “sin” to her mother, as well as to a small group of her girlfriends. Gresh (2017d) uses this narrative as a contextual springboard for describing the emotional peril and physical risks of “early sexual debut,” or teenage premarital sex. She cites statistics from social science research indicating that early sexual activity is often accompanied by depression and anxiety. She then makes her appeal to tweens, teens, and their mothers, about the importance of teaching, learning, embodying, and enacting sexual modesty and premarital sexual abstinence.

One not familiar with evangelical Christian culture might read these accounts with bemused and suspicious confusion. That these leaders, and other faith-based abstinence-before-marriage teachers, use their stories of not waiting in order to encourage others to wait may seem silly, unrealistic, and even troubling. However, Katelyn Beaty, editor-at-large for *Christianity Today*, explains that Christians tend to seek out and promote redemption stories:

That really gets to the heart of what Christians believe: God can redeem the most broken

of people, the most broken of sinners. And we love stories that have a dramatic twist. If I highlight how bad I was or how bad I sinned, then the story of the grace and forgiveness that God offers is all the more amazing. (Gjelten, 2018)

My Niece's Christian Courtship

My response to my sister-in-law's expressed interest in my virginity as a signifier of my value and worth to my fiancé/husband and to the rest of the world served as a significant catalyst for the strained relationship we have endured ever since. Over the years, our involvement in each other's lives waned and we took very different routes on our "faith journeys": she and my brother became more entrenched in a rule-based, conservative form of Christianity, while my husband and I became involved in more progressive church contexts that embraced a social justice ethic. During once-a-year family holiday gatherings and through the grapevine, we would learn that our nieces were engaged in a variety of purity culture activities, including an event described as taking place in a wedding-like atmosphere and in which girls as young as seven, along with married and un-married women as old as 40, would don white dresses, take vows to be chaste or to re-embrace a chaste mindset, and wear rings as reminders of their promises. As my family described their preparation for one such event, my nieces and sister-in-law referred to the event as a special opportunity to, in effect, marry Jesus. At the time, it sounded so far-fetched that I recall emotionally washing my hands of ever attempting to understand these convictions and actions. When my oldest niece turned 18 and it was announced that she had begun a "Christian courtship," however, my interest in the appeal and practice of the evangelical Christian sexual purity movement was rekindled.

Gardner (2011) describes courtship as a "backlash to traditional dating" and notes that "it is increasingly popular among a small minority of evangelical Christian young people,

distinguished by the relationship's serious focus on marriage and lack of physical intimacy" (pp. 105-106). DeRogatis (2015) explains that courtship "entails a commitment to get to know someone emotionally and spiritually only after deciding that marriage is the goal of the relationship" (p. 35). A decision to "court" is generally arrived at after first consulting with parents of both parties. Nonetheless, once the decision is made, the young man is expected to take the lead in major decisions related to the future of the relationship. This is thought to reinforce a notion of male "headship" or leadership, which is pivotal to the "complementarian theology" (a concept defined in Chapter 3 of this dissertation) that supports and perpetuates purity culture.

During the courting phase, all the way up to the wedding day, limited physical contact is especially important so as not to provoke what is considered problematic sexual temptation within the relationship. Some advocates of courtship "believe it is appropriate to hold hands after an engagement is announced but not to kiss" (DeRogatis, 2015, p. 35). Not all, but many practitioners of Christian courtship believe it is important to celebrate the first kiss as husband and wife in front of cheering congregation members who are made aware during the ceremony of the couple's prior commitment to sexual abstinence. Such was the case at my niece's wedding when the pastor publicly encouraged the newly announced couple to "enjoy each other's bodies, glorifying God in all [you] do."

Renewed Interest in the Sexual Purity Movement

Suffice to say, my niece's devotion to purity culture practices rekindled my interest in the movement and, in 2010, I found myself in a doctoral program, searching for a research topic for two different courses. I began examining the rhetoric used in father-daughter purity ball training kits, as well as the metaphors used to teach sexual purity in contemporary Christian children's

fairytale (Crouse-Dick, 2017). My research yielded interesting, though likely predictable, findings in that I mostly uncovered evidence that supported the conclusions of the then scant amount of scholarship addressing faith-based abstinence efforts at the time. Such findings included concern with rigid gender stereotypes and young women being denied agency in their own stories.

Due to work and family obligations, my fascination with purity culture and its manifestations remained, but my focused study halted. Such it was then that from 2012 to 2017, I placed my purity-centered research on the back burner, returning every so often to observe the broader American culture's confusion and fascination with father-daughter purity balls, as well as shifts and changes within government funding of abstinence-only education efforts. But I did not keep abreast of advances in the scholarly research on the movement or of advances within the movement itself. In late 2017, when I returned to the topic with renewed inquisitive scholarly fervor, I found the scholarly literature had blossomed, along with a deeply intensified cultural critique of the sexual purity movement.

Indeed, sexual purity is a hot topic. As mentioned in the previous chapter, a Google search of the term "sexual purity" in April of 2019 yielded well over 25 million hits, and a basic Amazon.com book search generated a list of nearly 500 titles. The Gale Infotrac Newsstand, touted as a comprehensive database collection of current and archival news content, reflects that at least 50 news articles published between January 1, 2018, and January 1, 2019, include a reference to the subject of sexual purity. Clearly, this is a subject that has garnered, and continues to garner, much attention.

And well it should. Sexual purity, often conceptualized as a very private, personal, and even precious moral virtue, is encouraged, taught, and reinforced in very public ways. Purity

culture deserves careful consideration and continued analysis not only because it is a phenomenon that impacts the sexual lives, practices, and intrapersonal forms of self-understanding of youth, young adults, and maturing adults, but also because purity culture impacts and influences non-religious contexts and the greater society's understandings of what is right and wrong, what is sexually moral and immoral, and what are considered to be appropriate and inappropriate behaviors and ways of being. In other words, sexual purity, while at the outset appears to be primarily a private, religiously informed concern, actually has significant implications for the broader culture at large. A clearer understanding of purity movement leaders, as well as their responses to the critiques of the movement, may help us better understand why and how the movement continues to attract followers and adherents despite its documented limitations.

My first- and second-hand experiences with evangelical Christian purity culture are clearly what propel this dissertation project. While I understand that self-situated research runs the risk of being deemed self-centered, self-indulgent, and maybe even narcissistic (see Douglass & Carless, 2013; Miller, 1999; Sparks, 2002), I contend that my experiences with the purity movement position me well to examine up close its evolving communicative strategies, as well as the implications of those strategies. I want to know more about this phenomenon. I want to measure my unique knowledge against the available literature, to explore the assumptions and practices of the movement, and to contribute insights that are not yet a part of the scholarly discussion. Therefore, to better situate my study of sexual purity leaders' communication strategies during a time of crisis, in the following chapter, I explore historical-contextual factors (as they are discussed in the relevant scholarly literature) that contribute to the milieu of sexual purity culture.

CHAPTER 3: HISTORICAL-CONTEXTUAL LITERATURE REVIEW

For roughly the past ten years (2009-2019), the subject of the contemporary evangelical Christian sexual purity movement has received increasing amounts of scholarly attention. While relatively new as a subject of inquiry, it has been amply justified as one worthy of study with scholarship falling into two basic categories: (1) health-focused efficacy studies and (2) feminist critiques. Various facets of the sexual purity movement have been examined from a variety of disciplinary angles including: interpersonal communication (Manning, 2015), rhetoric (Gardner, 2011), clinical sexology (Schermer Sellers, 2017), health policy (Rosenbaum, 2009), history (Lord, 2010), political science (Doan & Williams, 2008; Price, 2011; Williams, 2011), religious studies (DeRogatis, 2015; Gish, 2016; Moslener, 2015), sociology (Bearman & Brückner, 2001; Diefendorf, 2015; di Mauro & Joffe, 2009), and theology (Kieser, 2014), to name just a few. In the previous chapter, I offered an overview of the sexual purity movement by situating my own experiences with purity culture alongside contemporary scholarly literature that is focused on the movement. In this chapter (Chapter 3), I provide historical context by presenting an overview of evangelical Christianity and by examining two key issues that emerge as central in the scholarship on evangelical Christian sexual purity: (1) muscular Christianity and (2) biblical womanhood.

Evangelical Christianity: An Overview

Defining evangelical Christianity in the twenty-first century is said to be a “contentious endeavor” because within those church denominations and congregations that identify as evangelical, there are multiple and competing perspectives (Bellar, 2017, p. 113). Indeed, even seasoned scholars of evangelical Christianity debate the usefulness of the term as a religious category, citing a lack of clarity in definition and delineation (e.g., Balmer, 2010; Dayton, 1991;

Hart, 2004; Sutton, 2014). Nevertheless, because the term “evangelical” is used “widely by people both inside and outside the movement” (Kyle, 2018, p. 9), a basic understanding of the term is necessary. Those who study evangelical congregations, practices, and theology caution against crafting unified, catch-all definitions, and instead encourage the development of explanations that leave room for “diversity and internal contradiction” (Worthen, 2013, p. 264). Kyle (2018) believes that recognizing the common denominators “while still allowing for considerable diversity is a key to ‘unlocking’ the puzzle of evangelicalism” (p. 10). In a paper presented at the 2019 American Historical Association conference, Kristin Kobes DuMez argues that the issue lies not within which definition of evangelicalism is correct, but within “which imaginings have more power to shape other people’s imaginings.”

Historically, the term evangelical was used to refer to the theology that emerged when Martin Luther “rediscovered the gospel” (through his study of St. Paul’s letters to the Galatians and the Romans) and thereby ushered in the sixteenth century Protestant Reformation (Balmer, 2006, pp. xv-xvi). Luther’s movement embraced a theology that focused on developing a personal relationship with God based on revelations made through close scripture reading. This was a break from Roman Catholic tradition, which touted that eternal salvation was attained only through good works, avoidance of sin, and reliance on hierarchical church leadership.

Noll (2001) asserts that it is what occurred the century following Luther’s Reformation that most strongly influenced and shaped what we know as evangelical Christianity today. At this time, Protestant Christianity was transforming as a result of a “pietistic revival” that was “expressed as a multifaceted protest against ecclesiastical formalism and an urgent appeal for living religion of the heart” (Noll, 2001, p. 9). Revivals in eighteenth-century Britain and the British Colonies facilitated what were described as personal transformative experiences. John

Wesley documented his own transformative conversion experience as occurring in London. In a journal entry dated 1738, Wesley wrote:

I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me, from the law of sin and death. (Curnock, 1938, pp. 475-476)

Balmer (2006) claims that Wesley's experience served as a prototype for evangelical Christians: a warm-hearted experience that is "sudden, instantaneous, [and] datable" (p. xiv). Within this "warm-hearted experience," significance is given to human choice in salvation as opposed to a salvation that was mediated through a hierarchical church leadership. Kyle (2018) observes that Wesley's theology was popularized in England "and by the nineteenth century it became dominant in America" (p. 11).

It was because of experiences that mirrored Wesley's that "a distinct set of new emphases in the Christian world" emerged (Noll, 2001, p. 12), setting the tone for what is known today as evangelical Christianity. Among those emphases is an adherence to social conservatism. In fact, there is general consensus amongst scholars that the term "evangelical" can be applied in a broad sense to conservative Protestants (Balmer, 2006; Cope & Ringer, 2014; DeRogatis, 2015), although Smith (2000) cautions that "conservative" in the phrase "conservative Protestant" refers to theology, and not necessarily politics (p. 16). Additional emphases emerged in the form of evangelical theological convictions, or core beliefs. Bebbington (1989) posits that there are four specific characteristics that serve as hallmarks of evangelicalism: (1) conversionism, (2) activism, (3) biblicism, and (4) crucicentrism. Noll (2001) refers to these characteristics as "a consistent pattern of convictions and attitudes" embraced by evangelicals and provides brief explanations for each:

conversionism (an emphasis on the “new birth” as a life-changing experience of God), biblicism (a reliance on the Bible as ultimate religious authority), activism (a concern for sharing the faith), and crucicentrism (a focus on Christ’s redeeming work on the cross, usually pictured as the only way to salvation). (p. 13)

Bebbington (1989) asserts that, taken together, these four characteristics “form a quadrilateral of priorities that is the basis of Evangelicalism” (pp. 2-3). To be certain, not all who call themselves Christian affirm these four tenets and not all who affirm these tenets consider themselves “evangelical”; however, these basic traits “do serve to identify a large family of churches and religious enterprises” known as “evangelical” (Noll, 2001, p. 13).

What is clear from the scholarly discussions surrounding attempts to define, categorize, or describe the term “evangelical” is that central to evangelical faith is a required, conscious conversion experience—an “experience during which one accepts personal sinfulness and acknowledges that Christ’s atonement is essential for salvation” (DeRogatis, 2015, p. 7). For American evangelicals, the sexual body is an essential part of that personal salvation. In fact, scholars of Christian history note that sexuality has long played an important role in the demonstration of one’s adherence to, or deviation from, the Christian faith (Brakke, 2006; Brown, 1988; Bynum, 1992; DeRogatis, 2015). Indeed, beliefs about gender, sex, and sex roles played such a central role that they are identified as contributing to divisions that emerged amongst evangelicals, fundamentalists, and liberal Protestants in the early twentieth century. Additionally, they played an important role in the earliest iterations of evangelical Christian sexual purity.

Evangelical Christianity, Oscillating Gender Roles, and Sexual Purity

Smith (2000) observes that the terms “evangelical,” “fundamentalist,” and “born-again Christian” are sometimes conflated and are used to refer to all conservative Protestants, while at other times, people use “evangelical” to refer precisely to the subset of conservative Protestants whose “neo-evangelical” movement broke away from fundamentalism during the 1940s (p. 15). This early twentieth-century schism occurred when evangelical Christians who would soon live into or adopt the fundamentalist label “militantly opposed both modernism in theology and the cultural changes that modernism endorsed” (Marsden, 2006, p. 4). Kyle (2006) explains that fundamentalist separatism took shape progressively over time as a means of defending “orthodox Protestantism against the challenges of the modern world, especially theological liberalism, evolution, and the higher criticism of the Bible”⁴ (p. 14).

At the start of the twentieth century, it was clear that the evangelical revivalism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was on the decline. According to Noll (2003), several issues contributed to the abatement of evangelical cultural influence during this time: the large-scale immigration of non-Protestants, the growth of cities as multicultural sites, and the secularization of university learning. During this time, one area of particular concern was emerging: men seemed to be losing interest in emotional religious pursuits. Bendroth (1993) explains that revivalism had brought a gender-equalizing tone to evangelical settings: “In the heat of revival fervor, nineteenth-century evangelists cared little for social conventions or ecclesiastical rules against women preachers: all stood equal at the foot of the Cross” (p. 14). This meant the

⁴ Bendroth (2017) explains that scholarly attention was first given to the Bible in British and German universities where the focus was to determine textual and translational accuracy. This activity was known as “lower criticism.” What is referred to as “higher criticism” developed when scholars began studying ancient texts and noticing historical discrepancies. This led to “doubts about the Bible’s overall truthfulness...[and to] questions about the Bible’s uniqueness” (Bendroth, 2017).

evangelical revivalist tradition contributed to “a rising sense of feminine mission” and “gave women confidence and skill in enterprises that took them increasingly beyond the four walls of the home” (Bendroth, 1993, p. 15).

Alongside these changes in gender roles within evangelical settings, women’s roles in society, as a whole, were also shifting. Allen (2002) explains that the second wave of industrialization saw women “moving increasingly into the workforce and receiving college degrees in higher numbers” (p. 39). Women’s engagement in efforts such as the suffrage and temperance movements challenged the predominant separate spheres ideology in public, at home, and in the church.

It was this shifting milieu within the private and public spheres that the first wave of feminism and the earliest iterations of the purity movement coincided. Moslener (2015) explains that early purity reformers were women who used their newfound relevance in the religious landscape, as well as their elevated position of moral superiority, to control the sexual behavior of men: “Rather than acquiesce to the domestic realm and political irrelevance, these women used the claim of female purity to assert a moral authority beyond the confines of their homes” (p. 16). As a result, purity advocates began incorporating concerns about the moral actions of men into the established agendas of other efforts (e.g., suffrage and temperance) in which they were already involved. These early purity reformers operated from a gender egalitarian perspective, believing that a “civilized society required a single standard of sexual behavior” (Moslener, 2015, p. 17). Sexual purity efforts originally began with the presumption that white, middle-class women represented an ideal, while men were morally and sexually lax. Changing notions of womanhood were key in these endeavors because “reformers sought to relocate women’s domestic piety to the public sphere, promoting purity as a kind of social salvation that

would “elevate all worthy parties to the status of white, middle-class Protestantism” (Moslener, 2015, p. 18).

However, feminine piety and leadership in the church brought with it the perception that religion was a primarily “female endeavor” (Allen, 2002, p. 41). This new climate offered women unusual status and power, but it came as a perceived cost to the growth of the evangelical movement. Bendroth (1993) observes that “masculine indifference to religion clearly threatened Protestant hegemony in a rapidly secularizing, increasingly non-Protestant American culture. Thus, both male and female observers noted the declining appeal of religion among middle-class men with alarm” (p. 17). In fact, in response to early 1900s census reports and church demographic surveys, which revealed that women comprised two-thirds of church and church-affiliated organization membership, leaders began expressing concern that the church had become “overly feminine” (Allen, 2002, p. 41). Contemplating the dearth of men in churches and church activities, and simultaneously attempting to paint Christian faith as something relevant to a masculine sense of virility and strength, co-founder of the Men and Religion Forward Movement, Fred Smith (1913), wrote:

one of the marvels of the Christian religion is the beauty of its womanly virtues...But Christianity is also essentially masculine, militant, warlike, and if these elements are not made manifest, men and boys will not be found in increasing numbers as participants in the life of the Church. (p. 70)

Smith (1913) was one among many who expressed fear and judgment of “feminized theology and a female-dominated laity” (Moslener, 2015, p. 22).

Another figure who exerted significant influence on American culture as well as evangelical thought was psychologist and educational theorist G. Stanley Hall. Moslener (2015)

explains that Hall stood in solidarity with purity reformers' biologically essentialist view of men and women, but he did so by simultaneously glorifying the "mysteries of womanhood" while suggesting that female submission was necessary for social progress (p. 21). According to Moslener (2015), Hall's writings cultivated the belief that "threats to a young woman's virginity were not immoral because they threatened her social respectability, but because they threatened her ability to contribute to the improved condition of the human race" (pp. 21-22).

At a time when women were becoming key players in social, religious, and political arenas, many men were clearly threatened by a loss of leadership and privilege. Some women felt this threat as well. Griffith (2017) notes that opposition to the suffrage movement "included a great number of women too, women who believed truly terrible changes would result from female suffrage" (p. xv). In the aftermath of the Civil War, and in the midst of industrialization, overwhelming change was the "new normal" and the world was becoming confusing and fragmented (Marsden, 2006). Gloege (2015) notes that these changes were interpreted as a crisis "that left many 'respectable' Protestants demoralized and overwhelmed" (p. 7). Thus, emerged a desire for equilibrium and the motivation to restore male control, power, and preeminence. Scholars who study the social manifestations of this particular period of time point to the rise of a phenomenon called "muscular Christianity" (Bradstock, Gill, Hogan, & Morgan, 2000).

Muscular Christianity

According to Hall (1994), "muscular Christianity was an attempt to assert control over a world that had seemingly gone mad" (p. 9). Described as a strain of religiosity based on the notion that bodily strength is essential for doing good (Putney, 2001, p. 1), muscular Christianity is a "Christian commitment to health and manliness" (p. 11). It is rooted in the notion that there is a clear relationship between "physical strength, religious certainty, and the ability to shape and

control the world around oneself” (Hall, 1994, p. 7). The term “muscular Christianity” was made popular in the 1850s when Victorian British novelists Charles Kingsley and Thomas Hughes used their works to fuse “athleticism, patriotism, and religion and [to emphasize] the importance of training the body for the purposes of protecting the weak and furthering righteous causes” (Moslener, 2015, p. 22). According to Hughes, muscular Christianity was comprised of four ideals: (1) manliness, (2) morality, (3) health, and (4) patriotism (Ladd & Mathisen, 1999, p. 14). Moslener (2015) explains that muscular Christianity provided a means for Protestant men to “stand up to the challenges of modernity in the same way that Christ stood up to the challenges of the Roman Empire” (p. 22). One of the challenges facing Americans at that time was the population decline of the Anglo-Saxon race. Muscular Christianity responded by not only gendering “white, Protestant, native, male U.S. citizens” as an ideal, but also as a tool for disciplining, “through caricature, the bodies of lower-class, Irish, and non-European men” (Hall, 1994, p. 8). Muscular Christianity, then, provided a vehicle through which particular male bodies could address the “feminization of the church and the growing dominance of immigrant Roman Catholicism” and other bodies could not (Moslener, 2015, pp. 22-23).

As conservative evangelicals were using muscular Christianity to redefine manhood and to restore male authority, purity reformers were using it to reconstruct ideal manhood by demanding that men be held morally accountable (Moslener, 2015). Purity activists promoted feminine morals for women because men were viewed to be inherently lustful and undisciplined. Muscular Christianity, then, encouraged men to adopt a noble kind of masculinity that fought sexual temptation with restraint and discipline in order to protect women. However, DeFrancisco and Palczewski (2007) note that it was a certain kind of woman who was to be protected. The issues facing poor, mostly immigrant, and African American women “seemed not to bother those

in power” it was the perilous issues facing white women “that seemed to induce panic” (DeFrancisco & Palczewski, 2007, p. 228).

As liberal Protestants and purity reformers alike promoted the notion of muscular Christianity, a seemingly odd bedfellow joined them. In the early twentieth century, although fundamentalists were adamantly attempting to distance themselves from liberal Protestants, they found themselves in agreement on the attractiveness of muscular Christianity. Moslener (2015) explains, though, that they had divergent motivations. Whereas mainline Protestants embraced muscular Christianity because it offered a way to reconcile involvement with both a market economy and Christian piety, fundamentalists embraced muscular Christianity because they believed the assertion of male piety and religious leadership was “not economically advantageous but biblically mandated” (Moslener, 2015, p. 57).

However, agreement upon the usefulness of muscular Christianity is where the relationship between liberal Protestantism and fundamentalism ended. Marsden (1991) writes that by the 1920s, fundamentalists became so disenchanted by “liberal theology in the churches and changes in the dominant values and beliefs in the culture” that they separated themselves in order to hold strong to the “traditionally essential evangelical doctrines” (p. 3). In fact, Bendroth (1993) demonstrates that fundamentalism actually emerged in protest of theology that celebrated the superior moral piety of women over men. Moslener (2015) explains that women’s correctives and commentary on men’s moral and religious leadership were viewed as dangerous by fundamentalists. Women were threatening “the natural order of creation, which asserted male headship over women” (Moslener, 2015, p. 58).

Carpenter (1980) describes how anti-modernist fundamentalism appeared inactive to the onlooker during the 1930s but re-emerged in American public life in the 1940s and 1950s. Fea

(1994) explains that when fundamentalism did re-emerge, it did so in such a way that the public stood witness to internal disagreements over how to engage modernism. A key figure caught in the middle of these public debates was Billy Graham, a charismatic Christian fundamentalist leader who refused to openly oppose modernism in his New York City crusade in 1957. Fea (1994) notes that, in a move of retaliation for his refusal, anti-modernist fundamentalist leaders essentially blackballed Graham, organizing themselves against him. However, even though he found himself ostracized by the less intellectual and more militant fundamentalists, Graham's magnetism was a chief means by which conservative evangelicalism was ushered back into mainstream culture.

Moslener (2015) demonstrates that long before Graham was marginalized by fundamentalists, he did not embrace their kind of muscular Christianity that denied the value of women's piety; yet nonetheless, when he preached he did endorse a gender ideology that attempted "to reassure men that Christianity did not require the compromise of their God-given, masculine traits" and he "remained in step with mainstream attempts to establish a postwar nuclear family model that reified masculine virility and feminine domesticity" (p. 58). Thus, Moslener (2015) identifies Graham as an essential forerunner for the contemporary sexual purity movement because he adopted "a rhetoric of sexual purity that alerted teenagers to their crucial role in facing the emerging threats of the Cold War era" by linking sexual immorality to communist invasion and nuclear war (p. 9). Moslener (2015) observes that "this link between sexual deviance and national security would remain a salient trope through the mid-twentieth century and soon find even greater prominence with the rise of the Christian right" (p. 9).

Prior to the 1960s and 1970s, conservative evangelicals articulated few, if any, issues with premarital sex, homosexuality, divorce, and abortion, but the more Graham and other

religious leaders linked these issues as threats to the health of the traditional family and thereby to a robust national security, the more evangelical Christians began to embrace political participation through activism (Moslener, 2015). Concern for national stability, by way of concern for the traditional family, set the tone for the contemporary purity movement that emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s. American evangelicals came to believe that moral codes “derived from the Bible were a functional map for a secure and thriving nation” (Moslener, 2015, p. 84).

Moslener (2015) posits that existing research on the contemporary purity movement yields important findings on the role of faith in sexual decision making and the effectiveness of virginity pledges, but, on the whole, she believes that the lion’s share of this scholarship utilizes methods and approaches that obscure nationalistic themes inherent in purity rhetoric (e.g., Bearman & Brückner, 2001, 2005; Freitas, 2008; Gardner, 2011; Regnerus, 2007). In fact, she asserts that the contemporary purity movement emerged as a part of what Bivins (2008) refers to as a “religion of fear,” which responds to the chaos and excesses of cultural revolutions by “calling mainstream culture to account” for its failure to maintain strict moral codes that would protect children and adolescents (Moslener, 2015, pp. 155-156). Moslener (2015) argues that the twentieth century purity movement’s version of the “religion of fear” did not, in fact, arise in response to the excesses of the 1960s (e.g., the sexual revolution, etc.) as many assert. Rather she contends that the purity movement of the 1980s and 1990s “emerged at the historical moment when mid-century fundamentalist leaders sought to regain cultural respectability, political influence, and the intellectual veracity of their theological tradition” (Moslener, 2015, p. 156).

As this study of the historic origins of the purity movement demonstrates, contemporary sexual purity efforts “are the beneficiaries, not the progenitors, of a moral economy” that links

together a variety of camps within Protestant evangelicalism (Moslener, 2015, p. 167). And yet, there are significant ways in which the contemporary purity movement diverges from the earlier purity movement of the early twentieth century. First, whereas early purity reform provided Christian women an opportunity to assert their value through new forms of social, spiritual, and political leadership (Bendroth, 1993), the sexual purity movement of today depends upon women especially, but men as well, to assert their value by adhering to sex and gender norms that prevent deviation from the traditional nuclear family. Second, compared with “Cold War threats of nuclear apocalypse, national insecurity, and sexual deviance, contemporary purity rhetoric emphasizes a therapeutic, sex-positive message of self-fulfillment and self-care” (Moslener, 2015, p. 159). And finally, while early purity reform efforts emerged in tandem with first wave feminism (Odem, 1995), the contemporary purity movement manifests today as an explicit and overt reaction against feminism, as well as against the sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s. This means that the purity movement of the modern day is tasked with carefully balancing how women’s power is situated. It must simultaneously confront the “ills” of the feminist movement while suggesting that true power comes through submission (Moslener, 2015, p. 163).

Examining the subtle differences between early purity reform efforts and contemporary sexual abstinence campaigns, Gardner (2011) explains that appeals to female power have been a mainstay of purity rhetoric. In fact, literature produced in the mid-1800s encouraged women to use their sexual purity and private sphere gender roles to exert “absolute sexual power over men” (Gardner, 2011, p. 83). Women were perceived to have the sexual upper hand because of their natural procreative force. In order to bolster, protect, and retain this power, they were to dress modestly, place themselves in roles of subservience to others, limit their sexual desires, and serve as a grounding force for the home (and thereby society). In this context, then, power for

women was believed to be most fully achieved, retained, and protected through an attitude and lifestyle of submission.

Biblical Womanhood

Gardner (2011) explains that for many (if not most) conservative evangelical Christians, adherence to a biblical view of submission is positioned rhetorically as a way through which women are invested with power and freedom. Conservative evangelicals consider a biblically based “wives-submit-to-husbands” gender hierarchy as a means for women to “[assert] their personal agency” (Gardner, 2011, p. 83). Griffith (2004) refers to this as a “strategy of containment” (p. 181). In order to maintain harmony in the home, as well as to ensure their own personal security, women are to “bolster [men’s] fragile egos” (Griffith, 2004, p. 179). Adherents claim that gender-based submission (putting others’ needs first and deferring decision making to a male family member such as a husband or a father) leads to transformative freedom—especially freedom from the expectations of a secular society.

Scholars refer to the mindset and practice of zealous commitment to submission as “complementarianism.” Complementarianism is defined by those who coined the term as “the biblically derived view that men and women are complementary, possessing equal dignity and worth as the image of God, and called to different roles that each glorify him” (Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, n.d.). Those who adhere to complementarian theology believe that the Bible “establishes the foundation for the different roles and responsibilities for men and women” immediately in Genesis 1 and 2 (Esqueda, 2018). Complementarians maintain that men and women are to assume different but complementary positions in marriage, family life, religious leadership, and other social locations (Pope-Levison, 2012), though some complementarians permit women to assume positions of leadership in public life, work life, and

some aspects of church life (Giles, 2018; Warnock, 2012). James (2011) explains that, fundamentally:

complementarians believe the Bible establishes male authority over women, making male leadership the biblical standard. According to this view, God calls women to submit to male leadership and take up supportive roles to their husbands and to male leaders in the church. (pp. 154-155)

Driving this theology is a belief that scripture (such as 1 Corinthians 11:3-16, Ephesians 5:21-33, Romans 8:17, and 1 Timothy 2:11-14) instructs husbands to lead and love their wives as Christ leads and loves the Christian church (Piper, 2012, pp. 35-40).

For proponents of purity, a complementarian, submissive mindset is not relegated solely to the realm of marriage. Gardner (2011) notes that the “subversion of evangelical wifely submission is also found in the abstinence rhetoric directed to the next generation of wives” (p. 84). The period during which a young Christian woman is not married is to be time spent “actively pursuing princess-defining behavior and exhibiting control of her would-be suitors by modestly covering her body” (Gardner, 2011, p. 84). In fact, submission is encouraged in other non-marital relationships, too. For complementarians, as long as both parties are confessed Christians, relational deference is expected in any situation where a woman might find herself in the presence of a “godly” man.

For many involved in the evangelical sexual purity movement, views on submission, such as those described above, are steeped in the notion of “biblical womanhood.” DeRogatis (2015) explains that “biblical womanhood” (sometimes labeled as “Titus 2 Womanhood”) is a movement within conservative Christianity that is “focused on the inerrancy of Scripture” and on “the view that men are the head of the household” (p. 97). New Testament scripture found in

Titus 2:3-5 is believed to provide biblical authority for female submission. These verses lay out the appropriate roles to be adopted by Christian men and women. Titus 2:3-5 reads:

Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. Then they can urge the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God. (New International Version)

Within a biblical womanhood belief system, then, obedience to a husband in everyday life is viewed as obedience to God's will. This obedience secures a promise of blessing on one's marriage, as well as on the church and the world at large. Within this worldview, willing and joyful submission to one's husband is a way to bear witness for Christ.

Despite the fact that there is no one specific denomination or clearinghouse that serves to coordinate the biblical womanhood movement, it is incredibly robust (replete with numerous blogs, books, workshops, and seminars), with the lion's share of resources affirming that married women should fulfill their spiritual destiny through honing their homemaking skills, committing to pursue motherhood, and following their husbands' leadership. DeRogatis (2015) notes that a common thread woven throughout Titus 2 literature is that the act of choosing a life of submission is an act of choosing a life of empowerment because engaging in these activities demonstrates a choice to honor God's plan for proper biblical roles. Titus 2 empowerment, they believe, flies in the face of the kind of empowerment offered by the feminist mindset that is believed to rule the broader culture at large. For a Christian in pursuit of biblical womanhood, feminism with all of its promises of progress and equality "destroys godly families, ruins the lives of women with false promises, sanctions unbiblical sexuality, and promotes a pagan

religion” (DeRogatis, 2015, p. 97).

DeRogatis (2015) explains that biblical womanhood is “a fluid category that can include single, married, and widowed women who may or may not be mothers or homemakers” (p. 99). Yet Titus 2 writers believe women best fulfill their biblical destiny through homemaking and hospitality. Therefore, Titus 2 women believe God created them as distinct from men, with “unique roles, talents, and obligations to their husbands, children, extended family, other women, as well as to the church” (DeRogatis, 2015, p. 99). This notion of biblical womanhood is linked inextricably to the contemporary evangelical Christian sexual purity movement and can be found saturating the pages of purity movement literature. In fact, Dannah Gresh is closely aligned with the movement as is evidenced in the subject matter of her writings, the publishing houses who mass produce her printed content, the ways in which her ministry efforts are synergistically marketed with other Titus 2 ministries, and the presence of her name on the line-up of mainstage speakers and facilitators at the annual “True Woman” conference.

The “True Woman” conference is a near-annual event⁵ held to support a grassroots effort co-founded by Nancy DeMoss Wolgemuth and Mary Kassian. The event draws thousands of conservative evangelical women to learn about and to endorse what is called the “True Woman Movement,” which is built around a document referred to as the “True Woman Manifesto.” The manifesto, described as a way of looking at “some of the foundational aspects of what it means to live as a Christian woman” (Revive Our Hearts, 2018b), contains 15 points of affirmation that follow “we believe” statements touting the inerrancy of scripture, God’s perfect design, and the beauty and holiness found in God’s plan:

Scripture is God’s authoritative means of instructing us in His ways and it reveals His

⁵ At True Woman ’18, it was reported that the True Woman conferences began in 2008 and that, since that time, a total of six conferences, including True Woman ’18, had been held.

holy pattern for our womanhood, our character, our priorities, and our various roles, responsibilities, and relationships... We are called as women to affirm and encourage men as they seek to express godly masculinity, and to honor and support God-ordained male leadership in the home and church. (Revive Our Hearts, 2018b)

Embedded within the True Woman understanding of biblical womanhood is an unwavering commitment to an anti-feminist stance. In fact, the True Woman website acknowledges that the impetus for the True Woman Movement is located and detailed in Mary Kassian's book, *The Feminist Mistake: The Radical Impact of Feminism on Church and Church Culture* (2005). The True Woman website describes what happened when Nancy DeMoss Wolgemuth first read Kassian's book:

When she realized the powerful lies that had been foisted on an entire generation of women, the pervasiveness of feminist thinking in our whole culture and the extent to which Christian women have bought into the whole philosophy, she began to ask: "If a handful of women have succeeded by their writings and influence in destroying and brainwashing an entire generation with their godless philosophies, what could God do with a handful of women who were determined to reclaim surrendered ground?" (Revive Our Hearts, 2018a)

Thus, if anything is identified as a threat to biblical womanhood, it is feminism. Those who study the purity movement note that authors of texts promoting faith-based sexual abstinence tend to adopt a tone of frustration and panic related to feminism. Purity movement leaders assert that feminism makes women hard, harsh, overly independent, domineering, and, ultimately, unattractive to men. One prominent Titus 2 author (Pride, 1985) puts it this way: feminism subverts biblical principles and is a "totally self-consistent system aimed at rejecting God" (pp.

xxii-xxiii). The purity movement marks feminism as a force that stands in direct opposition of biblical womanhood. Despite the fact that the two movements articulate a shared goal of female empowerment, the purity movement marks feminism as evil and as tempting women with lies that promise false power in the midst of sexual freedom. Such it is, then, that the purity movement actually engages in the co-optation of feminist ideals and practices. Indeed, numerous authors confirm and explore the phenomenon of conservative Christian appropriation of feminist tenets and strategies (e.g., Flournoy, 2013; Loke, Bachmann, & Harp, 2017; Stacey & Gerard, 1992).

Research Question

The literature summarized above gives clear indication that the evangelical Christian sexual purity movement is rife with potential for continued social scientific research. The unique angle I explore in this project (responses to critiques in the midst of a call-out era) has not yet been studied with any systematic level of care or thoroughness. Especially during the contentious and precarious times in which we live, when civil rights advancements are being rolled back and essential liberties are being threatened under the guise of a return to (“healthy,” “stable,” “honorable,” and “biblical”) traditional values and beliefs, it is crucial to understand communicative strategies at play within a movement that has long held as its primary goal the use of sexual regulation as a means of preserving a particular kind of American identity (white, nationalistic, patriarchal, and heteronormative). Friedland (2002) notes that:

within any institution, the relationships between persons and objects are organized through practices premised on particular ontologies, ontologies knowable only through these practices. These institutional ontologies specify or afford substances—state sovereignty, bureaucratic rationality, democratic representation, familial love, religious

faith, capitalist property, scientific knowledge—whose reality is performed as much as revealed through routinized practices enacted by agents whose identity and interest are tied to those substances and the real relations both which they make possible and that conjure them into existence. These substances are known—made accountable and actionable—through the procedures by which they are produced and distributed. (p. 382)

Through this study, in order to more fully understand the persisting ontologies guiding the contemporary sexual purity movement, I interrogate the practices and procedures by which the movement is “produced and distributed.”

In the subsequent chapter, I explain the methodological processes that guided this dissertation project. Specifically, I describe, elucidate, and justify the strategies that were employed as I explored how leaders in the evangelical Christian purity movement are changing, shifting, or retaining movement rhetoric in light of critiques that are emerging from #MeToo and #ChurchToo activism directed toward evangelical church contexts. It is clear that the #MeToo and #ChurchToo movements have elevated the level of public attention given to the sexual misconduct of evangelical pastors and lay leaders within evangelical communities and contexts of faith and it is clear that mounting critiques directly blame the role purity culture has played in many, if not all, of these instances. Therefore, to discover how purity leaders are responding to critiques, I posed the following multifaceted research question:

RQ: How are leaders within the purity/modesty/abstinence-before-marriage movement responding to critiques of purity culture? Are they acknowledging critiques and accompanying criticism? To what extent are they accepting these critiques? Reframing critiques? To what extent do they appear to be changing their central stance/message as a result of such critiques?

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY, METHODS, AND DATA ANALYSIS

In this dissertation project, I aimed to contribute to: (1) the expanding body of literature focused on sexual purity practices and teachings and (2) the theoretical and practical understanding of strategies employed by evangelical Christian sexual purity leaders during times of heightened critique and criticism. Toward achieving these aims, I utilized a multimethod approach comprised of ethnographic participant observation, in-depth, semi-structured interviews, and qualitative, interpretive analysis of the data (i.e., blog posts, formal and informal speeches, social media posts, and several best-selling books). In order to exploit the collective potential of these multiple, yet complementary methods, I used Ellingson's (2009) concept of crystallization as a methodological frame [see also Richardson's (1994, 2000) concept of "qualitative crystallization"].

By using a crystallized approach to answer my research question (i.e., How are leaders within the purity/modesty/abstinence-before-marriage movement responding to critiques of purity culture?), I was able to examine (from multiple angles) the communicative strategies employed by a celebrated evangelical leader (i.e., Dannah Gresh) who serves as the public face of a popular sexual purity ministry during a time when critiques of sexual purity culture are numerous and persistent. In this chapter I provide: (1) an overview of crystallization as an approach to research, (2) an explanation of why crystallization is ideal as a methodological frame for this particular project, (3) an overview of the project and an introduction to the specific data that is the focus of this undertaking, (4) an overview of the procedures and a description of the participants and the recruitment practices I used in order to secure participant involvement, (5) an explanation of the data-gathering and analysis processes utilized in this study, and (6) a description of the theoretical frame used for data analysis. The data collection procedures and

methods developed for this project are located in the appendices of this dissertation and are referenced specifically throughout this chapter.

Crystallization: An Overview

Ellingson (2009) developed crystallization as a methodological approach when she found herself constrained by the commonly held assumption that scholars must limit themselves (in any given study) to the examination of a specific genre, to the utilization of a specific method of analysis, and to the employment of a specific way of reporting results. Ellingson (2009) bases her crystallized method on Richardson's (1994, 2000) notion that "qualitative *crystallization* [is] a postmodern reimagining of traditional, (post)positivist methodological triangulation (i.e., validating findings through mixed methods research design) as a messy multigenre, paradigm-spanning approach to resisting the art/science dichotomy" (Ellingson, 2009, p. xii).⁶ Ellingson (2009) summarizes the research method in this way:

Crystallization combines multiple forms of analysis and multiple genres of representation into a coherent text or series of related texts, building a rich and openly partial account of a phenomenon that problematizes its own construction, highlights researchers' vulnerabilities and positionality, makes claims about socially constructed meanings, and reveals the indeterminacy of knowledge claims even as it makes them. (p. 4)

By virtue of the fact that crystallization "problematizes the truths it presents" (Ellingson, 2009, p. 22), this method demands recognition that knowledge is partial, local, and historically situated

⁶ Tracy (2010) notes that "triangulation and crystallization are two [credibility enhancing] practices that align in craft but differ in paradigmatic motivation" (p. 843). Whereas triangulation emerged within realist paradigms with the aim of eradicating subjectivity, crystallization emerged from "poststructural and performative assumptions" (Tracy, 2010, p. 843), "not to provide researchers with a more valid singular truth, but to open up a more complex, in-depth, but still thoroughly partial, understanding of the issue" (Tracy, 2010, p. 844).

(see Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1997, 1998; Hartsock, 1983).

A crystallized frame is steeped within an epistemological view that asserts the world can be known, understood, and interpreted in a variety of ways (Manning & Kunkel, 2014). Therefore, scholars who use a crystallized approach, exploit “all there is to use” (Burke, 1973, p. 23) in order to develop more nuanced understandings of complex phenomena. Crystallization encourages researchers to engage in a notion of multiplicity by gathering multiple data types, by utilizing a variety of methods, by employing multiple theoretical frameworks (Tracy, 2010), and by “combining methods and genres from across regions of the continuum” (Ellingson, 2009, p. 5). Ellingson (2009) explains that “covering the same ground from different angles illuminates a topic” (p. 15). Examining different angles through a crystallized research model allows “findings [to] be considered in light of each other for fuller understanding” (Manning & Kunkel, 2014, p. 183). When employed, crystallization promotes data credibility and enhances truth value because its focus on the multiple rather than the singular (e.g., data sources, research methods, reporting formats) opens a variety of possibilities through which a phenomenon is unearthed, defined, examined, explained, and understood. Thus, crystallization is grounded within a feminist ideology wherein consideration of multiple and competing voices creates the possibility for a more thorough and more nuanced understanding of a phenomenon than a study utilizing a singular focus, singular method, and singular reporting style would render. The result is a product that yields a more holistic understanding of the phenomenon under investigation because patterns that emerge across different data types offer a higher degree of potential for analytical (rather than statistical) generalization (Ellingson, 2009; Manning & Kunkel, 2014).

Ellingson (2009) argues that qualitative, crystallized projects adhere to five guiding principles. First, crystallization offers “deep, thickly described, complexly rendered

interpretations of meanings about a phenomenon or group” (Ellingson, 2009, p. 10). Second, crystallized projects reflect “contrasting ways of knowing,” by including “at least one middle-ground (constructivist or post-positivist)” analytic approach along with at least one “interpretive, artistic, performative, or otherwise creative analytic approach” (Ellingson, 2009, p. 11). Third, a crystallization approach utilizes “more than one genre of writing” in the rendering of findings. For example, findings might be structured as a traditional research report, in narrative form, or through art, poetry, film, or music (Ellingson, 2009). Fourth, crystallization relies on “reflexive consideration of the researcher’s self and roles in the process of research design, data collection, and interpretation” (Ellingson, 2009, p. 10). Fifth, and finally, crystallization favors a view of knowledge as “situated, partial, constructed, multiple, embodied, and enmeshed in power relations” (Ellingson, 2009, p. 10).

Crystallization: An Ideal Methodological Frame for My Project

I describe my dissertation as “crystallized” because this research endeavor manifests in accordance with the five guiding principles (briefly identified above), which Ellingson (2009) asserts are necessary in order for a study to be classified as a crystallized project. First, I sought “to produce knowledge about a particular phenomenon through generating deepened, complex interpretation” (Ellingson, 2009, p. 10). I used thick, deep description, identifying prominent themes and patterns, and incorporating different genres and forms of analysis in order to “shed light on relevant cultural assumptions and constructions” (Ellingson, 2009, pp. 10-11). Second, I “encounter[ed] and [made] sense of [my] data through more than one way of knowing” (Ellingson, 2009, p. 11). I rendered my analysis by “juxtaposing different ways of knowing” through different and varied methods in order to reveal “subtleties in data” that would otherwise “remain masked” if “only one genre [was] used to report findings” (Ellingson, 2009, p. 11).

Third, I “[drew] upon *more than one way* of expressing data and/or the world” (Ellingson, 2009, p. 11). My writing and analysis were “intrinsically intertwine[d]” (p. 12) to “include more than one genre of writing or representation” (Ellingson, 2009, p. 11) of results. Fourth, I situated my study as a reflexive endeavor that relies on my “self and roles” through the process of research design, data collection, and interpretation” and as a process that recognizes knowledge is “situated, partial, constructed, multiple, embodied, and enmeshed in power relations” (Ellingson, 2009, p. 10). I located my “self” in the midst of the research process in order to transform my subjectivity from a perceived problem into an opportunity for rich dialogue and insight (Finlay, 2002). Fifth, and finally, I “surrender[ed] definitive truth claims...acknowledging that knowledge is never neutral, unbiased, or complete” (Ellingson, 2009, p. 13). I drew “together multiple methods *and* multiple genres simultaneously to enrich [my] findings *and* to demonstrate the inherent limitations of all knowledge” (p. 13).

An Overview of My Project and its Relevant Data

My investigation of contemporary manifestations of the purity movement merited a crystallized approach because I desired to develop a rich and nuanced understanding of a specific facet of the movement at a time when it was experiencing heightened critique. Specifically, I sought to examine presumed links between critiques of the sexual purity movement and a movement leader’s responses. By using a crystallized approach to study a highly-esteemed leader who guides noteworthy sexual purity efforts while she operates in unique and discrete contexts, I was able to purposefully utilize multiple methods to observe and examine the communicative strategies of Dannah Gresh, co-founder of Pure Freedom Ministries and Secret Keeper Girl.

To ensure the project was manageable and keenly focused on the research question (RQ:

How are leaders within the purity/modesty/abstinence-before-marriage movement responding to critiques of purity culture?), I imposed a bound timeframe (by examining how, and to what extent, current leaders in the purity movement are responding to critiques of purity culture messages and practices in the #MeToo and #ChurchToo era). Therefore, I conducted analyses of messages found in blogs and social media posts that were produced by Dannah Gresh and her Pure Freedom Ministries staff from October 15, 2017, to December 31, 2018. I used this time period as a binding device because October 15, 2017, marks the first use of the #MeToo hashtag in the Twittersphere and December 31, 2018, marks the end of a full calendar year after which the #MeToo and #ChurchToo movements began gaining momentum and generating widespread public attention.

In addition to isolating blogs and social media posts generated during this bound timeframe, I identified other texts for analysis (such as training sessions, conference presentations, interview sessions, and several of her best-selling books). I examined each individually, and then assessed them as a composite, in order to develop a holistic perspective. Furthermore, I employed ethnographic practices by functioning as a participant observer at three events: (1) the Pure Freedom Master Class, held in State College, Pennsylvania, from June 14-17, 2018, (2) the livestream of the True Woman '18 Conference held September 27-29, 2018, in Indianapolis, Indiana, and (3) the Wichita, Kansas, production of Dannah Gresh's Secret Keeper Girl Masterpiece World Tour on November 4, 2018. To augment my understanding, I coordinated and conducted a supplemental interview with Dannah Gresh, Bob Gresh, and their Secret Keeper Girl brand manager, as well as a supplemental interview with three members of "Across My Heart Ministries," who were in attendance at the Pure Freedom Master Class.

As I examined the data, I aspired to unearth dominant narratives, metaphors, and

definitions used to convey overarching messages and I sought to understand the primary strategies Dannah Gresh uses to navigate the current culture of critique. I examined Dannah Gresh's treatment of the concepts of "modesty," "virginity," and "purity," and I aimed to understand whether these concepts took on new meaning, or were framed differently, in the midst of the cultural milieu created by the #MeToo and #ChurchToo movements.

Dannah Gresh. Dannah Gresh is considered a powerhouse leader within the contemporary faith-based abstinence-until-marriage movement. A best-selling author and highly sought-after speaker, Gresh is described as a "mother/daughter communication coach" (Pure Freedom, 2018c), "an insider of the evangelical modesty and purity movement" (Gresh, 2013d), and "one of the leading experts on the subjects of sexual purity, modesty, and parenting tweens and teens" (Amazon, 2019). "Be the Mom" blogger, Tracey Eyster (2012), heralds Gresh as a specialist who "studies human sexuality, modesty, [and] the effect immodesty has on boys." Gresh's Pure Freedom website (Pure Freedom, 2018a) and TEDx bio (TEDx, 2013) tout that various media outlets (e.g., *The Chicago Tribune*, *TIME*, CNN, *USA Today*, *Christianity Today*, and *Women's Wear Daily*) frequently call upon her unique use of social science and medical research "to defend the conservative position on relationships and abstinence." Gresh is regularly invited to discuss "sexual theology" on FoxNews Live, FamilyLife Today, Revive Our Hearts Radio, Midday Connection, *The 700 Club*, and Focus on the Family. In addition to such appearances, she is frequently featured as a headline speaker on the mainstage at women's retreats and conferences (e.g., "Hydrate: Experience the Living Water Women's Weekend" and "True Woman 2018: The Truth that Sets Us Free Conference"). In April of 2013, she delivered a TEDx Talk ("The Walk of Fame vs The Walk of Shame," recorded at TEDxPSU at Penn State University in State College, Pennsylvania) in which she argued that there is societal intolerance

for the concept of virginity, for the desire to defer sexual activity until marriage, and for engaging in “sexual self-control” (TEDx, 2013).

With nearly 30 book titles bearing her name, Gresh is lauded as “one of the most successful Christian authors targeting teens and preteens” (Goodreads, 2019). Her most popular books include: *And the Bride Wore White: Seven Secrets to Sexual Purity* (1999, 2004, 2012b), *Secret Keeper: The Delicate Power of Modesty* (2002), *What Are You Waiting For? The One Thing No One Ever Tells You about Sex* (2011), *Six Ways to Keep the “Little” in Your Girl: Guiding Your Daughter from Her Tweens to Her Teens* (2010), *Six Ways to Keep the “Good” in Your Boy: Guiding Your Son from His Tweens to His Teens* (2012c), *Get Lost: Your Guide to Finding True Love* (2013f), and *Lies Young Women Believe: And the Truth that Sets Them Free* (DeMoss & Gresh, 2008; DeMoss Wolgemuth & Gresh, 2018).

According to her Goodreads bio (2019), for nearly 20 years, Dannah Gresh “has been fighting on the front lines to protect” teen and preteen girls from a culture “seeking to rob [them] of their innocence.” She has done so by advocating for an approach to abstinence-before-marriage education that teaches girls to simultaneously “celebrate their beauty” and to exercise what she calls “the self-control of modesty” (Gresh, 2013d). Her brand of modesty, according to Gardner (2011), is a “mode of power and control over men,” while immodesty is “relinquishment of that power” (p. 76). Gresh emphasizes the importance of the mother-daughter bond in the effort to raise girls “to be sexually pure, modest and emotionally whole” (Pure Freedom, 2018c).

Toward these ends, Dannah Gresh (along with her husband Bob) founded Pure Freedom, a non-denominational, not-for-profit ministry that serves as the umbrella organization through which the couple promote their ministries, house their online bookstore, provide access to media

coverage featuring Dannah's writings and teachings, manage Dannah's speaking schedule, and facilitate tax-deductible contributions from corporations and private donors. The official mission of the Pure Freedom enterprise, based on the bible verse Ephesians 5:31-32, is:

to encourage men and women of all ages to live a vibrant life of purity, to equip them to heal from past impurity if it exists in their lives and to experience a vibrant, passionate marriage which portrays the love Christ has for his Bride the church. (Pure Freedom, 2018c)

Through this ministry, Dannah and Bob Gresh produce and host live Pure Freedom events for teens using resources that Dannah creates for individual and group use (Pure Freedom, 2018a). Among the current available options are "do-it-yourself" retreat curricula that are sold in bundles on the Pure Freedom website. As of this writing in April 2019, church groups and youth leaders can choose from seven different titles offered at discounted rates in bulk quantities and paired with ancillary support materials like workbooks, DVDs, and leader resources (Pure Freedom, 2019).

While the Pure Freedom retreats, resources, and speaking engagement options offered by Dannah and Bob Gresh do indeed target "men and women of all ages" (Pure Freedom, 2018c), it is Dannah's Secret Keeper Girl franchise (designed for tweens, teens, and their mothers) that is the mainstay of the Pure Freedom enterprise. Marketed as "America's most popular tween stage show for moms and daughters" (Amazon, 2019), the Secret Keeper Girl brand evolved out of a book that Gresh published in 2002: *Secret Keeper: The Delicate Power of Modesty*. According to the Secret Keeper Girl website, upon the book's initial release:

it soon became a handbook for the modesty movement across the nation, encouraging teen girls to keep the deepest secrets of their beauty for one man. But while raising her

own daughter, Dannah realized that in today’s culture tween girls are being targeted with pressures that their mom’s [sic] didn’t face until high school. Wanting to keep her little girl from growing up too fast, she knew that she needed to instill the values of true beauty and modesty before those teen years. Mascara, spaghetti straps, training bras and all the other danger zones of being a girl: Dannah gathered her daughter and her friends together for a Christ-centered, tween-friendly study on the topic of what it means to be a godly girl. This little Bible study grew into a full-time ministry reaching moms and daughters across the nation! (Secret Keeper Girl, 2018)

Weddle Irons and Springer Mock (2015) write that Dannah Gresh’s Secret Keeper Girl line “has birthed a purity empire” (p. 93)—an empire through which myriad books, programs, and event tickets can be purchased and through which daughters can learn under their mothers’ tutelage “how best to remain modest” in the endeavor to save “the deepest secrets of her beauty for just one man” (Weddle Irons & Springer Mock, 2015, p. 93). Although Dannah Gresh’s purity-focused books for girls are chart-topping best sellers, Bob Gresh has co-authored two books with Dannah, which address the subject of sexual purity in boys: *Who Moved the Goalpost?: 7 Winning Strategies in the Sexual Integrity Gameplan* (Gresh & Gresh, 2001) and *Talking with Your Daughter about Understanding Boys: 8 Great Dates for Dads and Daughters* (Gresh & Gresh, 2014). Additionally, in the fall of 2017, Bob launched a stage show (under the Pure Freedom Ministries umbrella) for boys and their fathers—the “Born to Be Brave Tour.” The tour website describes the event as “a one-night father-son adventure where you’ll learn to lead your son in becoming a godly man” (Born to Be Brave Tour, 2017).

Despite the critiques that are launched at evangelical Christian sexual purity culture, Dannah Gresh’s various ministry efforts clearly strike a resonant chord within her target

audience as she boasts a significant number of followers and devotees (for example, as of April 2019, her official Dannah Gresh and Secret Keeper Girl Facebook pages have a combined total of over 175,000 “likes”). In this dissertation project, I examined messages generated by Dannah Gresh to better understand how she, as a contemporary promoter of faith-based sexual purity, is weathering the storms raging in the current and contemporary #MeToo and #ChurchToo climate, which points to the complicity of purity culture in numerous church-based cases of sexual abuse, as well as with other internal self-esteem related maladies. Analyzing Dannah Gresh and her Pure Freedom Ministries efforts as a compendium of data sources enabled me to address the primary research question posed in my dissertation project (i.e., How are leaders within the purity/modesty/abstinence-before-marriage movement responding to critiques of purity culture?).

Procedures Overview

This project unfolded in three overlapping stages. What follows is an overview of each stage, as well as a brief introduction to the procedures and methods I employed. Following the overview of these stages, I offer a more detailed account of the methods used, as well as relevant participant details, and eventually, the data analysis procedures.

Stage 1. In consultation with my advisor, Dr. Adrienne Kunkel, I assembled the procedures and methods for a portion of my dissertation data, participant observation and the interviews, and then submitted them to the University of Kansas Human Research Protection Program (or Institutional Review Board, IRB) in early June of 2018. After receiving IRB approval, I attended the Pure Freedom Master Class, held in State College, Pennsylvania, from June 14-17, 2018. This four-day event was held in two physical locations: (1) Grace Prep High School (which operates out of the Centre Church building, which Dannah and Bob consider their “church home”) and (2) the “Gresh Farm” (Dannah and Bob Gresh’s home located on the

outskirts of State College, Pennsylvania, where along with their family home, they own a swath of idyllic farmland that is populated with animals such as llamas, goats, horses, a turkey, and peacocks). For the attendees, the Pure Freedom Master Class was described as an “accelerated leadership experience” structured as an intensive, highly scheduled time of attending classes on “Biblical Sexual Theology” and “Sexual Healing” (team taught by Dannah and Bob Gresh); participating in worship sessions that included singing praise and worship songs and praying aloud; listening to guest speakers present perspectives and information on hot-button issues (e.g., non-binary sexuality, birth control, and sex trafficking); and networking with other Master Class attendees. Networking often occurred when attendees met in small “break-out groups” which served as built-in touchstones throughout the four-day event. In these groups, at the ends of, or in between, class sessions, attendees would process what they were learning and then enter into a time of guided, structured prayer. Additionally, attendees socialized during meals held either in the basement of Grace Prep High School, on the “Gresh Farm,” or at local restaurants.

Throughout each of these events, I engaged in participant observation activities, taking detailed notes about Master Class curricular topics, group dynamics, emergent themes bearing clear import for those in attendance, and strategies used (by presenters and attendees) to address critiques of particular stances on particular issues. I also conducted two semi-structured, interactional interviews: one with Dannah Gresh, Bob Gresh, and the Secret Keeper Girl brand manager (who also served as my transportation chauffeur and informational point person during my stay), and the other with three leaders of a sexual purity ministry (“Across My Heart Ministries”) based in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

During this pilot study stage, I also traveled to San Antonio, Texas, and attended the Girl Defined Love Defined conference from August 3-4, 2018. While there, I engaged in participant

observation activities, taking copious notes during the mainstage sessions, as well as during the breakout sessions, noting group dynamics, emergent topics, and strategies used to respond to critiques. Following the Girl Defined Love Defined conference, on August 5, 2018, I attended church with Girl Defined co-founders, sisters Kristen Baird Clark and Bethany Baird Beal, and then conducted a 66-minute, semi-structured, interactional interview with them over lunch. While the data rendered from this portion of the pilot study was intriguing, insightful, and important, I chose to exclude Girl Defined from this dissertation project as a means of ensuring focus and cohesion. The data gathered on Girl Defined will be retained and used in future, post-dissertation projects.

Stage 2. Stage 2 involved attending live events that were either created by Dannah Gresh or were in some way facilitated by her. From September 27-29, 2018, I attended, via livestream, the True Woman '18 Conference, which was held in Indianapolis, Indiana. At this event, Dannah Gresh joined Nancy DeMoss Wolgemuth and Mary Kassian (both mentioned in Chapter 3 as key figures in the "Titus 2" biblical womanhood movement) as an emcee, a mainstage keynote speaker, and as the moderator of multiple panel sessions. During a Friday morning breakout session, Dannah Gresh served as a headline speaker for an installment of "Young True Woman," a series of True Woman '18 sessions that were designed especially for mothers and their 13- to 17-year-old daughters. Dannah Gresh's True Woman '18 mainstage presentations were titled "The Truth about Marriage" and "The Truth about Emotions" (Revive Our Hearts, 2018d) and her Young True Woman session was publicized as an opportunity to "feast on the truth" about "three of the most powerful lies young women believe—lies about God, lies about guys, and lies about media" (Revive Our Hearts, 2018e).

On October 18, 2018, Wade Harris, Chief Operating Officer of Pure Freedom Ministries

(whom I met in June 2018 at the Pure Freedom Master Class event), emailed to tell me that Dannah wanted to invite me and my husband Christopher to attend an all-expense paid “Encouragement and Vision” event in Dallas, Texas, where “Bob and Dannah [would] be teaching all weekend long and then taking time to share more about the vision and needs of the ministry.” The event took place at the opulent Omni Hotel in downtown Dallas. Though I did not elect to attend this event (due to the last-minute nature of the invitation, scheduling conflicts, and the cost of airfare), knowing about it and monitoring Dannah and Bob Gresh’s social media activity during that time period, afforded some important insight into their world and activities during this particularly relevant point in time.

On November 4, 2018, I attended the Secret Keeper Girl Masterpiece World Tour event at Countryside Christian Church in Wichita, Kansas, as a participant observer. I secured a VIP ticket, which assured me early admission to the event; a seat within the first five center rows; an exclusive “VIP Meet ‘n’ Greet” time of conversation with other VIP ticket holders and the performers who star in the show; and a “VIP Behind-the-Scenes Tour” of backstage props, costumes, and the Secret Keeper Girl Tour Bus.

Stage 3. To begin this stage, I worked to gain a more comprehensive understanding of Dannah Gresh, her ministry, her affiliations, her purported stance on specific issues, and her rhetorical style and persona by examining several of her best-selling books (e.g., *Secret Keeper: The Delicate Power of Modesty*, 2002; *And the Bride Wore White: Seven Secrets to Sexual Purity*, 1999, 2004, 2012; *Get Lost: Your Guide to Finding True Love*, 2013f, and *It’s Great to Be a Girl: A Guide to Your Changing Body*, 2015) and by watching several of her noteworthy presentations available online (e.g., “The Walk of Fame vs The Walk of Shame,” TEDx, 2013, and “The Secret of the Lord: Discovering Authentic Christian Freedom,” Cedarville University

Chapel, 2018i). The lion's share of Stage 3, however, involved sifting through, selecting, preserving, and analyzing text-based data that afforded me insight into my research question.

During this stage, I identified blog posts that were published during the bound timeframe (October 15, 2017–December 31, 2018) on Dannah Gresh's Pure Freedom website and on her Secret Keeper Girl website; I transcribed footage from an in-depth interview conducted by Joshua Harris (in January 2018 on location at the Gresh Farm) that was made available (for a fee of \$44)⁷ on the "backstage" of Harris's *I Survived I Kissed Dating Goodbye* movie website; and I carefully monitored (checking five times per day) both Dannah and Bob Gresh's social media activity on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, while also periodically running searches on their names within these platforms. As a result of my social media monitoring practices, I became privy to current and past critiques aimed at Dannah Gresh by leaders of the #ChurchToo movement (most notably Emily Joy Allison-Hearn) and by other outspoken critics of evangelical purity culture (e.g., Dianna E. Anderson and Hannah "Eve" Ettinger, among others).

The activities I engaged in during stages 1, 2, and 3 positioned me to better understand recurring narratives, metaphors, and definitions Dannah Gresh uses when discussing terms such as "modesty," "virginity," and "purity" and when she is strategically justifying and defending her practices related to these concepts in the current #MeToo/#ChurchToo atmosphere.

Methods of Data Collection

Because I gained in-person access to Dannah Gresh and Bob Gresh, because I attended multiple high-profile events featuring Dannah Gresh, and because I accessed and preserved the contents of many of her online published texts, I employed the multimethod crystallized approach described earlier. The methods included: autoethnography (Chapter 2), ethnographic

⁷ Because the backstage passes expire after six months, I made two purchases (one for \$20 and another for \$24) over the course of my research for this project.

participant observation, in-depth semi-structured interviews, as well as analyses of several texts (described above). In the following sections, I provide descriptions of each of the methods used to unearth my findings. Prior to the details of ethnographic (i.e., participant observation) research and interviewing, I describe the process of securing permission to engage in research with human subjects.

Autoethnography. As noted above, autoethnography was used in Chapter 2 to situate my personal experiences with purity culture amongst relevant scholarly and popular literature. Ellis (2004) describes autoethnography as an autobiographical research method that involves “writing about the personal and its relationship to culture” (p. 37). According to Bochner and Ellis (2006) this methodology displays “people in the process of figuring out what to do, [learning] how to live, and [making sense of] the meaning of their struggles” (p. 111). For Ellis and Bochner (2006), autoethnography is an epistemological, methodological endeavor that aims to help others learn about themselves by witnessing and relating to others’ stories. Doing so challenges the dichotomous relationship between objectivity-subjectivity, other-self, and self-social (Bochner & Ellis, 2006). Holman Jones (2005) explains that autoethnography invites readers into a lived and felt experience, encouraging them to respond to and react from the contexts of their own lives while “[holding] self and culture together” and while creating “charged moments of clarity, connection, and change” (pp. 764-765). This happens as a result of the autoethnographer examining outer social and cultural aspects of personal experience and making available an inner “vulnerable self,” affording readers insight into multiple layers of consciousness (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 739).

Clearly, I used elements of autoethnography in this project. As mentioned in the paragraph above, autoethnography served as a narrative and contextual frame for Chapter 2; yet

it was also used at times to provide insights in Chapter 5 as I engaged in sense-making activities to process and render my data. As I took on the role of a reflexive researcher, I “continually [reflected] upon [my] interpretations of both [my] experience and the phenomena being studied so as to move beyond the partiality of [my] previous understandings and [my] investment in particular research outcomes” (Finlay, 2003, p. 108). In this way, I used autoethnography to examine sense-of-self-related complexities that arose as a result of my engagement with this topic.

Permission to engage in research with human subjects. In early June of 2018, I submitted the appropriate documentation to the University of Kansas Institutional Review Board (IRB) requesting approval for the ethnographic (i.e., participant observation) and interview components of this project. The IRB granted me permission to conduct ethnographic observations of, and interviews with, those in attendance at purity movement events coordinated by relevant organizations (see Appendix A). The email script I used to recruit participants is included as Appendix B, the informed consent form is included as Appendix C, and the interview protocol is included as Appendix D. My interview questions, subsequent discussions, and field notes all focused on the critiques purity movement leaders and their ministry efforts encountered both before the advent of the #MeToo and #ChurchToo movements and in the wake of these movements’ influence on social and cultural discussions.

It should be noted that the informed consent document (included in this dissertation as Appendix C) was initially developed (and approved by IRB) during a stage of the research process when I anticipated interviewing only attendees (emerging sexual purity movement leaders) of the Pure Freedom Master Class and the Girl Defined Love Defined conference. I did not know at the time, or anticipate, that I would be afforded interview access to such high-profile

evangelical Christian sexual purity leaders as Dannah and Bob Gresh and Kristen Baird Clark and Bethany Baird Beal. When I spoke with Dannah Gresh during our initial vetting conversation (on May 7, 2018) to determine whether I would be allowed to attend the Pure Freedom Master Class and to interview attendees, I mentioned that the informed consent statement would indicate that attendees' identities would be obscured, but that because of her public prominence (as well as Bob's), I would not be offering them the same assurance. She responded, saying, "Well, everything that we teach is also out there in print and video. We don't have anything to hide. So, I don't see that as a problem" (D. Gresh, personal communication, May 7, 2018). At the time of our face-to-face interview (June 15, 2018), before they signed the informed consent statements, we discussed the sections labeled "Procedures," "Risks," and "Participant Confidentiality." I indicated that the form was originally developed for people occupying less publicly prominent roles than they and that I would be associating their names with their responses in my dissertation project. Both Dannah and Bob Gresh verbally acknowledged their understanding, and on the following day (June 16, 2018) at the Pure Freedom Master Class, I reiterated to them verbally that their responses would not be anonymized. After consulting with my advisor, Dr. Adrienne Kunkel, I then documented this verbally clarified understanding directly on the already signed informed consent forms, crossing out the sections promising confidentiality and noting in the margins of Dannah and Bob Gresh's forms their verbal agreement to the revisions: "Not applicable for leaders. Approved by Bob and Dannah Gresh, 6/16/18, verbally." To preserve the confidentiality of those Pure Freedom Master Class participants who were interviewed, who signed informed consent forms, and who were not Dannah or Bob Gresh, I created pseudonyms to obscure their identity.

Ethnography. Ethnography was employed during stages 1 and 2 of this research project.

For the ethnographic components of this study, I engaged in participant observation activities by immersing myself in the cultural settings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008) where Dannah Gresh regularly makes herself, her husband, Bob, and her Pure Freedom Ministries staff members accessible. By issuing queries requesting permission to attend these events as a participant observer, as well as through payment of requisite fees and through registering for tickets, I was able to gain immersive access to Dannah and Bob Gresh's Pure Freedom Master Class (which cost approximately \$500 to attend), to Dannah's livestreamed and audio-recorded presentations and appearances at the True Woman '18 Conference (which was free but required early registration), and to the Secret Keeper Girl Masterpiece World Tour (which cost approximately \$80 for a VIP pass).

Gold (1958) asserts that there are four potential field observation roles that a researcher might adopt: (1) a complete participant, (2) a participant-as-observer, (3) an observer-as-participant, and (4) a complete observer. When the researcher assumes the role of a *complete participant*, they obscure their role as a researcher to the degree that other participants consider the researcher as a full co-participant or as a "colleague" (Gold, 1958, p. 219). In other words, the complete participant researcher assumes the role of a covert insider. A *participant-as-observer* assumes a similar role to that of a complete participant except that within the role as participant-as-observer, "both the field worker and the informant are aware that theirs is a field relationship" (Gold, 1958, p. 220). Here, the participant-as-observer acts as both a group insider and an observer seeking to understand processes. The *observer-as-participant* role involves "more formal observation" and less participation, meaning there is a lower risk of "going native" than with the two aforementioned roles (Gold, 1958, p. 221). Finally, the *complete observer* role "entirely removes a field worker from social interaction with informants" (Gold, 1958, p. 221),

meaning that with this type of role, the researcher observes in a manner that is least obtrusive and carries with it the lowest possibility of impacting the setting or the participants.

Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995) acknowledge that participant observers likely straddle the boundaries of different ethnographer role types, but regardless of the level of immersion and action on the part of the researcher, it is to be expected that there will always be some impact on those who are studied. Clarke (1975, p. 99) refers to this as “consequential presence,” explaining that ethnographers should anticipate that their presence will have some level of influence on the ways that members engage in and perform discourse. Rather than view this as a detriment to the enterprise of ethnography [or as what Clarke (1975) calls a “contamination” of the data], though, Emerson et al. (1995) contend these points of impact and influence have the potential to serve as the locus of “learning and observation” (p. 3).

During my ethnographic experiences, I engaged in various group-defining and group-shaping exercises and practices (e.g., small group and large group activities such as prayer, worship singing, authentic sharing, and supportive listening); however, due to four ways that I conducted myself as a researcher during these events, I found myself fitting squarely within one of Gold’s (1958) potential field observation roles. First, because I did not become involved in these sites/locations/communities in a sustained way over time (these were discrete one-time events, or one-time immersive visits), second, because I made clear my role as researcher multiple times throughout the events when interacting with co-participants, third, because I did not “give myself over emotionally” to the events and activities in the ways one would if they were a “true believer,” and fourth, because my purpose in attending these events was to learn through observation rather than to be transformed by the experiences, I did not categorize myself as a complete participant, as a participant-as-observer, or as a complete observer; rather, I

conducted myself in accordance with the ethnographic role of *observer-as-participant* (by engaging in more formal observation and less participation).

Field notes. During each of my ethnographic observation activities, I collected field notes focused on the content of the observed sessions; the reactions, questions, and comments of my fellow participants; and my own emotional responses to what was observed. I spent my first day at the Pure Freedom Master Class taking handwritten notes so as not to be obtrusive with the sound of my fingers clacking on my computer keyboard (I am a loud, forceful typist!). I felt that refraining from the use of electronic devices on this first day would help me be more fully present with the rest of the group, to appear less distanced, to be less of a distraction to the other participants, and to be better able to build a deeper sense of trust and mutuality between myself and the other participants. This approach seemed to work well. On subsequent days, after trust and authentic connection were established, I took notes using both my computer and paper. Out of respect, during times of sensitive sharing and times of prayer, I refrained from taking any in-the-moment notes at all. At the end of each day, and during airport layovers, as well as on plane rides home from State College, Pennsylvania, to Wichita, Kansas, I reviewed my notes, clarified concepts, identified emergent questions, and recurrent concepts, themes, and metaphors.

When I attended, via livestream, the True Woman '18 Conference, I used two computers (one to watch and one to register observations) in my private faculty office at Bethel College. I took notes on the event content, as well as on the comments sections on the Revive Our Hearts (the organization that oversees and maintains all aspects of the True Woman Movement) social media feeds (Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook). Realtime conversations unfolded as other livestream attendees logged on to share their thoughts on session presenters and session content. I transcribed (by later accessing digital recordings of the sessions, made available through the

True Woman '18 website) the sessions that Dannah Gresh facilitated or headlined and I took notes, keeping track of concepts, themes, and metaphors that emerged.

During the Secret Keeper Girl Masterpiece World Tour event, because of my VIP ticket status, I sat up front, in the second row with other VIP ticket holders. As I was the only participant in my section who attended alone and without a child, I tried to ensure that I did little else to draw attention to myself; therefore, I did not take notes in any obvious manner until the event was well under way. Paper programs were distributed upon entry, which (once the event was about half-way through) I used to take some notes by hand, but on the whole, I waited until I returned to my car to secure notes using a digital recording device and I added detail and clarification to those notes when I returned home later that evening.

I transcribed most notes via computer immediately after they were taken in order to ensure maximum validity (Lindlof & Taylor, 2017), though some were written by hand in research journals (see Ellingson, 2009). All were scanned and saved in Microsoft OneNote files (a digital note-taking, data-management application). Because Richardson (2000) recommends using individual field note journals to chronicle personal feelings and observations, I used multiple journals to organize various types of field notes (e.g., notes regarding methods, personal thoughts, theories, and observations).

Ethnographic data collection and participant information. While concrete, exacting demographic data was not published after any of the ethnographic events, there were general, approximate figures that were available through observation, through statements issued during mainstage events, or through requests for ticket sale information. At the Pure Freedom Master Class in June 2018, I observed that there were 31 individuals in attendance (though this number shifted over the course of the weekend due to participants' travel schedules). Most of the

attendees were women (26), though five men did attend with their wives, and additional male members of the Pure Freedom Ministries staff were also present, sometimes participating as speakers, observers, audio/video engineers, and errand runners. About seven of the attendees were either Pure Freedom Ministries staff members or staff/faculty of Grace Prep High School. The age range ran the gamut from 18 to mid-70s, with a median of about 40 years of age. At the September 2018 True Woman Conference, it was reported from the main stage during opening remarks that 7,000 women were physically present at the event in Indianapolis, Indiana, with 500 young women attending the teen track (Young True Woman); that there were a total of 15,000 groups signed up to experience the livestream as it was projected into churches and homes; that there were 40,000 unique livestreams over the course of the weekend conference; and that livestreams were sent to all 50 states and to 33 countries around the world, including Nigeria, Fiji, and numerous African nations. Through personal correspondence with Dannah Gresh's office manager and personal assistant, I ascertained that 480 women and girls attended the November 2018 Wichita, Kansas, Secret Keeper Girl Masterpiece World Tour event.

As a result of my immersive participation at all three of the aforementioned events, I completed approximately 74 hours of participant observation at the scheduled meetings, classes, and events, as well as during car rides with fellow participants to and from events. I also generated 52 typed, single-spaced Word document pages of field notes, filled two and a half 50-page 8.5" x 14" legal pads with hand-written field notes, and wrote memos in the margins of 65 pages of workbook-style materials that were circulated at or before each event.

Interviews. During Stage 1 of this dissertation project, I conducted interviews to gain clarity on concepts and ideas that were taught and discussed during the Pure Freedom Master Class to check my observations of other participants in attendance (including participant-leaders

Dannah and Bob Gresh) and to generate thoughtful and descriptive data. Interviews were used to prompt interviewees to check my presuppositions and to articulate their ideas, beliefs, and understandings in their own words (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015). To gain insight into purity movement leaders' goals, as well as to understand how they conceptualize criticism of the purity movement and the resulting purity culture, I employed a semi-structured interview protocol that facilitated "guided" conversations (Lindlof & Taylor, 2017). Thus, I prepared a detailed interview script to govern the territory the interview would cover, but I also took the liberty to deviate from the protocol in order to probe for further information at opportune times (Dilley, 2000) and to encourage the participants to become co-creators in the interview process (Manning & Kunkel, 2014). Additionally, I adhered to Dilley's (2000) suggestions for conducting successful interviews: I examined background information on my interviewees; I internalized my interview protocol; I listened carefully for what was said and not said; I compared what interviewees said with my own observations; I studied body language; and I "adopt[ed] the respondent's role," by attempting to "look at the situation from [their] perspective instead of the interviewer's [mine]" (p. 135) (see Appendix C for the informed consent form and Appendix D for the interview protocol).

Recruitment and procedures. I used purposeful (also referred to as purposive and judgment) sampling to make informed decisions about whom to target as ideal subjects of study, as well as ideal interview candidates. Purposeful sampling is a qualitative research technique used in identification and selection processes when cases are "information rich" and resources are limited (Patton, 2001, p. 45). According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2011), purposeful sampling involves intentionally selecting (or recruiting) individuals or groups of individuals "who have experienced the central phenomenon or the key concept being explored in the study"

(p. 173). In addition to experience with the phenomenon at hand, Spradley (1979, pp. 45-54) identifies three important considerations in determining whether to employ purposeful sampling: (1) availability of the participants you wish to include, (2) willingness of potential participant candidates, and (3) ability of the candidates to communicate experiences and opinions in an articulate, expressive, and reflective manner.

Purposeful sampling guided my recruitment process in that I sought to observe and interview individuals and group members whose experiences, knowledge, and expertise are relevant to my overarching research question. I identified potential participants based on their leadership roles within faith-based sexual purity organizations that have a significant following on social media. I recruited these individuals by reaching out to them via email, social media private messaging channels, and telephone conversations. Once contact was made, I requested their approval of my participation as a researcher at their events, and I inquired whether an in-person interview would be possible. After initial attendance approval was gained from Dannah and Bob Gresh, they indicated that they would determine together whether they would grant me an interview after we met in person and their Pure Freedom Master Class event (held in June 2018) was under way.

Dannah and Bob Gresh allowed me full participant-researcher access to activities and attendees at the Pure Freedom Master Class event. While there, I conducted a total of two semi-structured interviews with two groups of people (for a total of six participants directly interviewed for this study). The first interview was a 111-minute session with three participants (Dannah and Bob Gresh and their brand manager). The second interview was a 75-minute session with three participants (three leaders of “Across My Heart Ministries” who were also attending the Pure Freedom Master Class).

During a break, in between sessions on Friday afternoon of June 15, 2018, Bob Gresh approached me, indicating that he and Dannah wanted to invite me to supper with their brand manager and that I could expect to conduct an interview with them during that time. We met at an upscale restaurant and requested an outdoor table where it would be quieter than inside the restaurant. After securing their signatures on informed consent forms and asking if I could record our session, I activated two recording devices and conducted the interview. Earlier in the day, I approached three women representing “Across My Heart Ministries” and asked if I might conduct an interview with them. They eagerly agreed, with their executive director and co-founder saying, “We hoped someone would want to talk with us.” We exchanged business cards, and after I returned to my hotel following the interview with Dannah and Bob Gresh, I texted the co-founder of “Across My Heart Ministries” to indicate I was available. The three women drove to my hotel, where I met them outside. Together, we assessed the options for interview spaces in the hotel’s public gathering areas, and we decided to pursue an option with less noise and more privacy. Thus, we went to my hotel room and sat around a table in the dining room portion of my hotel suite, where after they signed informed consent documents and consented to the session being recorded, I activated two digital recorders and conducted the interview. In September of 2018, the interviews were sent to a professional transcription service, yielding a total of 62 single-spaced pages of data (which I cross-checked and corrected for accuracy).

Overview of additional data sources. In addition to ethnographic notes and interview transcripts, the data analyzed in this dissertation came from 66 blog posts and their comment sections (i.e., Dannah Gresh’s Pure Freedom Ministries blog posts, as well as Secret Keeper Girl blog posts) and posts and accompanying comments that were posted on the official Dannah Gresh and Secret Keeper Girl Facebook feeds. The social media posts and blogs that were

secured, preserved, and analyzed were either originally published or promoted (i.e., linked to social media feeds) between October 15, 2017, and December 31, 2018.⁸ Midway through the sample selection and preservation process, I encountered some difficulty as the Pure Freedom Ministries' website began to bear evidence of preparation for the launch of a rebranding and updating process. Those blog posts which were updated to match the visual identity of the new front page no longer carry with them the original comments that at one time accompanied the original posts. In fact, as of this writing (April 2019), on those posts that have been updated, there is no comment section option. Fortunately, in early October of 2018, I began preserving blog posts that would fit in a category of "responses to critique." As a result of this preservation process, I "clipped" and saved a total of 86 blog posts and their accompanying comments in my Microsoft OneNote dissertation notebook. For the Facebook-related data, I culled through Dannah Gresh's Facebook feed between the aforementioned timeframe and I copied and pasted all posts (and the accompanying comments) that dealt with issues of criticism or critique. This Facebook-culling process yielded a 235-page single-spaced document, with images peppered throughout.

Theoretical Frame for Data Analysis

A grounded practical theory approach proved helpful for guiding and illuminating data gathering, and data sense-making, processes as this project unfolded. Grounded theory entails analyzing data by following a set of steps and procedures and by formulating a theory based on

⁸ While only 16 new blog posts were published to the Pure Freedom and Secret Keeper Girl blogs during the bound timeframe (October 15, 2017, to December 31, 2018), Dannah Gresh frequently engages her social media followers by posting links to older blog entries. This means that some of the blog posts analyzed in this project, though originally published outside of the bracketed timeframe, in actuality were promoted and discussed during the bound timeframe, and were therefore included as data for analysis (see Appendix E for a listing of all blog post titles examined in this study).

the resulting analysis. Applied communication scholars Craig and Tracy (1995) have developed and honed what they call “grounded practical theory.” This approach offers a frame through which to understand “the communication problems experienced by practitioners” and “the specific techniques by which they attempt to cope with those problems” (Craig & Tracy, 1995, p. 250). They define grounded practical theory as a “metatheoretical and methodological framework for developing theories designed to inform reflective thinking and deliberation about particular communication practices” (Craig & Tracy, 2014, pp. 231-232; see also Manning & Kunkel, 2014). The aim of this type of theoretical approach is to provide “grounded description, critique, and theoretical reconstruction of communication problems, techniques, and situated ideals” (Craig & Tracy, 1995, p. 250). The primary contribution of grounded practical theory is that it offers a framework for “constructing practical theories of particular communication practices in their own terms, rather than by interpreting them through a universal heuristic model” (Craig & Tracy, 2014, p. 236).

Analysis of the data. All participant observation notes, interview transcripts, blog and social media posts, and relevant speaking engagement transcripts were treated both in isolation, as well as in combination with one another. In isolation, they were analyzed and then compared against each other. Taken together, they were treated as a cohesive data set. Because of the exploratory nature of this study, I utilized inductive and iterative analytic techniques and employed a combination of concept-driven, open, and axial coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This cohesive, multifaceted approach allowed me to identify recurring and patterned themes that emerged throughout different data sets (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Using an inductive, constant comparison coding method to establish longitudinally recurring themes located within Dannah Gresh’s writings and speaking engagements allowed me to

identify strategies she employs when responding to or anticipating criticism.

I began by first engaging a practice of concept-driven coding during which I identified substantive codes that demarcated the prevalent ideas and themes located in communicative messages crafted and engaged by Dannah Gresh. This initial practice of substantive coding laid a foundation for developing a conceptual map from which theoretical codes could later be examined and qualified (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser, 1998). I first began cataloging recurrent themes along with documentation of supporting examples in Microsoft OneNote. As my data sources grew in number, I continued this digital preservation note-taking process, but also printed out and taped these substantive codes to three separate large walls (in an empty classroom near my faculty office) in order to create a birds' eye view which allowed me to determine whether some codes were simply anomalies or if they were, in fact, subordinate to larger, overarching themes. I then used a highlighting process to code and recode my data sources. As I employed a constant comparison coding process (Glaser, 1965; Miles & Huberman, 1994), I wrote memos to chronicle my observations, insights, and reactions. Once these initial, concept-driven themes were established, I compared and contrasted the emergent substantive, preliminary codes and developed a codebook (with documentation of my coding decisions, themes, code names for each theme, and examples for each theme, as suggested by Lindlof and Taylor, 2017), which provided a mechanism for later identifying more macro-level, theoretical codes, and I further explored the data through open and axial coding (Charmaz, 2006).

This ongoing, open coding process necessitated multiple passes through the data and yielded a coding scheme that was shaped by constant comparative sense making (Glaser, 1965; Miles & Huberman, 1994). During this constant comparison process, I repeatedly revised and refined my codebook until my initial themes gave way to larger patterns and themes (Charmaz,

2006; Manning & Kunkel, 2014). As a result of this process, axial coding made it possible to delineate amongst common themes and specific strategies that emerged from the data. The benefit of employing an open and axial coding process was that I was able to discover patterns in the data set that I may not have otherwise anticipated had I relied solely on the codes and strategies identified in the scholarly literature (Manning & Kunkel, 2014; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Throughout the analysis, I remained vigilant about ensuring that the process was consistently open, ongoing, and flexible. In addition to other practices, this meant that when anomalies (or, what Lindlof and Taylor, 2017, refer to as “deviant cases”) arose, I examined whether they conformed to already coded categories or whether their deviance from established patterns (Lindlof & Taylor, 2017) offered more “holistic and meaningful” insight (Manning & Kunkel, 2014, p. 202). This iterative process allowed me to be guided by the data, to check those constructs against the scholarship associated with those constructs, and to determine how particular data sets added unique illumination to the already established literature. For the duration of this open coding process, I engaged in multiple conversations with my advisor, Dr. Adrienne Kunkel, to discuss emergent codes as well as my coding decisions, until the initially identified themes were collapsed into finalized categories as a result of the constant comparison process (Charmaz, 2006; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Conclusion

The methods and procedures outlined above served as a guide for this dissertation study. Through the employment of grounded practical theory, along with a crystallized approach (i.e., using ethnographic participant observation, in-depth, semi-structured interviews, and analyses of blog posts, formal and informal speeches, social media posts, and several best-selling books), I was able to answer my overarching research question for this dissertation project of how leaders

within the purity/modesty/abstinence-before-marriage movement are responding to critiques of purity culture, and to expand the existing body of research on the contemporary evangelical Christian sexual purity movement. In the following chapters (through the findings and subsequent discussion), I offer insights into shifting communication strategies within the purity movement and I contribute to contemporary scholarly conversations regarding religion, gender, power, and communication.

CHAPTER 5: RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION

As articulated above, my multifaceted research question asks: How are leaders within the purity/modesty/abstinence-before-marriage movement responding to critiques of purity culture? Are they acknowledging the critiques and criticism? To what extent are they accepting or reframing these critiques? To what extent do they appear to be changing their central stance or primary message as a result of such critiques?

In an effort to address these questions, in the pages that follow, I categorize and explain the dominant practices that a well-known and active leader within the evangelical Christian sexual purity movement (Dannah Gresh) uses to maintain and shore up her image (alongside the image of her Pure Freedom Ministries brand) as she maneuvers through direct, indirect, perceived, and anticipated critiques. In this chapter, I accomplish the following objectives: (1) reiterate critiques frequently launched toward the sexual purity movement, (2) demonstrate Dannah Gresh's awareness of such critiques, and (3) establish her level of engagement with #MeToo/#ChurchToo hashtags. Further, I develop what I call a "Framework of Strategic Curation" to (4) identify and describe prominent strategies that Dannah Gresh employs to combat such critiques during the height of public awareness of #MeToo and #ChurchToo activism (at a time when purity movement efforts and goals are experiencing intensified criticism and concern), (5) explain how these techniques function as attempts to shore up her personal brand and ethos, and (6) consider how simultaneous adherence to, and careful deviation from, these strategic categories assists Dannah Gresh in her bid to combat the significant obstacles she faces at a time when her primary message (promoting sexual abstinence until heterosexual Christian marriage) is deemed not only as outmoded, but also as detrimental to the emotional and physical wellness of the segment of the target audience intended to receive this message, accept

it, adopt it, embody it, enact it, and promote it.

A Reiteration of Critiques of the Sexual Purity Movement

Before delineating how Dannah Gresh contends with criticism, it is helpful to recall the scope and nature of critiques she faces as a principal leader within the purity movement. Those who study various facets of the sexual purity movement, and those who provide critical commentary on it from a variety of perspectives and experiences, indicate that sexual purity teachings disparage single parenthood (Solinger, 2000), undervalue the experiences and personhood of children born outside of marriage (Odem, 1995), vilify women's rights efforts (Lord, 2010), discourage women's sexual and social empowerment (Bolz-Weber, 2019), shame women for inspiring sexual feeling and expression in others (Klein, 2019), demonize non-binary sexuality and relationships (Charlton, 2013), undermine the right of marriage equality for all (No Shame Movement, n.d.), and discourage the use of birth control practices, as well as the employment of measures to protect against sexually transmitted infections and diseases (Brückner & Bearman, 2005). In addition to these critiques, numerous others explain that by simply observing the purity movement's depictions of ideal womanhood, one can gain insight into inherent and systemic modes of hierarchical oppression woven throughout purity culture (e.g., Anderson, 2015; Chastain, 2017; Klein, 2018; Schermer Sellers, 2017). The ideal sexually pure woman is acquiescent, diminutive, white, and middle class and possesses a meek and mild spirit—a combination of expected characteristics that, according to Allison-Hearn (Chastain, 2017), contribute to the creation of atmospheres in which sexual misconduct is easily carried out, minimized, and even rationalized:

Ultimately we are talking about a system that prioritizes men over [and] against women and fem identifying people, that prioritizes adults over children, that prioritizes white

folks over black folks, that prioritizes people with privilege over people with less privilege. We're talking about power dynamics that make abuse ripe to be harvested.

(Chastain, 2017)

Awareness of Critiques

A formidable fixture within the evangelical Christian sexual purity industry, Dannah Gresh is without a doubt aware of critiques facing the purity movement. She makes her awareness apparent through select blog post titles (e.g., “A Modest Proposal for My Critics,” Gresh, 2013b, 2013c), in the content of her public presentations (e.g., “The Secret of the Lord: Discovering Authentic Christian Freedom,” Gresh, 2018i), during formal interviews (e.g., Backstage Pass-Preview. I Survived IKDG Documentary, 2018), and in the course of informal side conversations. For example, on my second day at the Pure Freedom Master Class (held from June 14-17, 2018, in State College, Pennsylvania), she approached me during a break, holding a copy of Christine J. Gardner’s (2011) *Making Chastity Sexy: The Rhetoric of Evangelical Abstinence Campaigns*, asking if I was familiar with the book (which, of course, I was). In Gardner’s (2011) examination of the rhetoric employed by multiple purity organizations, she chronicles her observations of, and concerns related to, early iterations of Dannah and Bob Gresh’s Pure Freedom events for teenage girls and boys.

Engagement with #MeToo/#ChurchToo Hashtags

However, despite Dannah Gresh’s awareness of critiques launched toward the purity movement, during the bound timeframe of my data-collection period, she does very little within her branded realm to categorically address the assessments of purity culture that surged during the eruption of the #MeToo and #ChurchToo movements. In fact, the instances when Dannah Gresh uses her social media presence to overtly and explicitly address the #MeToo and

#ChurchToo movements at all are relatively few in number. While I documented a total of eight times when Dannah Gresh explicitly refers to the #MeToo movement on her Facebook feed, and a total of seven tweets in which she mentions the #MeToo movement on her Twitter feed (see Appendix F for a full list of these instances that emerged in the social media data I gathered), not one time does she respond to or acknowledge #ChurchToo directly. In other words, she never publicly mentions the #ChurchToo hashtag or movement by name. Because that which is not said within (or that which is omitted from) a communicative act is just as important as that which is said, it is imperative to make note of Dannah Gresh's apparent practice of distancing herself from #ChurchToo. Further, of the 15 times she uses the #MeToo moniker, she employs it either to demonstrate her connection to someone who takes #MeToo movement issues seriously (e.g., "@Nicole_Bromley For a long time you were #OneVoice but I see God using #MeToo to create a choir to sing songs of healing!"; Gresh, 2018s) or to articulate her doubt and concerns regarding the consistency of the #MeToo movement. For example, Dannah Gresh (2018c, 2018e) notes:

I can't understand why there is a #MeToo campaign that everybody's excited about and at the very same time many women across the nation are celebrating the release of *Fifty Shades of Grey*, the third movie in the trilogy. This seems like a horrible disconnect to me.

In another case, Dannah Gresh (2018y, 2018z) blames the rise of #MeToo incidents on the Sexual Revolution of the 1960s when she says, "As anyone following events can see, the ongoing sex scandals that gave rise to MeToo are more than just placeholders in the news cycle. They reveal a shift in the cultural plates of the last half-century."

Indeed, on her own social media feeds, and within her branded Internet presence, Dannah

Gresh engages minimally and with an almost exclusively dubious, distanced tone toward the #MeToo movement. However, in mass mediated contexts that are hosted or owned by others in which she is a guest (e.g., blogs, podcast interviews, news pieces), she positions herself as an authority on the subject of #MeToo. For example, on a December 11, 2017, CBS segment (with WTAJ of State College, Pennsylvania), she claims that her purity efforts minimize occurrences of #MeToo moments by “instilling the importance of value in a young girl’s mind [to] better prepare them for any situation involving harassment in their future” (Padilla, 2017). Another example, chronicled by the *Tampa Bay Times*, shows her offering insights on the pros and cons of the #MeToo movement:

I think there are great things about it and things that could be better. I’m happy it is happening, that women are speaking out and change is happening. At the recent Grammy Awards, it was awesome seeing celebrities advancing the movement. At the same time, there were female presenters dressed in ways that promote objectifying women. I think that double-mindedness is contradictory to what we are trying to communicate. I am thrilled men who are not well are getting the help they need and losing the privileges they do not deserve, that women have been given a voice and are trying to heal. I think it’s also okay to say to women, don’t objectify yourself. (Whitman, 2018)

Likewise, in an interview on The Modern Motherhood Podcast, host Julie Lyles Carr asks Dannah Gresh for her expert opinion on how to navigate those who critique her quest to teach young girls about purity:

So, Dannah, tell us, in this #MeToo movement era that is so important, that we are having...powerful exposure of a lot of the sexism, a lot of the victimization, that has gone on in years past...How do we take the content that you have so carefully and prayerfully

developed and make sure that people aren't sort of twisting it to almost sound like victim blaming when we talk about modesty (things like that)? How do we stay in that place where your message of girls really understanding true beauty, of avoiding body shaming, of walking in an attitude of modesty...How do we keep that empowering versus judging? Because I know sometimes when we bring these topics up and we are talking about God's best, then all of a sudden it can get all twisted around, and it can sound like we're blaming people when that's not the intent at all. (Beckett, 2018)

To which Dannah Gresh responds by touting her ministry's efforts as resources that work hand-in-hand to address #MeToo era concerns:

Our ministry is super careful about how we word things. That's why we don't have, like rules about how long a skirt should be or shorts should be. We have things—we call them our Truth or Bare Fashion Test—and they're really subjective. They're just putting questions in the girls' heart about, "Am I in a position of power—so that people are seeing the inside of me?" The saddest thing for me about the #MeToo movement is how many women and girls have spent so many years hiding deep, dark, sad secrets. And what we do at Secret Keeper Girl is we open the conversation to these very difficult topics. I have been in the lobby at my Secret Keeper Girl event where moms and daughters come out in the middle of the event because the little girl...because we're in that space of talking about what's appropriate and talking about you are beautiful and you are treasured and you are worth something and that opens a little girls' heart to confess to her mom that she has been a victim. And, so, what I...have seen is that we are creating this space for girls to get the help they need much faster. The other thing we're doing is creating confidence in girls—that they know they're valuable. They know they're worth

something. And when you know you're valued and you know you're worth something, you are much more likely to stand up to someone and to say "no" when they're trying to hurt you and take advantage and victimize you. And so I'm really proud of the dialogue that we've created as a ministry. It hasn't been easy. We've had lots of...criticism—some of it useful—much of it...just because anytime you open up the Bible and talk about God's definition of womanhood...you're kind of a target for some of these critics that really don't want to help, and it's all the problem—they just want to hate. But I'm really happy that even in those situations, we read every email, and we say, "How can we make this message better? How can we make this message safer? Is there something we need to change about the way we're communicating?" I'm very mindful that women need protected. And I'm also very mindful that the grace of protection is empowering them and so we try to do that at every Secret Keeper Girl event and with every resource.

(Beckett, 2018)

Though Dannah Gresh does little on her ministries' public platforms (e.g., blogs, websites, and social media accounts) to formally respond to criticism about purity culture arising from the #MeToo/#ChurchToo era, she does employ a catalog of image preservation tactics to shore up her personal brand and ethos. Recall that Weddle Irons and Springer Mock (2015) refer to Gresh's Secret Keeper Girl enterprise as a "purity empire" (p. 93). This empire, a carefully constructed and synergistically marketed brand, has over time grown and shifted (showing no signs of slowing), through what appears to be a tightly managed process of curation. Throughout this chapter, I use the base word "curate" in the development of what I call a "Framework of Strategic Curation" to identify and explain the ways Dannah Gresh navigates treacherous communication territory as she attempts to defend and safeguard her empire.

A Framework of Strategic Curation

It is for three reasons that I employ variations of the word “curate” (e.g., curation, curatorial) to develop a theoretical frame for understanding Dannah Gresh’s strategic maneuvers around critiques of the sexual purity movement and of her role within that movement. First, as I note above, Dannah Gresh’s Pure Freedom Ministries (of which Secret Keeper Girl is paramount) is a multifaceted brand. When brands are carefully managed, there is a commitment to meticulous, long-term consistency amongst visual, verbal, and thematic elements (Ekhlassi, Moghadam, & Adibi, 2018; Kapferer, 2008; Sicard, 2013). The vehicles and methods for shaping and reinforcing these elements may change over time, but in order to maintain a brand’s integrity, the cultural essence of that brand must not change significantly (Rosenbaum, 2011). To manage a brand, then, means that a careful and constant process of curation must be in perpetual motion.

To understand Dannah Gresh’s curatorial management of her brand, it is helpful to examine linguistic nuances of the word “curate.” The verb “curate” is a linguistic “back formation” to describe what it is that a “curator” does, which is to “[take] charge of” or to “manage” something such as a museum, exhibit, or an art gallery (Harper, 2019a). Curatorial processes entail purposeful content selection, content display, and content interpretation (Deepwell, 2011). As is evidenced in the following pages of this chapter, it is clear that Dannah Gresh, and members of her ministry team, carefully manage, position, and curate the content and brand identity of Pure Freedom Ministries and of the efforts (e.g., Secret Keeper Girl) and resources that fall underneath its umbrella.

A second reason I apply the term “curation” to Dannah Gresh and her ministries’ strategic communication is because in the persona she adopts on her various public platforms,

she assumes the role of a curator, or a “guardian; one who has care or superintendence of something” (themes, ideas, and ideals) (Harper, 2019b). The Oxford English Dictionary (2019) states that a curator is “a person who has charge,” they are “a manager,” an “overseer,” a “steward.” Beyond these definitions, however, there is a more compelling connection between the notion of curation and the persona or role that Dannah Gresh assumes. The etymological root of the word “curator” stems from the noun “curate,” which originates from the 14th-century medieval Latin “curatos”—a word meaning “spiritual guide, ecclesiastic responsible for the spiritual welfare of those in his [sic] charge,” or “one responsible for the care (of souls)” (Harper, 2019a). In her work as a leader within the evangelical Christian sexual purity movement, Dannah Gresh dons the mantle of a spiritual leader who is a caretaker, protector, keeper, and guide of the hearts, bodies, minds, and spirits of a specific target audience: young girls, their mothers, and other women within the sphere of young girls’ influence.

The third and final reason I employ the term “curation” is because something revealing emerges in acknowledging what the act of curation does at a rhetorically functional level. When something is curated, the result is a product that is not naturally occurring. To curate, then, is to impose a structure upon, or to control, something that was before without its currently controlled or structured display. The term curation, therefore, carries with it the notion that a particular view, angle, or scene is manufactured for the purpose of consumption. Thus, the concept of curation is connected to the practice of brand management, prompting acknowledgement that Dannah Gresh’s purity empire is a commodity that is infused with social, religious, political, and fiscal currency.

Curatorial Strategies

Through a process of examining Dannah Gresh’s blogs, social media posts, public

lectures, interview transcripts, and interactions with her social media followers over a 63-week period [the start of the use of the #MeToo and #ChurchToo hashtags (October 15, 2017) to the completion of one full calendar year (December 31, 2018) after the inauguration of their use], I uncovered an inventory of curatorial strategies that she employs. By categorizing and explaining these strategies, I provide insight into how she manages her messages, her persona, and ultimately her brand when she is threatened by public objections and scrutiny.

The practices identified in the following pages are significant for at least two reasons. First, they occur across all data sets examined in this study—in Dannah Gresh’s formal communication (e.g., blog posts, speeches, and promotional materials), as well as in her less formal communication (e.g., interviews and side conversations) about her work, philosophy, and theology. Second, this “on-message” consistency across multiple data sets, and across multiple communication mediums, is noteworthy because when considered as a composite whole, it becomes clear that a well-orchestrated, image management process is in play. Thus, in addition to being consistent and persistent, these practices manifest as shrewd tactical maneuvers around significant communication-related obstacles.

Based on my careful analysis of the data for this project, four curatorial strategies, or themes of curation, dominate Dannah Gresh’s body of communication during this time of heightened cultural critique of the sexual purity movement: (1) curated erudition, (2) curated imperfection, (3) curated moderation, and (4) curated deflection. In my explication of these interrelated strategies below, I provide a definition of each curatorial type and an explanation of how Dannah Gresh employs each one, sometimes marshalling the power of one in order to activate the power of another. I end my discussion of each curatorial component with a recurring section called “deviant cases: curated contradictions,” wherein I examine instances of

discrepancy in which Dannah Gresh appears to deviate in some way from strict adherence to the strategy under investigation. I demonstrate how messages that may seem (at the outset) contradictory, hypocritical, illogical, careless, or messy can potentially function as shrewd rhetorical moves resulting in a shoring up of Dannah Gresh's persona and brand and serving to broaden her appeal to a wider swath of potential target audience members.

Curated erudition. The adjective erudite means to be in possession of knowledge that is grasped or understood by very few people (Erudite, 2019). Derived from the Latin "eruditus," the term applied to an individual means a person is "well-instructed," "learned, accomplished, well-informed," "educate[d] and polish[ed]" (Harper, 2019d). Whereas Merriam-Webster (2019) defines erudition (the noun formation of erudite) as "extensive knowledge acquired chiefly from books," Starn (1996) defines the term as "wide knowledge acquired by close study," indicating that the characteristics of erudition are "a penchant for the arresting detail" and "a predilection for the curious, strange, unexpected, sometimes uncanny and riddlesome fact" (p. 2). In an essay examining how academic fields evolve, Boyer (2003, p. 347) identifies six features of erudition: (1) "an agreed upon corpus of knowledge," (2) a recognition that "knowledge is not made explicit in manuals," rather it is absorbed "by working under the tutelage of more experienced practitioners and [by] immersing oneself in the material for many years," (3) an understanding of "the history of the field," including awareness of long-standing experts, (4) a significant contribution to the field, (5) a possession of wisdom, intuition, and competence that comes about only through the achievement of a certain age, and (6) the endorsement of a significant number of others. Erudition, then, is the kind of intellectual acumen, profound insight and wisdom, and astute level of cerebral polish or shine that emerges as a result of years of experience with a specific subject. To cultivate the notion that one is erudite, one sees oneself as an expert in a

particular field, demonstrates a depth and breadth of knowledge surrounding a particular topic, and positions oneself as a logical, rational, and world-wise critical thinker.

If one thing stands out immediately about Dannah Gresh and her in-person persona, it is the way her calm, composed disposition melds with her well-manicured appearance to create an aura of erudition. During face-to-face conversations and Q&A sessions, her posture conveys not only that she is listening intently but also that she understands subjects at large. She rarely interrupts and scarcely ever asks for clarification. She inserts herself into (verbal and nonverbal) communication exchanges with confidence, employing a tone that intimates full comprehension of any topic at hand and that is devoid of deferential uptalk at the ends of sentences. While she augments her femininity through her jewelry and clothing choices, she simultaneously adheres to a business-professional code of dress, haircut, and make-up, thereby conveying conformity to gendered norms and establishing her upper-middle-class station. Her controlled, direct gaze, her steady, square-shouldered poise, her restrained, no-nonsense demeanor, and her attention to detail in her physical presentation—all coalesce to create the image of a polished, confident, competent, and unflappable, authority figure.

Beyond utilizing disposition-oriented, and appearance-focused, means of conveying credibility, Dannah Gresh curates erudition in the packaging of, presentation of, and discussion about her content in four primary ways: (1) by drawing on first-hand experience, (2) by employing cerebral-sounding buzzwords, (3) by projecting a scholarly demeanor, and (4) by recommending resources that promote answers to societal ills.

Drawing on first-hand experience. Dannah Gresh cultivates erudition by establishing herself as one with first-hand, real-world experiences that afford her special insight on the physical, sexual, and emotional health of teenagers. One way she demonstrates this expertise is

by conveying how she felt years after she engaged in sexual activity when she was 15. As she recounts her memories, she adopts the persona of someone who has “been there,” someone who “knows better,” and someone who can serve as an example from which others should learn. In their January 2018 interview for the *I Survived I Kissed Dating Goodbye* documentary, Joshua Harris asks Dannah Gresh about the catalyst that spurred her to want to write her best-selling book *And the Bride Wore White* (1999, 2004, 2012b). She responds with a story she frequently recounts on her blogs, in her books, in her interviews, and in her presentations:

I was driving down the highway with my brand new baby girl in the back seat of my car, listening to a radio show. I remember two sentences. It’s almost like I can still hear them in my head. One was, “What is the number one question on a teenage girl’s mind when her mom is talking to her about sex?” And without hesitation, a female voice—I don’t know who it was—said, “The number one question on that girl’s mind is: ‘Mom did you wait?’” And so, there was all this brokenness in my heart that had never been dealt with, that just kinda got stuffed to the side. I wanted to forget my sin. I wanted to forget my brokenness. I wanted to just pretend that everything was okay. But—you mean my wellness and my ability to be okay about this thing is going to impact my baby girl? That was life changing. That was a momma bear moment for me, because I was like, “Okay, let’s fight this thing! Let’s fight this hurt.” And it was the beginning of a battle. See, I didn’t deal with a lot of the common consequences of being sexually active: [I] didn’t get an STD, I didn’t get pregnant, nobody knew. But I was emotionally different...I dealt with shame, embarrassment, the courage to tell my husband that the woman he thought was the driven snow when he married her was not. I had all these secrets that really caused a lot of the shame. (Van Der Wyngaard & Russell-Jones, 2018)

In a presentation to 500 teenage girls at a Young True Woman '18 session, she tells the audience that this shame kept her from developing and thriving during her own teenage and young adult years:

I was stuck from the age of 15 to 26, I think. Up the age of 15, I was progressing in my sanctification and I was progressing in my holiness—in my healing. And then when I was 15, I sinned sexually. And I thought that was the worst sin—and nobody else in my church, nobody else in my youth group—had done that, so I didn't tell anyone. And from 15 to 26—even though I broke up with the boy, wasn't in a relationship with that boy, I went on, I lived a life of purity, I got married, I had a baby (two babies!)—for 11 years, I didn't tell anybody. And for those 11 years—I can look at them—and I was sitting in the pew and I was saying the words and I wasn't whole and healed. I was stuck. (Gresh, 2018ee)

Another way she uses first-hand experience to curate erudition is by pulling from the stories and experiences that young people have shared with her. She identifies herself as a “wise advisor” who is regularly entrusted with relevant, critical information when she sits with, counsels, and prays with young women about their hang-ups or poor life choices. Using these stories as evidence, Dannah Gresh claims that no young woman in the modern era is problem-free and that to navigate these problems, they need advisors such as she as they struggle to determine how best to refrain from engaging in sexual activity before marriage:

I sat with girls who it happened to... Their external selves got on the bandwagon of courting and their hearts never really got why they were getting there. Do you know what I mean? So, they were open to some of the same risks of making some of the same mistakes that girls who were dating were making, 'cause I think whether you call it

dating or courting, if it's not governed by not only God's word but also wise advisors, you know... We get stupid when we fall in love... We need advisors. We need people saying, "No, that's not what Josh was writing in this book, he was saying this." I did that with some girls. You know? I had an intern... that was super, super on the *I Kissed Dating Goodbye*—I mean I heard Josh Harris's name so many times. I was like, "Could we not say his name today?" And yet, she was experiencing some funky things. She wasn't doing anything necessarily sinful, but she was experiencing some attachments in weird ways with guys. And I got your book out and I said [to her], "This is what you're telling me he says. That's not what I'm reading here. Can we just put this aside?" (Van Der Wyngaard & Russell-Jones, 2018)

Further, young women need advisors such as she to help them navigate morally questionable behavior and activities:

I want tell you a story of a time that I heard God's voice... and he asked me do something I didn't want to do and it did grow fruit. I was on a cruise with a couple of my best friends. And it's funny, on that cruise, on the way to that cruise, I had said, "Lord, I really need a break. Could I really not minister to anyone on this trip? Could you just minister to me on this trip? Could you just fill me? Can I have time on the lounge chairs where I read your word and I fill my journal?" Cause that makes me feel..., ya know? And this is what God said to me in the quiet of my spirit, "You must not want much of me. You must not want much of me." I was saying, "Lord, I want to be filled but I don't want to be poured out." You see, we're supposed to be so full that it pours out of us. And so I said, "Lord I want to be filled." And I understand that what he was saying was, "It doesn't really work like that. If you want a bunch of me, it's going to have to fill and scatter." So,

we're on a catamaran and we're going to go snorkeling. I don't know why they stuff like 5,000 people on those catamarans... Like 500 people get in the water and then someone barfs. I was like, "Where did all the fish come from and what was that they're eating?" My friend was laughing and was like, "That girl over there just barfed." And I was like, "I swam in that barf." But, I'm on the catamaran and I'm on the way back and it was kind of a cheap cruise so there were a lot of girls that were hung over and drunk—a lot of guys too, but I was seeing the girls. And the Lord said to me, "Go pray for that one." She was obviously hung over. She was calling it seasickness. And I was like, "Lord." He was like, "Dannah, do you want me to fill you up? If you do, it's gonna have to pour out." And I said, "OK, but this catamaran isn't that big. Everyone's going to have to see the blonde with her Bible running over there to the drunk girl." And so he said, "Dannah, you have some motion sickness medicine in your bag. That's what she's saying she has, so go over there." So I walked over and I said, "Hey can I just give you some of this? You said you weren't feeling so good. Maybe this will help." And she was like, "Oh this'll be awesome." So I went and got her some water. I felt everyone's eyes watching me, taking her, the drunk girl... I gave her the pill, gave her some water. I did what I was terrified to do, and I obeyed the Lord and I said, "I feel like God wants me to pray for you. Can I do that for you?" And she looked up at me with the eyes of a believer that was in full repentance. She said, "I really need that today." Tears slid down her cheek and I quietly pulled her close and prayed in her ear and then I started to walk back. And the girl next to her tugged on my little cover up. She said, "Could I have some of that too?" She wasn't talking about the motion sickness. She wanted to be prayed for. And I prayed for four or five hungover drunk girls. I don't know how God used it that day, but I know that I was

fruitful because I was a follower. I said, “Yes, Lord, I will be obedient to you.” (Gresh, 2018ee)

In addition, young women need advisors such as she to help them through what Dannah Gresh claims every young woman deals with—sexual pain: “I’ve sat with a lot of hearts from different theological perspectives, different faith perspectives. The thing they all bring to me: sexual pain” (Van Der Wyngaard & Russell-Jones, 2018). Dannah Gresh articulates that it is her own experience with sexual pain that drives her desire to advise and assist young women:

Listen, my heart [wants to help other] hearts being broken the way that mine was.

Because the depression was real, the hurt was real, the barrier in my marriage was real...I want the girls who make the same mistakes that I made, who walk the same road, to find that freedom a lot faster. (Van Der Wyngaard & Russell-Jones, 2018)

While the examples above demonstrate how Dannah Gresh uses her own, personal, first-hand experiences with sexual pain to build credibility, she also uses her followers’ first-hand experiences with her ministry to curate the notion that she is a trusted advisor, counselor, and guide. In a June 6, 2018, Facebook post, under the guise of needing help with writing a bio for her soon-to-be revamped website, Dannah Gresh appeals to her followers to tell her who she is:

I need your help and advice. They say I’m supposed to know who I am by now. At this age. Because, you know, websites are supposed to say who you are when you write books and stuff. But I’m wondering. Who Am I? What Do I Do? What Have I Done For You? I think I knew when I started, but...OPPORTUNITY! So much of it. And so now...a little confused, but not a lot. Just trying to figure out the simplistic five word description of who I am. Ok, maybe six or seven words. So, I’m wondering. Who am I to YOU!?! FOR YOU!?! How do our lives intersect? (Gresh, 2018n)

This sets the stage for her followers to act as co-participants in the curation of Dannah Gresh's erudite persona based on their own, ostensibly successful, first-hand experiences with her resources. One follower writes:

A year or two ago I wrote a very long, tearful letter to you about your impact on my life over the last 15 years. I don't think I finished it and sent it yet. But, since I was a highly impressionable 15 year old until now, your story in the book *And The Bride Wore White* has been one of my strongest inspirations and motivations to not only fight for purity in my life and relationships, as well as use whatever influence I have on my peers and younger women & girls to do the same, but also to have the courage to be transparent about areas where I've made mistakes while not giving up on the pursuit of purity.

Because of your example, I have successfully made it through my teen years, my 20s, and am prepared to make it through my 30s as a single woman whose commitment to honoring both God and my future husband with my mind, heart, and body remains the highest priority. Thank you, Dannah, after my mother you are probably [sic] the woman who has had the 2nd greatest impact on my life just through your book! (More recently, your book *What Are You Waiting For* has given me renewed clarity and practical help in this journey.) I will forever be grateful.

On the same thread, another follower identifies Dannah Gresh as a trusted advisor because of her ministry's materials, saying, "You are full of wisdom and sound advice. Thank you for giving me tools needed in this crazy world." An additional follower joins the chorus, articulating that because of Dannah Gresh's sexual purity efforts, she survived her daughter's pre-teen years:

An answer to my prayers. Because of your books and your ministry, I made it through my daughter's middle school years...and I'm not as fearful of her high school years. She is

open with her Dad and I [sic]...and she made her own decision to stay pure!!! I will be forever grateful for you.

As the follower comments above demonstrate, members of Dannah Gresh's fanbase contribute to her overall brand management process by inserting themselves into conversations in ways that build the overarching message that she is credible and trustworthy.

Employing cerebral-sounding buzzwords. Dannah Gresh also curates a trusted persona through the use of erudite-sounding buzzwords to make her brand appear rational and reasonable. For example, she marshals the power of the word "intelligent," using it to label her approach to teaching sexual purity. On December 4, 2017, she updated her Facebook cover photo with a banner bearing her image next to the words "purity," "true beauty" and "modesty" and an invitation: "FOLLOW ME FOR AN INTELLIGENT-FAITH CONVERSATION ON TODAY'S HOT-BUTTON TOPICS." The same term ("intelligent-faith") is applied to the capstone senior project experience required of all seniors preparing to graduate from Grace Prep, the Christian high school she founded with her husband Bob Gresh. In an April 10, 2018, Facebook post, Dannah Gresh notes that one student used their Grace Prep High School "intelligent-faith" project to tackle the subject of sexual purity and modest attire:

So proud of the Grace Prep seniors for the thoughtful and intelligent-faith project presentations this week. Each senior at our Christian high school must present a senior project to be considered for graduation. Molly's was on the topic of modesty. [Molly says,] "Everybody will eventually have a job in life, and in order to get a job, you will have to know how to dress appropriately. My goal is to teach the students how dressing modestly while being fashionable can help the view others have of you. You must dress for success, because what you wear reflects how you are on the inside. We are all

children of God, and we need to remain pure so we don't cause a brother to stumble.

People are blinded by their style; they may think that they can wear whatever they want

because it's what they like to wear. My goal is to open your eyes.” (Gresh, 2018k)

On December 12, 2018, Dannah Gresh again fuses her brand with the concept of intelligence by questioning and challenging the intellect of historians who assert that the historical mother of Jesus could not have been a virgin. In a Facebook post promoting a Pure Freedom blog post, she claims that she has “logic to debunk that myth”:

Some scholars argue that Mary could not possibly have been a virgin. Is that an intelligent argument to be considered?... Was Mary really a virgin when she became pregnant with Jesus? Many scholars argue that she wasn't, but here's some logic to debunk that myth... (Gresh, 2018ss)

Another way Dannah Gresh creates a sense of erudition with buzz terms is through the employment of a lie-truth dichotomy. This strategy assists her in conveying expert status and gives her legitimizing credibility to guide her reading and listening audience members as they identify lies (coming from society, from Satan, from one's own self) that should be eradicated from one's life and replaced with “truths” (or beliefs based on biblical interpretation from a particular angle).

The use of this particular lie-truth dichotomy is based on a heavily branded concept located in resources produced by Nancy DeMoss Wolgemuth—Dannah Gresh's friend, ministry partner, and (as mentioned in Chapter 2), a key leader of the complementarian biblical womanhood movement. Nancy DeMoss Wolgemuth first published *Lies Women Believe: And the Truth that Sets them Free* in 2001. Since then, an entire flight of “Lies” books have been published, with Dannah Gresh serving as a lead author or co-author of three—*Lies Young*

Women Believe: And the Truth that Sets Them Free (2008, 2018), *Lies Girls Believe: And the Truth that Sets Them Free* (2019), and *A Mom's Guide to Lies Girls Believe: And the Truth that Sets Them Free* (2019). In fact, this lie-truth theme played a central role in the 2018 line-up of Nancy DeMoss Wolgemuth's True Woman Conference. The tagline for True Woman '18 was "The Truth That Sets Us Free" (Revive Our Hearts, 2018d) and many of the mainstage sessions, including those headlined and moderated by Dannah Gresh (e.g., "The Truth About Marriage" and "The Truth About Emotions"), relied on a lie-truth framework.

Dannah Gresh relies heavily on this lie-truth binary in many of her teachings. It is present in her blog posts [e.g., "A Modern Understanding of Ancient Truths" (Gresh, 2018w) and "Three Truths About Creativity" (Barton, 2018)]. She also invokes the lie-truth binary in her social media posts. For example, consider the following examples from her Facebook timeline and Twitter feed:

Satan's native language is lying. He speaks through different mouthpieces, sometimes using evil rulers, false religions, social media, Netflix, popular songs, or even friends to deceive us. But all lies originate with him. "The Bible tells us that Satan poses as an 'angel of light' (2 Corinthians 11:14). Ezekiel 28 tells us the story of how he asserted his claim to be like God. He is the Impostor. And his motives are malicious through and through, as Jesus Himself pointed out..." (Gresh, 2018x)

Atheism doubles among today's teens and college students. Doing research today for an upcoming book release and my heart hurts for students to know truth. (Gresh, 2018j)

Mom, you have the ability to be a lie detector in your daughter's life. Find out the lie you

may be believing that disables you from having that super power. And, here's another chance to win an advanced reader copy of *Lies Girls Believe!* (Gresh, 2018pp)

In my continual journey to let God's Word (not my emotions) get the last say, I found a Truth nugget today. Woke up feeling... 'nuff said. I had a lot of the feels. So, isolated in the crowd of the Seattle-Tacoma International Airport, I plopped in my AirPods and listened to Timothy Keller! He is often my go-to Truth speaker, and today God used him to give me break-thru with this powerful quote: "Anger is energy aroused against something evil with intent to defend what is good." The "Christian" response to anger sometimes deflects or minimizes holy, righteous anger. Our feelings are good tools of God, friends! Let's learn to line them up with Truth! (Gresh, 2018jj)

Have you been going through a rough time emotionally lately? Take a few minutes this afternoon to find out the Truth about emotions. Sisters, your thoughts are the boss of your feelings. Whatever you are thinking about is going to be how you feel! This is one of my messages from True Woman Movement 2018 conference for Revive Our Hearts...

Emotions. Are they good? bad? reliable? Can we ever hope to control them? (Gresh, 2018kk)

Even her followers internalize and recapitulate the lie-truth dichotomy in their comments. For example, in her request that followers help her write an updated bio by providing feedback on how she has helped them, one follower states, "[You are an] Advocate, Mom, and Friend reaching out to the next generation with the truth about God's love" (Gresh, 2018n). Another follower echoes the same sentiment, saying, "[You are] a voice that speaks the truth in love"

(Gresh, 2018n). Yet another raves: “When it comes to the restoration of God’s design for families, Dannah Gresh is a Biblically-grounded, bold, gracious, hope-filled voice speaking Gospel-driven, soul-freeing Truth into a world saturated with lies and a Church riddled with wounds and shame” (Gresh, 2018n). On a different comment thread from a Facebook post, in which she directs her followers to watch a video clip detailing Hugh Hefner’s role in ushering in the “lie-filled sexual revolution,” fans laud her for pointing them away from lies and toward the truth: “This is extremely disturbing. But so important for people to know the truth” and “Thank u for exposing a lie and speaking truth” (Gresh, 2018hh).

Projecting a scholarly demeanor. Another way Dannah Gresh curates an erudite persona is located in the way she strategically positions herself as a researcher and a scholar. She often uses the word “research” to describe her work. For example, after Joshua Harris asks whether she regrets the title of one of her best-selling books (*And the Bride Wore White*, 1999, 2004, 2012b), and if she would ever consider changing it, Dannah Gresh responds with an explanation of how her “research” impacted her decision to retain the title despite its problems:

So, as I have researched it and understood it...white is mostly to represent the bride’s joy, not her purity. And it is a reflection of one way in the Christian tradition—‘cause you go to other countries and they’re not always wearing white—sometimes they’re very colorful. Um, but the Christian tradition is to wear white because at the wedding supper of the lamb, we will be clothed in white garments because we will be perfectly presented to a holy god. (Van Der Wyngaard & Russell-Jones, 2018)

Later in the same interview, she refers to her work as “research” when she argues that young people need wise advisors because of clouded judgment that results from the chemical release in the brain during sexual climax and physical touch:

Okay, you wanna know one of my strangest, weirdest research facts? So, we can do a functional MRI on the brain, right? And kinda see how the brain is functioning. And when the brain experiences sexual climax, there's this vasopressin, oxytocin, dopamine—all this stuff firing up the brain, right? And that's probably the most powerful dose of oxytocin—one of the most powerful doses of oxytocin—that a human can experience other than a mother breastfeeding her baby. That's also very powerful. But why? Because God created that mother and that baby to say, "We belong, forever and ever." It's a bond, right? And when a dad holds his baby against his naked chest, same thing—oxytocin. Very powerful. Well, the first few months of dating, probably up to about six months, your brain just makes little tiny levels of that cocktail constantly all the time. ALL the time. And you know what it does? It's the rose-colored glasses of relationships. So that what it effectively does is make us a little stupid in relationships at the beginning. We need advisors. (Van Der Wyngaard & Russell-Jones, 2018)

Similarly, when Dannah Gresh describes parenting scenarios, she refers to the reading that she and Bob engage in as "research." In fact, in an October 10, 2017, Secret Keeper Girl blog post ("The Number One Way to Reduce the Risk of an Early Sexual Debut"), she describes their reading activities as a process that infuses them with academic expertise:

When Bob and I saw this research, we did three things... We got smarter... We became learners. Reading everything we could to be culturally aware and academically armed with sexual theology, sexually transmitted diseases, and relationship issues, we made it our aim to become the experts our kids needed us to be to guide them wisely. (Gresh, 2017d)

The staff of Pure Freedom Ministries also reinforce the notion that Dannah Gresh is a

researcher when they refer to her data-gathering processes and the sources she utilizes. For example, early in this project, when I was considering Dannah Gresh as a potential focus for study, I sent an email inquiry through the Pure Freedom website asking whether there were outside agencies that identified and ranked leaders within the evangelical Christian sexual purity movement. Her office manager responded, directing me toward Dannah Gresh's most trusted research sources, even though I had not requested such information:

Thank you for reaching out about leaders in the modesty/purity movement. There aren't any agencies that we are aware of who rank leaders on this. Most of the statistics that Dannah shares are included as footnotes in her resources. If you liked something she said and want to study it further, you can begin by purchasing the resource you heard her speaking about at our online bookstore. Her research is gathered from a vast number of sources. She has a membership to highbeam.com which offers over 6,500 credible publications in one place including journals on human sexuality, child psychology, and medical issues. Some of her most trusted sources on sexuality include the following: <http://www.medinstitute.org/> and <http://www.abstinence.net/>. Hope this helps you with your research. In Christ, Eileen. (E. King, personal communication, April 12, 2018)

Dannah Gresh also projects a scholarly demeanor through the utilization of "we" language when she references the findings of social science and medical research. This strategy is employed multiple times throughout her interview with Joshua Harris:

We have really good stats now on the impact of teen sex on the emotions and the brain of teenagers... We know this from a scientific point of view. We know that oxytocin that washes over a man and a woman's brain... when they climax... At purity events, we know there are girls who are not virgins and who have seen pornography. The stats tell us that.

(Van Der Wyngaard & Russell-Jones, 2018)

She also uses this strategy in her social media plugs for her blog posts: “For the next few paragraphs, we’re going to talk directly from a Social Science approach” (Gresh, 2018uu). By utilizing “we” language, in tandem with references to scientific research, Dannah Gresh effectively sutures herself to a community of scholars and to a body of scholarship. In the act of affiliating herself with the work, research, and findings of others who are educated in areas and in ways that she is not, she transfers a level of scientific, scholarly credibility to herself.

Whether she employs “we” language or not, Dannah Gresh curates a scholarly persona through regular references to “studies,” “research,” and “statistics.” In a November 19, 2018, Facebook post, she links to a *MarketWatch* report indicating that research reveals a clear connection between Facebook usage and depression:

I am certain that limiting my social media usage makes me feel more connected to people and to God. Here’s some research to put behind my “gut!” MARKETWATCH.COM
 “For the first time, researchers say Facebook can cause depression. The findings are published in the December *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*.” (Gresh, 2018ll)

In a December 14, 2018, Facebook post, Dannah Gresh notifies her followers that in the linked Pure Freedom blog post, she will guide them through a “social science approach” in order to understand “God’s design” for sex:

Did you know that when you have sex, your body makes a promise to your partner even if you don’t? Even in the most casual consumer relationship, what God designed to happen during sex still happens. For the next few paragraphs, we’re going to talk directly from a Social Science approach, and we’ll circle back to the scriptural truth at the end. So buckle up! (Gresh, 2018uu)

When her followers challenge her interpretations and assumptions, she relies on references to “the research” and “stats” to maintain her erudition. For example, in an October 18, 2017, Facebook post alluding to the #MeToo movement, Dannah Gresh suggests a Pinterest board as a source for modest fashion for young girls:

Come on! Harvey Weinstein isn't the only one objectifying women. When will the fashion industry get it: moms want age appropriate clothing for our daughters! A mom got fed up with short shorts for girls. So she started her own brand. These small companies are making a big difference. (Gresh, 2017g)

Dannah Gresh received pushback from a follower who asked her to use caution in blaming fashion (or the way one dresses) for causing #MeToo moments (e.g., sexual abuse, harassment, and objectification): “True—but clothes companies are not bullying us or threatening us to buy their clothes. I totally agree that the market for modest clothing is sadly lacking, but please don't compare that to a sexual predator/criminal.” In Dannah Gresh's response to this follower comment, she holds her ground, relying on the word “stats” to shore up her argument:

The stats say differently. The marketers and purveyors of clothing dramatically increase the risks of eating disorders, body image issues, depression, and an early sexual debut. I'm not be-littling [sic] the damage done by men who have been objectifiers [sic], but just trying to shed light on an equally harmful and more wide spread and impacting evil.

It is through this practice of fusing social science and medical research findings with her sexual theology tenets that Dannah Gresh becomes more than a concerned mom with a Bible. Confidently marshaling the rhetorical power of biblical teachings, biblical scholarship, and medical/social scientific scholarship, she positions herself as an erudite, world-wise, science-aware mom with a Bible. By wedding medical science and social science “truths” to scriptural

“truths,” she ostensibly shores up the notion that her particular evangelical biblical interpretation of sex is the right way. Consider these two examples:

Stanford University researched friends with benefits. [Their findings] showed they aren’t just going to just any one friend; they are going back to the same one. Our bodies were created for monogamy. The science tells us that there is an addictive form of those chemicals and a really warm bonding purpose to those chemicals which makes sense why we would go back to the same person. (Van Der Wyngaard & Russell-Jones, 2018)

For women, the University of Chicago out of Illinois did a study on sex lives of Americans. And the most orgasmic women were evangelical middle-aged married women...That particular statistic isn’t coming out of white knuckling your way through “I’m-gonna-do-this-God’s-way”...That’s coming out of a rich relationship with Christ. And what the church has wrong most of all is our understanding of the meaning of sex. The first time the word sex is mentioned in the Bible is Genesis 4. Adam lay with his wife, Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth. It was the word “Yada.” You know, so Seinfeld kind of made that word synonymous with boring, you know, “Yada, yada, yada?” Not a boring word after all. It means “know.” Adam knew Eve. And it means to know to be known, to be deeply respected. (Van Der Wyngaard & Russell-Jones, 2018)

By adopting a scholarly demeanor, Dannah Gresh is able to convey the status of an expert—one who is well-versed in the subject at hand, in the landscape in which it unfolds, and in the answers to relevant life problems. Curating erudition in this way, she places herself in a position of authority to promote trustworthy products and resources.

Recommending resources that promote answers to societal ills. As noted above, Dannah

Gresh disseminates biblical, cultural, and social scientific and medical knowledge in her teaching sessions, blogs, and books, but she also conveys an expert status by authoritatively identifying what she deems as reliable, quality, and helpful resources for her target audience members as they confront any number of social ills. Over the course of the Pure Freedom Master Class (which I attended in State College, Pennsylvania, from June 14-17, 2018), she often made mention of the texts and authors she relies upon and trusts. For example, during a teaching session on “Sexual Theology,” Dannah Gresh indicated that her “go-to” or “most trusted” source on the topic is *The Theology of the Body: Human Love in the Divine Plan* (1997) by Pope John Paul II, and then proceeded to indicate that others esteem it highly, too: “Christopher West has an entire ministry based on this book!” A resource table was positioned at the front of the room near the podium where, as she taught, she could easily grab, hold up, refer to specific texts that she “depends on,” and then encourage Master Class attendees to peruse the table during breaks. Such resources included: *Passion Pursuit: What Kind of Love are You Making?* (Dillow & Slattery, 2013), *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Gagnon, 2001), *Unbound: A Practical Guide to Deliverance* (Lozano, 2010), *Sex and the Supremacy of Christ* (Piper & Taylor, 2005), *Rethinking Sexuality: God’s Design and Why it Matters* (Slattery, 2018), and *A Practical Guide to Culture: Helping the Next Generation Navigate Today’s World* (Stonestreet & Kunkle, 2017).⁹ Beyond suggesting particular books by name through verbal shout-outs from the Master Class pulpit, or by placing specific titles on the resource table, Dannah and Bob Gresh also recommended specific resources and authors by way of gifting Master Class attendees with texts they considered insightful and helpful. Every Master Class attendee was given a copy of *Single Gay Christian: A Personal Journey of Faith and Sexual*

⁹ Placed among these resources were books that Dannah and Bob Gresh have authored.

Identity (Coles, 2017) and *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty without Hurting the Poor...and Yourself* (Corbett & Fikkert, 2012).

In her social media presence, Dannah Gresh curates erudition by way of recommending resources to identify pornography as a particularly pernicious social ill. She recommends resources to help educate parents about the science of addiction:

This is one of the BEST articles I have ever seen on how porn can quickly become addictive. With the average first inception of porn being 11-years-old, it's vital that every parent know this complex science of the brain. This article simplifies it beautifully! Pass it on to every parent you know. Porn is devouring our kids! Let's get armed to stop it! PROTECTYOUNGMINDS.ORG "How Porn Use Becomes an Addiction (Simplified!) A no-nonsense explanation of how pornography impacts your brain and can become an addiction." (Gresh, 2018f)

She suggests products to help ensure childhood addiction to pornography is less apt to happen. For example, in a March 1, 2018, Facebook post, Dannah Gresh reposted from the Secret Keeper Girl Facebook account with a link to Covenant Eyes, an accountability software firm that monitors and restricts Internet content deemed unsuitable for children. She notes in her post the importance of protecting children from stumbling upon or accessing pornographic materials:

Bob and I have long been saying that if you don't have filters on your devices, you might as well put Playboy and Penthouse on the coffee table in your living room. Know how to protect your kids with this great information from Covenant Eyes! Keep your kids protected while they're surfing the web. Did you know that 63 Google kid apps were recently displaying pornographic pop up ads? Learn the reasons why Google is not parent friendly, and find out how to set up parental controls on YouTube!

COVENANTEYES.COM “Google Is Not Parent Friendly—Covenant Eyes Google’s parental controls on YouTube and Chromebooks never wowed me. But recent events and setting changes more clearly show Google is not parent friendly.” (Gresh, 2018g)

She also suggests materials for addressing adult-aged pornography addiction.¹⁰ For example, in an October 4, 2018, Facebook post, Dannah Gresh suggests a DVD box set from KingdomWorks titled *The Conquer Series: The Battle Plan for Purity* (Wiles, 2018), as well as an upcoming Master Class that she and Bob are scheduled to lead:

WARNING: ADULT CONTENT (Do not watch this if you are easily triggered by sexual language and/or have an extremely tender heart. But if you want understanding about who fathered our sexual revolution and all that has grown out of it, this is excellent.)

What you didn’t know about Hugh Hefner, but should know. This is a clip from Conquer Series, one of my most highly recommended curriculums for men struggling with pornography addiction. It’s also a clip we show in our Pure Freedom Master Class to showcase both the excellent resource and also to train up our attendees. I hope you’ll consider joining us at Master Class in Atlanta this January! (Gresh, 2018hh)

As is evidenced in the previous example, Dannah Gresh does not simply promote resources produced by others in order to enhance her credibility, she also perpetually points to resources she herself produces. This assists her as she generates brand awareness and curates erudition through steady reminders for her target audience that she is a much-respected, best-selling author. In most publicly visible moments (radio interviews, blog posts, social media posts), she promotes her ministries’ resources, suggesting the Secret Keeper Girl Masterpiece

¹⁰ While she recognizes that women develop addictions to pornography, she most often points to resources developed for men. This augments a narrative thread in which she and Bob acknowledge Bob’s life-long struggle with pornography. This is examined further in the following section of my Framework of Strategic Curation, “curated imperfection.”

World Tour, Bob's Born to Be Brave Tour, her blogs, recorded speeches, and books as go-to places for answers. Promoting her entire catalog in this way allows her to demonstrate the sheer volume of content she has produced over two decades on the topics of purity, modesty, and sex.

On both the Dannah Gresh blog and the Secret Keeper Girl blog, her posts always include references to, and recommendations of, Dannah Gresh-produced resources where the reader can learn more. For example, in a December 6, 2018, Secret Keeper Girl blog post titled "How to Talk to Your Daughter about Social Media," the blog entry addresses the topic at hand, but also, mid-way through, includes a promotional reference to her latest book, *Lies Girls Believe* (2019):

It is so important for us to follow this example and tell our children about the temptations we know they will face. In the pages of *Lies Girls Believe*, I've tried to bring some of those topics up in a safe environment where mothers can be in the driver's seat of presenting Truth to their tween daughters. In the first chapter, the readers will meet a fictional girl named Zoey... (Gresh, 2018qq)

Additionally, at the end of this post, as well as every other Secret Keeper Girl blog post, is a promotional paragraph featuring links to the Secret Keeper Girl Masterpiece World Tour and the Born to Be Brave Tour along with this accompanying text:

Connect with your child and start the conversation by attending one of our events for tween boys and girls! Secret Keeper Girl features deep Bible teaching, live worship, and stories that help girls aged 7-12 embrace true beauty. Born to Be Brave features interactive games, Biblical teaching, the WHEEL OF DESTRUCTION, and live worship with the Allan Scott Band—all strategically designed to put the brave back in your boy in a world that will emasculate and rip the goodness out of him, if given the chance. (Gresh, 2018qq)

On the official Dannah Gresh blog, resource promotion does not appear with the same level of frequency as the Secret Keeper Girl blog, but entries do often end with a plug for readers to consider attending the Pure Freedom Master Class, as is the case with a blog post from June 20, 2018:

This [blog post] is an excerpt from one of the sessions of the Pure Freedom Master Class, inspired by a teaching by Tim Keller: *Sexuality & Christian Hope*. The Master Class is not just a conference, workshop, or set of educational opportunities but an organic networking experience for leaders interested in learning more about sexual theology and sexual healing. Join Dannah and Bob as they seek to accelerate the sexual theology, teaching, coaching and healing capabilities of leaders through collaboration and education. It provides mentoring to a limited number of approved applicants who desire to collaborate with others to: Increase a biblical understanding of sexuality, gender, and related issues such as birth control, abortion, masculinity, and womanhood. Increase the capacity of the body of Christ to culminate healing in those broken by sexual sin. Interface with unbiblical views of sexuality by presenting truth with convictional kindness. Learn more at dannahgresh.com/masterclass. (Gresh, 2018w)

Through her social media posts, Dannah Gresh recommends her materials as a panacea for tough issues and questions. Some of these resources are recommended for mothers of teens:

Struggling with how to talk to you [sic] teenaged daughter about boys and dating and sex? I can help! Give her the gift of mother/daughter time by reading through *And the Bride Wore White*, my best-selling book. It has an accompanying video series, companion guide, and leader's guide. I'm giving away a set for an adult woman to lead four teen girls through the study during this hour on the Secret Keeper Girl Facebook live

event. If you don't win, you can always grab your copies at my online bookstore. Save 20% when you use the coupon code THANKS2018 at check out.

<https://dannahgresh.com/andthebrideworewhite/> (Gresh, 2018rr)

Other resources (as is demonstrated in the following examples) are recommended for young adults:

Whether or not you wait to have sex is your choice. Make sure it's an informed one. Here's ten minutes that will change the way you think about sex. TEDx TEDxPSU YOUTUBE.COM "The Walk of Fame vs The Walk of Shame: Dannah Gresh at TEDxPSU. Dannah Gresh is a sexuality educator and best-selling author of several books on the subject." (Gresh, 2018vv)

What are you trying to stuff into the God-shaped hole in your heart? Food? Guys? Social Media? Friends? STOP THE MADNESS. Only one thing fits there. Learn how to embrace TRUTH at <http://www.liesbooks.com/youngwomen/> (Gresh, 2018h)

In addition, Dannah Gresh offers other resources recommended for adult women. In a comment thread that unfolded on a February 8, 2018, Facebook post, Dannah Gresh twice posted links to her book (co-authored with Juli Slattery), which heralds the dangers of the *Fifty Shades of Grey* compendium. In the original post, she describes how she and her husband Bob walked by a movie theater that evening, deflated to see so many people in line for the movie, *Fifty Shades Freed*. She expresses confusion about the concurrent activity of the #MeToo movement's commitment to calling out abusive situations and the general American consumer interest in an erotic romance book-film franchise that features depictions of bondage and sadomasochism:

Tonight I walked by a theater with my man and we decided on a whim to see what was

playing. The only thing starting just then was *Fifty Shades Freed*. We left, but I was so sad to see how many people were in line to buy tickets. With the current #MeToo conversation, I find it so contradictory that people are excited about this movie. There's no such thing as sexy abuse. It's all just abuse! (Gresh, 2018d)

The post linked to an article from anti-pornography website fightthenewdrug.org titled "8 Things The 'Fifty Shades' Trilogy Teaches About Sex and Relationships" (Fight the New Drug, 2019).

Responses to Dannah Gresh spanned the gamut, from agreement:

I agree. It's sad to see lots of men or women sucked into watching these films. So much wrong with it, from abuse to pornography etc. God did not make the beautiful art of marriage and sex between a husband and wife to be like that.

to challenge:

I LOVE this trilogy!! I've read the books 4 times and I've seen every film up to date in theater. I do agree that there are some very non-christian actions going on here, but as a christian woman all I can think is "but God!!" Look how God did the super natural here and brought Christian Grey out of bondage and into a godly relationship/marriage. The way Ana shows Christian love, grace, and mercy is similar to the way Father God treats His children. I don't agree/believe anyone should live in abusive situations, I just choose to look at this fiction book in a different light and say "look how good my God is."

Matthew 19:26

Have you read the books? It's not an abusive situation. They are married & deeply in love. I agree with the poster above, Ana saved Christian with love. He was broken & had so many issues, & she helped him work through & heal. The world is not so black &

white.

In the instances of challenge, Dannah Gresh responds with comments that feature a tone of care and concern for followers whose erudition is no match for her own and with suggestions to access her book mentioned above (*Pulling Back the Shades: Erotica, Intimacy and the Longings of a Woman's Heart*, 2014):

Oh that troubles me. God can and does follow us and pursue us and rescue us in our sin.

He [sic] book in the Bible titles [sic] Hosea is proof of that. But he would much rather see us not walk into sinful abusive relationships or thinking. It concerns me that this series is romanticized. Dr [sic] Juli Slattery and i [sic] wrote a bit on how damaging the book was to many women. Maybe you would consider taking a peak [sic].

I wrote an entire book with psychologist Dr [sic] Juli Slattery who did read the series and found them deeply troubling. I'm also concerned about the link I see between younger readers and tendencies to be interested in unhealthy relationships. Maybe consider reading the book.

Deviant cases: Curated contradictions in curated erudition. As I demonstrate above, Dannah Gresh strategically curates an erudite persona in four ways: (1) by drawing on first-hand experience, (2) by employing cerebral-sounding buzzwords, (3) by projecting a scholarly demeanor, and (4) by recommending resources that promote answers to societal ills. While these erudition-building strategies consistently appear throughout the data sets examined in my research, instances do occur in which she deviates from erudite displays. Of these deviant cases, the most prevalent include: (1) calling her own intelligence into question, (2) recounting dates inaccurately, and (3) employing anti-intellectual intelligence. During an initial observation, one

might be inclined to dismiss these contradictory instances as nothing more than simple anomalies; however, further investigation of these deviant cases reveals that Dannah Gresh's subversion of her own erudition may, in fact, be curatorially purposeful.

The first means by which Dannah Gresh subverts her curated erudition is by calling her own intelligence into question. This materialized at the Pure Freedom Master Class (which I attended from June 14-17, 2018, in State College, Pennsylvania) when she intermittently directed "dumb blonde" jokes toward herself. During one of the very first Master Class sessions, she recounted an appointment with her dentist. In retelling the scenario, she remembers, "And I said to my dentist, 'Stop talking to me in doctor terms, [talk to] me in blonde terms'" (D. Gresh, personal communication, June 15, 2018). In subsequent Master Class sessions, if she stumbled over a word, forgot the name of an author, or told a story involving an embarrassing moment, she would, at times, enthymematically point to her hair and mouth the word "blonde."

Another example of using intellectual self-deprecation to subvert erudition is located in repeated references to her lack of an advanced degree. On the first day of the Master Class, before asking attendees to introduce themselves, she said, "I am shaking in my boots up here because among you are...a Ph.D. and an about-to-be Ph.D." (D. Gresh, personal communication, June 14, 2018). In our one-on-one interactions, she often made self-disparaging statements about her intellect for the purpose of flattery, saying things like, "Now, I'm not as smart as you" or "My brain doesn't work like yours," despite the fact that she and I had not spoken at enough length, or in enough depth, for her to accurately gauge my level of intelligence (D. Gresh, personal communication, June 15, 2018). Further, in a reference to her friend, Mary Kassian (Nancy DeMoss Wolgemuth's co-founder of the True Woman Movement), Dannah Gresh said to me during our interview, "You are so smart; you know so many things I don't know. Mary

Kassian’s brilliant, too. She knows all the...She’s probably the smartest woman I know. You might be her only equal” (D. Gresh, personal communication, June 15, 2018).

The second way she challenges her own curated erudition is through an inaccurate accounting of dates. It is clear that Dannah Gresh prides herself on the inclusion of timely data in her presentations and materials. She made this apparent during our interview when she referred to an incident from earlier in the day after a Pure Freedom Master Class session when her brand manager confronted her about facts and figures she had cited: “I try to be, very responsible to make sure my information is current. And Courtney ran up to me right after [I used] some numbers and said, ‘How old are those numbers?’ And I said, ‘They’re new numbers.’” Yet despite her claims of commitment to employing current and accurate information, at times, she actually is quite inaccurate in her accounting of dates, recency, and titles. For example, in my personal interview with her, she drew attention to her TEDx Talk (“The Walk of Fame vs The Walk of Shame”) as a means of indicating that she, herself, has been trying to draw attention to #MeToo-related concerns for quite some time:

But [in] my Ted Talk—what was that, 2011?—I was pointing out the contradiction between the walk of shame versus the walk of fame and saying, “This can’t be!” You know? I’m trying to not have an inflammatory conversation about things like that, but to bring it to light. It’s not a surprising conversation for me; I’ve been trying to instigate some of it.

The TEDxPSU talk to which she referred was (according to activity on her Facebook page), in fact, not in 2011. It was presented and recorded in March of 2013 (“Honored to present a TED talk in March! TEDxPSU,” Gresh, 2013a), published on April 19, 2013 (TEDx, 2013), and officially released on May 12, 2013 (“My TED Talk on tolerance for virginity releases

TOMORROW! I can't wait to share it. Since it's a TEDx talk, I have to earn my spot to the TED.com website with views, so I'd be grateful if you could watch it," Gresh, 2013e).

Another instance of an inaccurate accounting of time is found in her January 2018 interview with Joshua Harris, when she states: "It's interesting, I was recently writing an article for *Christianity Today* on modesty and the title is, 'Why modest clothing doesn't matter as much as we think'" (Van Der Wyngaard & Russell-Jones, 2018). In reality, Dannah Gresh's only piece written for *Christianity Today* was a guest blog post published in April of 2013 under the title of "Believing in a Better Modesty Movement: How We Teach Purity Through a Celebration of Beauty and Self-Respect." Indeed, this is, in fact, not all that recent (i.e., 2013d).

A final way Dannah Gresh deviates from her curatorially erudite persona is perhaps the most intriguing. At the same time that she relies on citations from social science and medical research to shore up her arguments, she employs what I refer to as "anti-intellectual intelligence"—a kind of bob-and-weave logic that simultaneously acknowledges the findings of current research and scholarship, but belittles it at the same time, thereby diminishing the value of expert opinions and higher order, critical thinking. This can be seen in instances when she says that "the science is starting to catch up with God's word," or with particular teachings that she touts as biblical. For example, consider the following examples:

Of all the things you can do to reduce the risk of your child experiencing an early sexual debut, social science states that one thing reduces the risk more than anything else. And I think it's safe to say that social science is just figuring out what God recorded in the pages of Scripture. (Gresh, 2017d)

Dr. McIlheney of the Medical Institute for Sexual Health [says the oxytocin wash at the

time of sexual climax is a] physiological glue that happens in your brain. I was experiencing unholy attachment to a sex partner; it was impacting how I was able to enter into a relationship with my husband. The science is starting to catch up with God's word. Even some of the most liberal, secular media forms are catching up: *SELF Magazine* says if a woman wants to have great sex, she should push pause on porn. The research is starting to get on God's side. (Van Der Wyngaard & Russell-Jones, 2018)

We have really good stats now on the impact of teen sex on the emotions and the brain of teenagers. It's different for adults who are sexually active...Depression is a more significant risk for them. Even risk of suicide is, many studies say, a more significant risk for them. And I didn't know that research then, I just knew I was sad. There was always this thing that was broken in me. And what I've come to understand is...the Bible, you know, God knew that. God knew how he designed our bodies. The Bible says that sexual sin is a sin like no other because it is a sin against our body. It is just in the last ten years that we've had like the neurochemical research and an understanding to know how incredibly impactful the act of sex is on our brains. I was living in the aftermath of that and that was my turning point, that was my "Blood of Christ is enough for me—I'm gonna win this—I'm gonna be okay [turning point]." (Van Der Wyngaard & Russell-Jones, 2018)

"We...arose from a recent and profound creation event." Scientist "fought hard" against new bar code evidence suggesting that we all came from one man and one woman. Science always catches up! FOXNEWS.COM "Did a mysterious extinction event

precede Adam and Eve? In one of the most provocative and misunderstood studies of the year, scientists in the U.S. and Switzerland have made an astonishing discovery: All humans alive today are the offspring of a common father and mother—an Adam and Eve—who walked the planet 100,000 to 200,000 years ago...” (Gresh, 2018mm)

Claiming that science is finally catching up with God, Dannah Gresh is able to adopt an air of superiority as she tacitly asserts that her conservative teachings and beliefs are before their time and are more enlightened than “secular science” and society.

Dannah Gresh and her staff also use a form of anti-intellectual intelligence when they warn against the pitfalls of Christian students attending secular universities and colleges. During a presentation by a Pure Freedom staff member at the Master Class, attendees were encouraged to promote Christian higher education to the youth that they mentor rather than state schools for no other reason than that:

Seventy percent of students are leading a life of abstinence at Christian universities...[because] purity culture/modesty culture is in place...Kids will become like the people they are around. Make sure they have connections with Christian organizations like CRU or Navigators [to] make sure they are connected to Christians. (F. Bergstrom, personal communication, June 16, 2018)

Further, though she does refer to scholarly, peer-reviewed studies and the findings of research conducted at state universities, Dannah Gresh’s “most trusted” sources for locating statistics and anecdotes come primarily from organizations whose missions are to promote “the appreciation for and practice of sexual abstinence (purity) until marriage” (Abstinence Clearinghouse, 2019). Recall this excerpt from my personal exchange with Dannah Gresh’s Pure Freedom office manager, indicating that “Some of [Dannah’s] most trusted sources on sexuality

include the following: <http://www.medinstitute.org/> and <http://www.abstinence.net/>” (E. King, personal communication, April 12, 2018). Though Dannah Gresh attempts to legitimize her messages by affiliating with scientific-sounding sources and people (she frequently cites Dr. Joseph McIlhaney of the Medical Institute for Sexual Health), her citations on the whole are produced and packaged by politically conservative organizations that exist for the sole purpose of lobbying and advocating for abstinence-only practices and policies (Schaffer, 2006; Valenti, 2009).

A final example of the employment of anti-intellectual intelligence is located in her posture as an expert on the dangers of erotic literature and film (especially *Fifty Shades of Grey*). As noted above, Dannah Gresh curates erudition by promoting her resources as well-researched, yet even though she co-authored *Pulling Back the Shades: Erotica, Intimacy, and the Longings of a Woman’s Heart* (Slattery & Gresh, 2014) with the goals of “rescuing women from erotica” (Gresh, 2014b) and challenging Christian women to eschew the *Fifty Shades of Grey* franchise,¹¹ she admits that she never has and never will read the *Fifty Shades of Grey* trilogy, nor will she see the movies:

I thought long and hard before I decided not to read it. While one obvious reason was that I’d already publicly stated that I wouldn’t, another was that I want to dispel the myth that you have to read it to be able to have an informed opinion and engage in the debate. I have taken the time to come at this debate from another angle by engaging the stories of women whose lives have been impacted by erotica. Email by email, they poured their hearts out. Many of them were brave enough to tell their stories, some of which you’ll

¹¹ In fact, after Slattery and Gresh released *Pulling Back the Shades: Erotica, Intimacy and the Longings of a Woman’s Heart* (2014), they offered anyone who sent them copies of E. L. James’ *Fifty Shades* novels a free copy of *Pulling Back the Shades* (Haas, 2015).

read in this book. (Slattery & Gresh, 2014, pp. 11-12)

Dannah Gresh has a sustained history of curating erudition. This is evident in the tone and content of her resources produced long before the timeline from which I gathered data (October 15, 2017, to December 31, 2018). However, in the midst of the #MeToo/#ChurchToo climate, it is imperative that she stay the course in conveying expert status on her stance and teachings regarding sexual purity and modesty. To maintain the Dannah Gresh/Pure Freedom brand, she must convince her target audience that she currently has (and always did have) a corner on the truth. Again, she does this by: (1) drawing on her first-hand experience, (2) employing cerebral-sounding buzzwords, (3) projecting a scholarly demeanor, and (4) recommending resources that promote answers to societal ills. And yet, as demonstrated above, she at times contradicts her own erudition by: (1) calling her own intelligence into question, (2) recounting dates inaccurately, and (3) employing anti-intellectual intelligence. When considering what Dannah Gresh could gain by deviating from strict adherence to her curated erudition, it is helpful to acknowledge two basic principles prized within the Christian tradition: faith in God alone and humility. In the words of Francis Chan (an evangelical Christian celebrity pastor and author) whom Dannah Gresh quotes frequently on her Facebook feed (e.g., Gresh, 2012a, 2014c, 2015a, 2017a), “faith in God alone...really comes down to trust” and “humility counts others more significant than [oneself]” (Chan, 2009). By carefully navigating the lines between confident expertise, blind faith, and humility, Dannah Gresh establishes a more nuanced erudite persona: one who is credible and trustworthy, yet “God-inspired” and humble. Whether intentional or not, these cases that at the outset seem to be potentially detrimental to the curation of an erudite persona may, in fact, assist her in exploiting her second curatorial strategy, and the focus of the next section: curated imperfection.

Curated imperfection. Religion and political journalist Laura Turner (2018) coined the term “curated imperfection” when she first used it in a November 9, 2018, *Buzzfeed News* article (“*Girl, Wash Your Face* is a Massive Best-Seller with a Dark Message”) to describe her observations of a growing phenomenon employed by women’s lifestyle bloggers and social media figures. Though Turner has not, to date, developed a comprehensive definition of the phrase, she notes that the point of infusing curated imperfection into one’s branded public persona is to make oneself appear and feel relatable to a target audience (L. Turner, personal communication, November 12, 2018). Whereas Turner used the phrase “curated imperfection” to critique and warn about the phenomenon itself, social media and lifestyle marketing strategist Kirsten Atkins (2019) capitalized on Turner’s coinage of the term, suggesting that her clients consider infusing their own content with the concept as they build their respective lifestyle brands.

In her February 12, 2019, “Socially Boutique” podcast entitled “How to Achieve the Instagram Trend of Curated Imperfection in Your Own Feed,” Atkins asserts that curated imperfection helps one connect to, and resonate with, their audience by cultivating a “more imperfect version” of themselves (Atkins, 2019). She observes that until recently, the long-standing norm for lifestyle bloggers has been to display a flawless image of oneself and of the portions of their lives that they allow their readers and followers to see. Typically, this occurs through careful tailoring of one’s body, clothes, style, hair, ponderings, questions, and surroundings to an ideal after which their target audience would likely aspire. Atkins (2019) observes *curated imperfection* as a careful and cunning departure from the status quo of *curated perfection*. She says that lifestyle bloggers are starting to “show up” on their blogs “how they show up in their own” everyday lives—vulnerable in their appearance (e.g., wearing sweats and

putting their hair in a bun) and in their accompanying photo captions: “They’re showing up as themselves rather than this ‘perfect persona’” (Atkins, 2019). Atkins asserts that such a move creates more resonance with, and connection to, audience members because it is more down-to-earth. Atkins (2019) notes:

[Curated imperfection] is [about] really showing up, being your most vulnerable self, but it’s also very strategic...very well-thought-out...[Those who employ curated imperfection] know that [it] will resonate with their audience and [it] will help them get more engagement, and more comments, and more likes. Because people are relating—and that’s what people want to do, they want to relate—especially [with] people who are brands...Us [sic] as their audience and us [sic] as their followers, we don’t notice that. We don’t notice how well planned out this content is. We just think that it’s authentic and real and right in the moment. But this content is planned out...People with big accounts—they plan out their content, they schedule it in advance...[And yet] they’re trying to be more relatable to their audience, and they have a caption that [reveals an] imperfect life...It’s not “I’m traveling to Greece and I’m having the best time and all my flights went perfect and everything was perfect.” No! They’re not doing that anymore. They’re talking about what went wrong. They’re talking about their mistakes. They’re talking about their failures [in a way that] us [sic] as an audience can relate to them.

Thus, curated imperfection can be defined as performative vulnerability with the aim of manufacturing a sense of authenticity, sincerity, and realness. Use of this strategy attempts to cultivate a shared bond between the message crafter and the message consumer—a bond through which the audience member is able to identify with the speaker or writer, not just through shared dreams, aspirations, hopes, and fears, but especially through shared failures and deficiencies.

Curated imperfection marshals the potential of gaining assent by exploiting the concept of identification (Burke, 1969), which can flatten the hierarchy between those who occupy a celebrity-level status and those who occupy the role of an average, everyday person of non-celebrity status.

To be certain, Dannah Gresh curates imperfection by sharing with her followers evidence of relatable struggles, missteps, emotional pain, and fears. For example, she shares about the mold issue in her home (“MOLD ADVICE NEEDED! This summer in PA, it has rained enough for me to empathize with Noah and the Mrs! The result is that we have mold in our basement, garage, and on the outside (at least) of our air vents,” Gresh, 2018dd), about the salmonella outbreak at a picnic she and Bob hosted (“URGENT PRAYER ALERT. About 100 people involved with our ministry have been stricken with salmonella poisoning. We are on day four of the battle and so miserable,” Gresh, 2018aa), about the pain of dry, cracked hands (“Sore thumb from dry, cracked skin. Any tips on how to help it heal!” Gresh, 2018oo), about a beloved pet’s death and dying process (“Just said a forever goodbye to our Quito. This is one of my favorite moments with him. When he was a baby he loved to touch noses. Death really stinks,” Gresh, 2018ii), and about her anxiety and apprehension related to public speaking [“And I (still may have) qualms or fears about teaching but he does expect me not to be where I was when I was 30 years old, (when I was) terrified and in tears in a fetal position before I did it, right?,” Gresh, 2018ee]. While these admissions of human fallibility and fragility most certainly infuse Dannah Gresh with a down-to-earth accessibility, a careful examination of the data reveals that within her ministry, she strategically utilizes the potency of curated imperfection in two primary and interlocking ways: (1) by illustrating the rhetorical power of acknowledged moral failure and (2) by encouraging the exploitation of moral-failure narratives.

Illustrating the rhetorical power of acknowledged moral failure. With an entire ministry built around the erudition gained from her teenage failure to save sex for her heterosexual Christian marriage, Dannah Gresh clearly relies upon on a packaged narrative of imperfection in the building of her ethos. As is evidenced in the previous section (curated erudition), the resulting emotional turmoil she says she endured after engaging in sexual activity as a 15-year-old affords her a level of experiential credibility to sagaciously guide her followers to better comprehend the psychological, physiological, and spiritual perils of an “early sexual debut” (Gresh, 2017d).

Likewise, Bob Gresh’s sex-themed moral imperfections serve an illustrative function to build the brand. In one of the texts placed amongst the recommended readings on the Pure Freedom Master Class resource table (*Who Moved the Goalpost: 7 Winning Strategies in the Sexual Integrity Gameplan*, Gresh & Gresh, 2001), Bob Gresh reveals to his target audience of tween and teen boys that his lifelong struggle with pornography began when he was 12 years old:

The attic was steamy and thick with heat. I could see dust particles dancing in the sun’s rays. I smelled the old papers and mothballs. My twelve-year-old mind reeled with confusion. I’d stumbled onto a magazine. It took only a passing glance of the cover to entice me to look within. A desire was awakened within me that I’d never known as I looked at her. She was beautiful. Every curve said “Yes, look!” So why did I feel something deep within me screaming “No?” I opened it anyway. I could never have imagined anything that looked so good could make me feel so bad. I started to go throw it away, but sat there wrestling with whether to look again. I did. (Gresh & Gresh, 2001, p. 19)

At the Pure Freedom Master Class, Bob took to the podium to describe how this “battle” with

pornography addiction contributed to a season of particularly intense turmoil in his marriage with Dannah. Recounting how an administrator at the school where he once served as headmaster found evidence of pornography usage on a school computer, Bob recalled that he feigned frustrated incredulity that a student at their school would engage in such behavior and that he endorsed a full investigation of the situation. He described how within minutes of leaving that conversation, Bob returned to his co-worker to reveal that he was the one accessing pornography with school-owned technology, during school hours, on school property. This triggered a series of events, including removal from his post. Though he wanted to communicate with and tell his students, their parents, and members of his faith community about what he had done and why he was being suspended from his position, legal counsel encouraged him to remain silent. Bob described the pain of separation and ostracism he, Dannah, and their children experienced with many of their friends, colleagues, and church family (B. Gresh, personal communication, June 14, 2018).

Several days following Bob Gresh's telling of this story at the Pure Freedom Master Class (June 17, 2018), Dannah Gresh posted on Facebook, saying, "Some of our new Master Class grads wanted to see this recording of Bob and I testifying about God in the healing of our marriage. Maybe you will enjoy it, too!" In the accompanying video from September 30, 2017, she and Bob are featured in a joint presentation at "Revive '17"¹² ("Need Help Lovin' That Man: Training Our Hearts for Relationship") where they describe the situation in further detail. Bob curates imperfection as he makes clear to the audience that he and Dannah have a marriage that is anything but trouble-free:

¹² According to Revive Our Hearts ministry services representative, Debbie Hancock, "Revive" conferences are "similar to True Woman [conferences, but are] smaller in size" and lacking "some of the features the larger True Woman event has, such as the Teen Track, Drama Skits, Pre-Sessions, etc." (D. Hancock, personal communication, March 18, 2019).

Dannah loves me well when she does whatever it takes to push me towards the often-lonely frontier of God's plan for my life. Dannah loves me well when she does whatever it takes to point out my sin, and let me take ownership of it. In our marriage, loving well means being willing to take the scalpel and open a wound when the disease of sin and selfishness and pride lurk beneath. And loving well also means waiting patiently for the right time to start that cut. All that to say this: so often leaders leave the platforms letting you think the very best about them—allowing you to fill in the unknown parts of their lives like spaces on the path in Candyland. I can tell you that we don't live on Gumdrop Mountain. We tend to live somewhere between the Candy Cane Forest and the Molasses Swamp!... You see, I have no doubt that I would die for Dannah, but sometimes it is so hard to live with her! And then there's this... I've put Dannah through hell. And I use that phrase because I know no other word to describe the depth of pain that I've brought into our marriage. My struggles with lust, pornography, depression, anxiety—and all the relational disasters produced by it—have brought her to places where she had no good choices. And it is the great sadness in my life. You know, there was a time that I had to tell both of my boards that I'd fallen below the standards required of a leader—and we had to do that on our own. I called my publishers and took my name off two books I had written, that were ready to come out. And I remember the morning I called Nancy [DeMoss Wolgemuth] and told her that I understood if I had compromised Dannah's relationship with Revive Our Hearts. I will never forget how nervous I was to call Nancy. I didn't know how she would respond. But, Nancy, I'll never forget how much healing you brought to my life! (Gresh, 2017c)

Curatorially managed moral-failure narratives, which permeate many, if not most, of the

Pure Freedom Ministries resources, capitalize on the strategic production of cognitive dissonance. Psychologist Leon Festinger (1957), who first developed cognitive dissonance theory, proposed that “dissonance, that is, the existence of non-fitting relations among cognitions, is a motivating factor in its own right..., [leading] to activity oriented toward dissonance reduction” (p. 3). Campbell, Huxman, and Burkholder (2015) note that when cognitive dissonance is used strategically, a communicator creates “psychological discomfort by showing that a major problem exists [and then creates] consonance (balance) by suggesting a remedy...that will solve the problem” (p. 154). By structuring and presenting her content in such a way that target audience members are emotionally primed to feel the gravity (especially the shame) of a situation along with the teller of the imperfect story being told, Dannah Gresh establishes a state of tension, readying her followers to receive a resolution. Thus, it is in this state of discomfort—through drawing to mind the existence of a potentially similar unresolved experience or through the fear of a similar experience materializing—that audience members are emotionally prepared to receive action-based suggestions introduced as solutions. In fact, as is demonstrated at the end of the segment above, following these revelatory times of confession, Dannah and Bob Gresh create rhetorical relief from the tension by drawing attention away from their acknowledged moral failures and by pointing toward what helped (or what could have helped sooner) in regaining equilibrium (or bringing “healing”) in their lives and in their relationships. Chief among Pure Freedom Ministries’ strategies to address imperfection is the act of confessional accountability within Christian community.

In *Who Moved the Goalpost: 7 Winning Strategies in the Sexual Integrity Gameplan* (Gresh & Gresh, 2001), Bob Gresh promotes the concept of confessional accountability when he suggests that boys should cultivate deep, intimate, godly friendships with two types of men:

peers and elders. An intimate, godly peer friendship is to be developed with someone you can talk to “about your dreams, your goals, and even your fears and failures. There is a love between you”¹³ (Gresh & Gresh, 2001, p. 161), whereas an intimate, godly friendship with an elder means turning to someone who is an “older, wiser accountability partner,” someone who can offer “wise counsel” and from whom there are “no secrets” (p. 163).

When she shared at Young True Woman '18 her story of being “stuck” for 11 years after she engaged in premarital sex, Dannah Gresh made clear that the answer to moving past her resulting dysfunction was found in “confessing” her story to a select group of wise, trusted, Christian advisors and friends. She then encouraged those in the audience to find advisors (in that moment or soon thereafter) to whom they could confess their own shortcomings and failures:

Hebrews 10:14 says: “By one sacrifice Christ has made finished perfect forever. Christ has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.” Being made holy. You hear that? Being made holy is a process, and you can see that language in many verses where God says, “Become pure; become holy.” It’s a work that we do with him. We have to be in cooperation with him. I want to say that one of the keys to that work is full confession. Not just to God, but to each other...James 5:16 says, “Confess your sins one to another and then you will be healed.” Whatever sin you’re struggling with, whatever addiction you have going on in your life, whatever secret that somebody has committed against you—you’re not gonna find the full healing until you tell someone. Tell a woman in this room. We have prayer counselors available for you. You can tell them anything. Walk up

¹³ In case the reader is uncomfortable with the notion of close, intimate male-male friendship, Bob Gresh offers reassurance: “Hold it! Is this getting girlie? No, this is not girlie! David was as tough as they come” (Gresh & Gresh, 2001, p. 161).

to me, or Erin, or Chizzy. You can tell us. Talk to your mom tonight in your hotel room. I think you're gonna be stuck [if you don't]. When I finally did that, I told two people: my mom and my husband. And they will tell you that when I finally told them this ten-year-old secret—this 11-year-old secret—it was like a new salvation. He was alive in me and I was cooperating once again by obeying his word and doing. So, I have a question. Are you progressing towards full healing? God doesn't want perfection, but he wants progress. If you need healing today, tell someone. (Gresh, 2018ee)

At the Pure Freedom Master Class session during which Bob Gresh shared about his struggle with pornography and its impact on his family and marriage, he described how he immediately surrounded himself with trusted friends who were also “accountability partners” (B. Gresh, personal communication, June 14, 2018). Additionally, he notedannah’s need for community at that time. After Bob Gresh left the stage at Revive '17,annah told the women in the audience that, at that juncture, she needed her Christian girlfriends to make it through the ripple-effect from the turbulence that Bob had brought into their lives:

The darkness will come in so thick that you cannot see through it, let alone get out of bed in it! It will hold you down. It is then that we run to our girlfriends. When my husband sat down with me and shared with me that he had hit a hard place and that he didn't know his way back to God—except to break my heart, bringing all of the sin out into the light for me to see—I called my girlfriends. I called them fast! I did not hesitate...Ladies, I don't know what you're walking through with your husbands. I don't know if he's sick and unwell. I don't know if he's driven you into financial debt. I don't know if he once knew the Lord and loved Him—and now is far from Him. I don't know if you've come to know the Lord since you were married, and you feel so desperately spiritually single. I just

know this. When you hit the hard time, that is no time for a woman of faith to back off! That is when a woman of faith finds herself in a place of standing in faith—because faith is believing what we can't see! So, how do you get perspective? You run to your sisters! I called three girlfriends the very first day that I knew I was going to have a long time to walk through some hard things. One of them was my friend Donna VanLiere. She turned me quickly to the Word of God when I said, "I just can't see straight. I don't know what to do!" She said, "Dannah, God's Word says that it is a 'lamp to your feet and a light to your path.' Get in the Word. And I want to tell you something before you get there. It says it's a lamp; it's not a stadium light. It's going to show you where to plant your foot for the next step. Don't expect more right now." Ugh! I wanted at least a spotlight! I wanted to know at least how today would look. But I got in the Word because I had a Christian sister. (Gresh, 2017c)

Dannah Gresh, in her January 2018 interview with Joshua Harris, further develops a case for acknowledging moral failure, for recognizing the discomfort of life's realities, and for emphasizing intentional Christian companionship as a partial resolution to the struggle. In the vignette that follows, she suggests fusing the concepts of confessed imperfection and a "Titus 2" biblical womanhood model of mentorship:

I think Jesus didn't promise us that our lives were gonna be perfect, and frilly, and full of material goods and happy relationships. He promised us that there might be suffering. And we don't want that. We want all of the promises of God that make us prosperous and happy, but he also promised that we would share Christ's suffering. And that reality isn't something that the Christian culture really wants to embrace or talk about very much. But we do, it is a form of embracing Christ's suffering when we walk through life more alone

than we thought we would. When we walk through life with a different purpose than we thought we would. When we walk through life with a body that doesn't work the way that we hoped it would. That is part of Christ's suffering. Now, I always think that there's always Christ's healing and Christ's hope and every time a girl comes to me and a married woman comes to me with all these sexual or maybe relational obstacles, I do everything I can using God's word and counseling and encouragement her to help her fix those obstacles. And we've seen some—a lot of—beautiful success with that. And I think that's the whole Titus 2, older women talking to younger women. We're supposed to be talking to younger women about sex lives. We're supposed to be encouraging them and training them. But we can't also throw out that part of the scripture that says life might hurt. (Van Der Wyngaard & Russell-Jones, 2018)

These instances in which Dannah and Bob Gresh intentionally draw attention to their imperfect pasts give evidence of their employment of curated imperfection as a communication strategy. Using their own stories of moral failure as entry points for explaining how they addressed their “sins” through research, confession (to God and others), and implementation of plans of action (e.g., accountability groups, “healing” prayer, Bible studies) shores up their credibility and removes them from “perfect-celebrity” status to “we're-real-people-just-like-you” status. In fact, her social media followers acknowledge how Dannah Gresh's personal stories appeal to them, helping them feel less isolated and alone. In the June 6, 2018, comment thread in which she asks her Facebook followers to tell her who she is, responders talk about how “real” and “raw” she is as a human being. Consider the following examples:

You are real! Transparent! Encouraging and empowering! I'll never forget the story you told while we were on the Women of Purpose Spring Tour about flying bacon wrapped

meatloaf at the dinner table. I have shared that story many times with many wives, and it always leaves us feeling like we are not alone and even our most messy moments can be redeemed!

[You are] a sister in Christ that I look up to because you emulate what I am striving to be as a woman in Christ, but you also show us your raw side, and your funny side reminding us that you're human like we are.

Using moral-failure narratives allows Dannah and Bob Gresh to temper their near celebrity-like status, as well as their curated erudition. By curating imperfection in this way, they are able to present themselves as real, relatable, and relevant.

Encouraging the exploitation of moral-failure narratives. Marshalling the power of identification through sharing anecdotes of their personal moral failures is not simply a literary device or a form of evidence that Dannah and Bob Gresh weave throughout their own speeches and books in order to forge a felt sense of relationship with their target audience members; they also tout moral-failure narratives as a type of tool to exploit when others teach youth within their sphere of influence to strive for a life of sexual purity. Dannah Gresh contends that in the act of acknowledging her moral-failure narratives, as well as Bob's, they have created a deeper connection with, and a healthier environment for, their children. In a message ("Passionate about Purity") she delivered on the mainstage at Revive '17 (and to which on January 19, 2018, she provided a link to on her Facebook wall), she encouraged the women in the audience to share their moral failure narratives with their own children:

Ladies, I want to tell you how Bob and I have attempted to create an environment of grace for [our] own children in our home. We tell them about our past. We told them

about our sin. I remember when I took my oldest son, Robbie—in eighth grade—out for ice cream to tell him about my past. Girls in his class had begun reading my book on purity, and I knew that he might hear my story before I could tell him. I just simply said, “Robbie I want to tell you why I love talking and teaching on the subject of purity. It’s because when I was a teenager, I did not walk in purity. I know how much it hurts, and I don’t want other people to know that hurt. But if they do, I want them to find the healing of Jesus much faster than I did!” And my sweet Robbie—oh, he’s a teddy bear. But he sat there in all of his eighth-grade awkwardness, not knowing what to say. And I said, “Robbie, I kind of need to know what’s going through your head right now.” He looked at me, and he just simply said, “Mom, that’s why Jesus died for you!” Hmm. Create an environment of grace in your home. I truly believe that creating an environment of grace in our home is what has given our children permission to come to us before they’re too deep in. When you have grace, it trains you for godliness, it trains you for purity. I want to tell you how that kind of has unfolded in my life. (Basham, 2018a)

Over the course of my time as an attendee at the Pure Freedom Master Class, I observed that moral-failure narratives were referred to frequently as “assets.” During the very first Master Class session, in fact, attendees were led through a process called “asset mapping”—a community planning technique Dannah Gresh credits Kretsmann and McKnight (1993) with developing. Asset mapping, according to Dannah Gresh, includes:

individuals with strengths and interests in [a particular problem] and ministries and organizations that reach your target demographic. An asset will contribute any specific need that helps you achieve goals such as money, access, natural resources, land, success stories, expertise, and more. No matter what, though, the biggest asset...is [personal]

brokenness, [personal] story, [personal] testimony. (D. Gresh, personal communication, June 14, 2018)

At the heart of the personal-story-as-asset concept is recognition of the power of perceived vulnerability and the suggestion that vulnerable moments can (and should) be curated for the purpose of evoking moral-failure narratives from the target audience. Describing the concept of this “I’ll-tell-you-now-you-tell-me” model, Dannah Gresh spoke of the importance of shared acknowledgement of human fallibility as a means of prompting people to open up and to be vulnerable: “It is important to have a humble, transparent heart and say, ‘I’m broken, too’... [because the] people who will open up and tell you their story are the ones who have heard your story” (D. Gresh, personal communication, June 16, 2018).

During the Pure Freedom Master Class, a concept called “DGroup” (short for “discipleship group”) was introduced by Bob and Dannah Gresh’s daughter-in-law, Aleigha Gresh, a Grace Prep High School graduate and now Grace Prep High School English literature teacher and DGroup leader. DGroups are mandatory weekly meetings of confession with clusters of Grace Prep students and a faculty leader, who starts off the accountability session by sharing from their own experience. In a handout circulated during the Master Class, DGroup leaders are instructed to model transparency:

Accountability: This should be a goal of your DGroup, but THEY have to WANT to do it. It is possible that some in your DGroup will want to and others will not, and you will have to decide how to handle that. You can’t force it on them. The best way is to model it to them by doing it yourself: be transparent and show your own need for accountability and forgiveness. (Gresh, A., 2018)

Bob Gresh then explained that the primary goal of the DGroup:

is to create a forum for transparency...At Grace Prep a student can confess anything and they aren't going to have immediate consequences, because confession is a big part of overcoming [sin]. We have students we've had to help lock down computers, have drug testing, help [in the] process of breaking up or boundary setting...[Our philosophy is that] you were never meant to do things alone. At Grace Prep, we consciously focus on this.

(B. Gresh, personal communication, June 15, 2018)

During a December 17, 2018, "family chapel" service (broadcast via Facebook Live) that drew together the students of Grace Prep High School, Pure Freedom staff members, and their respective family members, Dannah Gresh intensified the notion of vulnerability when she told those assembled that she and Bob, through Pure Freedom Ministries, are calling people to practice "radical vulnerability":

We practice radical vulnerability as opposed to powerless superficiality. This produces authentic community. Satan wants to make you believe that your story is too mediocre to be useful or so bad that it disqualifies you, but telling it is critical in overcoming the enemy. Covered in Christ's blood, your story is your greatest asset.

Located within this intensified treatment of vulnerability ("radical vulnerability") is a cunning separation technique. Dannah Gresh identifies *her* brand of vulnerability as something different than what other Christians do. Later that same day, she posted to Facebook, providing her followers with a link to the recording of the morning's speech and articulating her belief that most Christians do not employ, or capitalize upon, the power of radical, transparent vulnerability as an asset:

Such a joy to share my story with my beloved Grace Prep/Pure Freedom ministry family. Each month we gather to consider our calling and our core values. Today we talked about

radical transparency. Oh, how I wish there were more of it in the body of Christ. Our stories, covered in Christ's blood, are our greatest asset. (Revelation 12:7-11) (Gresh, 2018ww)

In her encouragement to exploit the power of moral-failure narratives, however, Dannah Gresh cautions against revealing everything. During the Pure Freedom Master Class, she told the attendees:

You don't have to tell them everything. Notice that Bob and I don't... You don't have to tell a lot of detail; you just have to be transparent enough to feel authentic. Every single one of us when we sense that someone is in bondage to something we were once in bondage to, if in that moment we do not have the ability to share our stories, we are still in bondage. If you can, tell your story about how you have struggled with that thing or with something like it... But, again, you don't have to give them every single detail. (D. Gresh, personal communication, June 16, 2018)

She explains further in her interview with Joshua Harris why one should use transparency with caution. If too much emphasis is placed on moral-failure narratives without discussion of next steps or corrective behavior, she says, the sheer volume and frequency of shared moral-failure narratives may lead to moral relativism:

When I die, I hope people don't really recognize that I wrote books on purity or modesty. I hope they say, "She lived her life transparently." That's really more—that's of higher value to me in terms of the legacy I leave behind. But here's the problem, we can be so transparent, that all we do is barf all over each other in accountability group. And we're not holding up the standard and the word of God. Instead of being like, listening, and hearing the brokenness and hearing whatever sin happened this week in your life and

saying, “Okay, what do we need to do to make sure that this doesn’t happen again,” you’re hurting yourself, you’re distancing yourself from God, you’re distancing yourself from these other people that are involved. Instead, I think what we do a lot of times is [say], “Oh that’s alright, everybody’s struggling.” Like, we’re getting to that point with our storytelling with sex and relationships and pornography where it’s just like, “Oh, it’s alright.” And that’s not alright. (Van Der Wyngaard & Russell-Jones, 2018)

Located within encouraging the exploitation of moral-failure narratives is the notion that one should not aim for perfection, but progress. This can be seen in Dannah Gresh’s Young True Woman ’18 session (“And I heard something years ago that really ministered to me: God wants progress not perfection...[H]e wants my progress but he doesn’t expect my perfection,” Gresh, 2018ee), in a Facebook post describing a True Woman ’18 mainstage session during which she and other panel members discussed sexual abuse and healing (“[God] wants our full healing. I don’t think He wants perfection, but progress,” Gresh, 2018ff), and even in Bob Gresh’s Born to Be Brave tour theme, “Do the Next Right Thing” (“Guys love [the theme], because if you mess up, you don’t dwell on it, you just move on,” B. Gresh, personal communication, June 15, 2018). This “progress-not-perfection” mentality opens up for Dannah Gresh an opportunity to situate her sexual purity efforts and her Pure Freedom Ministries as “works in progress.” This allows her to begin addressing critiques of the purity movement from a carefully curated location of agreement that she, along with other purity movement leaders in the past, promoted problematic messages. In her January 2018 interview with Joshua Harris, she says she “self-corrected” and stopped doing things that were unique to the purity movement in the late 1990s and early 2000s:

I think I’ve self-corrected a little bit because I feel like in the late 1990s, early 2000s, we were collectively sending a message that said, “Hey, you’re wearing your purity ring and

you're wearing your chastity belt, everything is going to work out for you. There will be a prince charming. There will be a princess that's just beautiful for you." And that's not the promise. (Van Der Wyngaard & Russell-Jones, 2018)

In that same interview, as she and Joshua Harris discussed whether and why to revise already published books, she acknowledges that she has made revisions:

[W]hen we take our brokenness and we try to filter it...maybe you wouldn't have written some of the words differently. I have revised *And the Bride Wore White* multiple times, and I think to myself, "I can't believe I said it that way." Because I've grown in my experience as I've worked with people. (Van Der Wyngaard & Russell-Jones, 2018)

During an in-between-session conversation I had with Bob Gresh at the Pure Freedom Master Class, he noted that one of the most significant changes to their content was with the Secret Keeper Girl Truth or Bare Fashion Tests, which were "developed as a fun way for a girl and her mom to think about what she's wearing and monitor outfits for modesty" (Secret Keeper Girl, 2018b). Bob told me that in its first iteration, one of the Truth or Bare tests was originally named "Grandpa's Mirror." According to a still-live blog post on the Lies Young Women Believe blog (Davis, 2008), girls were asked to consider "How short is too short?":

Action: Get in front of a full-length mirror. If you are in shorts, sit Indian style. If you are in a skirt, sit in a chair with your legs crossed. Now, what do you see in the mirror? Okay, pretend it is your Grandpa! If you see undies, or lots of thigh, your shorts or skirt is too short! Remedy: Buy longer shorts and skirts! (Davis, 2008)

Further, Bob recalled:

We got slammed for that. I mean, we didn't mean to set up a situation for girls to think about their grandpas looking up their skirts, but we got pummeled. And, you know, they

were right. So, we changed the name of that modesty test from “Grandpa’s Mirror” to “Mirror Image.” (B. Gresh, personal communication, June 15, 2018)

A direct benefit of curated imperfection and the focus on a progress-not-perfection mindset is that in the face of critiques, Dannah Gresh is able to lean on the notion of “progressive sanctification,” which she discussed in her session at Young True Woman ’18: “But then there’s this thing called progressive sanctification and that’s the work that we start in cooperating with God to be fully healed. That’s why it can say in Philippians 2:12: ‘Continue to work out your salvation’” (Gresh, 2018ee). Progressive sanctification emphasizes that no one is yet fully formed, that everyone is broken, and that everyone is continually learning to do better and to be better.

Indeed, the viability of Pure Freedom Ministries (as with any evangelical Christian ministry, in fact) is dependent upon the concept of imperfection. Dannah Gresh’s ministry would not exist if it were not for her moral-failure narrative and for the moral-failure narratives of others. Recognition of one’s sinful, fallen, imperfect state and of conversion as a prerequisite for salvation is central to the theological convictions of evangelical Christianity (as discussed in Chapter 3 of this dissertation project). Curated imperfection, then, gives Dannah Gresh the opportunity to maintain her curated erudition because, though she does not yet have all the answers, she is affiliated with the one who does (i.e., God). Therefore, when she self-corrects by backing away from promises of perfect relationships or by revising her texts, her culpability diminishes because she can rely on her imperfect-thought-in-progress trajectory toward prospective, or final, sanctification.

Deviant cases: Curated contradictions in curated imperfection. Despite a strong focus on the curation of imperfection through manufactured transparency, Dannah Gresh does, at the

same time, prize curatorially perfect displays as well. For instance, in this January 18, 2014, blog post (“Is It OK To Sleep Over at My Boyfriend’s?”) that Dannah Gresh linked to in a December 20, 2018, Facebook post, the appearance of propriety is presented as especially important:

It looks like you’re having sex, even if you’re not. Assuming you believe that a Christian is called to one mutually monogamous lifetime sexual relationship—I like to call that marriage—you understand that God’s standard encourages us to wait until we’re married to have sex. (If you think you can start having sex once you are engaged or even if you’re sure you’ve found the one, read “Sex First, Then A Wedding.”) When you decide to sleep over at your boyfriend’s, it’s really hard for the rest of us to believe you’re not having sex. Too many of us have been there. Even myself. Once. Long ago. A decision I made that was with the best intentions, but I slid into sin. I Thessalonians 5:22 says that Christians are supposed to “avoid all appearances of evil.” When you sleep over, it looks like you’re sinning. It’s as simple as that. (Gresh, 2014a)

Indeed, appearances of perfection matter quite a lot to Dannah Gresh. At the Revive ’17 mainstage session mentioned earlier, she asserts that Christians need to be mindful of how observable instances of their imperfections can serve as a hindrance to their cause:

So much of our pain is about sexual impurity. It’s not just the world that’s broken...it’s us! Let me share with you some statistics. One thing that just breaks my heart is that, in recent years, erotica—a form of pornography that uses story lines and narrative rather than photos and videos to arouse—has nearly cannibalized the publishing industry. Here’s what’s sad: There is virtually no statistical difference in the percentage of churched versus unchurched women who read the best-selling title *Shades of Grey*. Sixty-four percent of men attending our churches say that they use pornography once a

month, causing widespread pain to women in the church. About forty percent of the women who have abortions each year have it while they're attending our churches. We are broken! We are wounded! Adultery, divorce—sadly—not as uncommon as they should be in our church. Ladies, here's the problem: We cannot display and adorn ourselves with the gospel when we look as addicted, as broken, as impure and as ashamed as the rest of the world! They're not going to want what we have if they don't see it working. (Gresh, 2017c)

Apart from these deviant case exemplars, in which Dannah Gresh reveals that curated perfection actually does matter a great deal, it is important to identify something else that is deviant, or subversive, about the Pure Freedom Ministries' brand of curated imperfection: Dannah Gresh's deployment of curated imperfection is a deviant case in and of itself. When she so passionately and frequently emphasizes the importance of moral-failure narratives, a curious phenomenon emerges. By perpetually advocating for the practice of regularly shared, radically transparent moments in which shortcomings and failures are a focal point, she makes imperfection a type of perfection. Stated another way, through (1) regular, semi-public confessions of sin in accountability forums, (2) numerous public statements such as "One thing we have to do is be more transparent" (Van Der Wyngaard & Russell-Jones, 2018) or "Oh, how I wish there were more [radical transparency] in the body of Christ" (Gresh, 2018ww), and (3) side conversations like the one she had with me at the Pure Freedom Master Class when she disclosed that there are some evangelical Christian sexual purity leaders (e.g., Girl Defined Ministries and Eric and Leslie Ludy) who in her estimation are "truly good and pure, but not relatable" (i.e., "they're too perfect") (D. Gresh, personal communication, June 15, 2018), what effectively emerges is the notion that imperfection is an ideal state. In other words, curated

imperfection is a necessary condition for perfection. Being perfectly, curatorially imperfect allows Dannah Gresh to position herself and her sexual purity efforts as different, and more perfect, than other evangelical Christian sexual purity ministries.

Dannah Gresh's reliance on curated imperfection helps her temper the rigid pedantry of her curated erudition. Through her emphasis of personal failure narratives, Dannah Gresh uses curated imperfection to soften the edges of her expert persona and of her lofty expectations for how her target audience should maneuver to uphold specific social and religious mores. Further, curated imperfection allows Dannah Gresh to adopt a folksy and relatable persona. In a #MeToo/#ChurchToo atmosphere, it is imperative that she curate imperfection. Critiques and criticism, whether she finds them valid or worthy of her attention or not, require careful navigation in order for her to appear reasonable and self-aware of the potential pitfalls of the sexual purity movement and of her role within it. Thus, the Dannah Gresh/Pure Freedom brand curates imperfection in two specific, interrelated ways: (1) by illustrating the rhetorical power of acknowledged moral failure and (2) by encouraging the exploitation of moral-failure narratives. And yet, as demonstrated above, she at times contradicts her own imperfection by calling on her audience members to embrace appearances of perfection and by employing her curated erudition to assert that she has a corner on "the truth" (recall how she utilizes the lie-truth dichotomy to build erudition). Careful adherence to, and deviation from, curated imperfection allows Dannah Gresh to sink into the basic theological tenets of evangelical Christian belief and sets the stage for her to lean into the rhetorical power of the third curatorial strategy, and the focus of the next section: curated moderation.

Curated moderation. To be moderate about something is to show restraint or regulation about a topic, an issue, or a person (Harper, 2019e). One who is moderate is "one who holds

[measured] opinions on controversial subjects” and “is opposed to extreme views or courses” of action (Harper, 2019e). The English Oxford Living Dictionary (2019) defines moderation as “the avoidance of excess or extremes, especially in one’s behaviour or political opinions.” The Cambridge Dictionary defines a moderate as “a person whose opinions, especially their political ones, are not extreme and are therefore acceptable to a large number of people” (Moderate, 2019).

Cialdini, Levy, Herman, and Evenbeck (1973) observe that the maintenance of the middle-ground, or a moderate position, is an impression management strategy. Snyder and Swan (1976) explain that there are two distinct advantages of assuming a position of moderation: (1) “The middle ground allows the individual to draw supportive arguments from both sides of the issue without appearing to be inconsistent” and (2) “an individual with a moderate position is likely to be viewed favorably because [they create] the impression of openness and rationality” (p. 1039). Thus, the strategic employment of moderation serves a persuasive function. By positioning oneself as moderate on an issue, “an individual increases [their] chances both of making a favorable impression” and of “having [their stance] prevail” (Snyder & Swan, 1976, p. 1039).

As is demonstrated thus far in this research project, Dannah Gresh is a public religious figure whose resources and ministry efforts are packaged to appeal to a primarily conservative evangelical Christian audience. This is established in her public association with high-profile, theologically conservative enterprises (e.g., Dannah Gresh is one of the 153 original signatories of The Nashville Statement),¹⁴ in her ministry partnerships with and frequent citations of socially

¹⁴ The Nashville Statement, issued on August 29, 2017, by the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, is a set of 14 declarations about human sexuality. Many of the declarations enforce a conservative and exclusionary position on same-sex marriage and gender-fluid identities (e.g.,

and theologically conservative leaders (e.g., Nancy DeMoss Wolgemuth, James Dobson, Mary Kassian, John Piper, and Dennis Rainey), and in her affiliation with socially and politically conservative organizations and institutions (e.g., the Abstinence Clearinghouse, FamilyLife Today, Focus on the Family, the Medical Institute for Sexual Health, Moody Publishers, Revive Our Hearts Ministries, and *The 700 Club*). Indeed, even a frequently used line in her biographical sketches demonstrates her claim to a conservative identity: “[Dannah Gresh] has long been called upon to defend the conservative position of abstinence in national news media” (e.g., FamilyLife Today, n.d.; Moody Publishers, 2019; Tyndale, 2019). However, despite her entrenchment in, and leadership of, conservative Christian endeavors, Dannah Gresh fosters a pretense of curated moderation by often situating herself as measured, tolerant, and even cutting edge in her beliefs and practices. She curates a moderate persona in three principal ways: (1) by eschewing rules-based legalism, (2) by affiliating with subversive mavericks, and (3) by conveying an attitude of sensible reason.

Eschewing rules-based legalism. Dannah Gresh cultivates the notion that she is moderate by portraying herself and her ministry as challenging common conservative evangelical practices and convictions. The primary way she does this is by verbally eschewing fundamentalism, legalism, and legalistic, rules-based evangelical practices and teachings. In a private early morning, pre-session conversation as we were standing next to one another at the Pure Freedom Master Class resource table, Dannah Gresh asked me about the focus of my research project (i.e., how purity leaders are responding to critiques of the purity movement). When I told her again (I had mentioned my research focus on May 7, 2018, during our “vetting” phone call), she said,

“We deny that God has designed marriage to be a homosexual, polygamous, or polyamorous relationship... We affirm that it is sinful to approve of homosexual immorality or transgenderism and that such approval constitutes an essential departure from Christian faithfulness and witness,” Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, 2017).

“I’m so glad you are doing this. I am looking forward to reading your paper. You know, legalism is so damaging when it is connected to purity teachings. I think you’ll find we aren’t legalistic here” (D. Gresh, personal communication, June 15, 2018). While she did not expand further on this thought during our one-on-one conversation, a negative treatment of the topic of legalism arose in other Master Class settings. For example, at the Pure Freedom Master Class session in which Dannah Gresh presented her sexual theology, she told the attendees that when they teach young people about sexual purity, they should:

try not to go first to the “thou shalt not” verses because legalistic rules are not helpful. Instead, start positive, start with the “thou shalt” verses like Genesis 1:26 and 2:18, where God tells them to have sex...It is important to set up boundaries, not restrictions. (D. Gresh, personal communication, June 15, 2018)

Later, during the Pure Freedom Master class event, Bob Gresh explained to the attendees that the primary reason he and Dannah distance themselves from legalistic interpretations of scripture and Christian practice is because of the potential to “damage the faith journey” of questioning Christians (especially youth) when they learn that a heavily promoted legalistic rule or principle is, in fact, not based on biblical truth or on “sound” biblical interpretation. He noted:

You need to be sure that you do not give wrong answers. If you are wrong, they will find out the first quarter of college. When that pillar gets knocked out, these things break your faith. When you knock out one of these central truths, it is difficult to renew or restore that faith. (B. Gresh, personal communication, June 15, 2018)

When a pastor who was also attending the Master Class when I was there, offered that giving people a list of do-and-don’t rules “creates spiritually stunted, stuck adults who can’t make a choice,” Bob Gresh nodded to convey agreement, articulating that legalistic rules are harmful to

relationships and to personal growth: “Right. Don’t make up rules that aren’t there, because that will push people away... Things are complicated. People have wildly different ideas of what is right” (B. Gresh, personal communication, June 15, 2018).

To illustrate “wildly different ideas of what is right,” Bob and Dannah Gresh challenged stereotypes of conservative evangelical Christians (and thereby curated moderation) by providing counsel on two sex-related topics. First, Bob Gresh promoted the use of sex toys sold by Christian distributors to enhance marital sex: “We have seen positive benefits to using sex toys as aids. Many Christians have found help and assistance” (B. Gresh, personal communication, June 15, 2018). Second, Dannah Gresh articulated that while she and Bob have determined together that anal sex is not appropriate for them, it might be right for others:

We feel strong about the line on anal sex, and yet when we counsel couples, we never tell them anal sex is wrong because God never said it was wrong. Those decisions can change from individual to individual because of spiritual maturity. (D. Gresh, personal communication, June 15, 2018)

These brief Master Class discussions, moderating common conceptions of what happens within heterosexual Christian evangelical bedrooms, confirm the findings of sociologist Kelsy Burke (2016), who notes that:

by emphasizing their own understanding of piety and God’s rules... conservative Christians [can] fashion boundaries that separate them from ungodly others while still taking advantage of the pleasures that those ungodly others helped to develop—that is, the pleasures that result from rejecting prescriptive rules restricting sexual expression. (p. 165)

Throughout the Master Class sessions that I attended (from June 14-17, 2018, in State

College, Pennsylvania), Bob Gresh further developed the notion that he, Dannah Gresh, and the efforts of Pure Freedom Ministries are moderate because of how they avoid legalistic rules at Grace Prep High School. Bob explained that they founded the school based on the belief that a Christian school should be filled with grace and not legalism or judgment. He told a story of how Dannah met a teenager at a purity event who was pregnant and who was preparing emotionally to be kicked out of her Christian high school after she disclosed the pregnancy publicly before her church congregation the next day during a confession-of-sins portion of the Sunday church service. Bob indicated to the Pure Freedom Master Class that, when he heard the story of the pregnant teenager, he was inspired by the idea of a Christian school that would promote grace instead of judgement. He then directed the Master Class attendees to make note of entry number 23 on “The 40 Points of Grace” (the founding principles upon which Bob based his germinating idea for Grace Prep): “We believe that legalism is the easy way out and is employed by weak leaders” (Grace Prep High School, 2019). Bob then stated:

Our view is: do not make rules unless there is not another choice. Even at Grace Prep, we say, “Do not make rules that God doesn’t make”... We have a list of ten things that God clearly says “no” on [the Ten Commandments]. Beyond that, we have to exercise Christian wisdom, and how we do that is by asking three questions: “Is it good? Is it loving? Does it bring me closer to Jesus?” (B. Gresh, personal communication, June 15, 2018)

A negative treatment of legalism also arose in other data sets examined for this dissertation project. During her interview with Joshua Harris for the *I Survived I Kissed Dating Goodbye* documentary, Dannah Gresh mentioned briefly how she sees young girls and women negatively experiencing the ramifications of legalistic sexual purity teachings when she serves in

the role of a counselor/advisor: “I have to be sensitive to those who have experienced childhood sexual abuse or legalistic and very unholy and harmful teachings on modesty and purity” (Van Der Wyngaard & Russell-Jones, 2018). On “The Modern Motherhood Podcast” (Beckett, 2018), in a conversation about the term “modesty,” Dannah Gresh indicated that she tries to stay away from legalistic rules:

What I don’t like to do with modesty—and what I’ve really worked hard at [not doing]—is creating hard and fast legalistic rules that your skirt should be this many inches above or below the knee or...whatever the case may be, because I find that that doesn’t help a girl internalize the decision to be appropriate. All it does is get her stuck up on your rules and she doesn’t go through the process in her heart and in her mind of looking in the mirror and saying, “Is the way I’m dressed appropriate?” (Beckett, 2018)

In her Revive ’17 mainstage presentation (“Passionate about Purity”), which she promoted in a January 19, 2018, Facebook post, Dannah Gresh speaks with a tone of blame and disdain toward legalism and legalistic teachings when she discusses the negligible statistical differences between “churched” and “unchurched” men and women and their use of porn and erotica:

Impurity grows in an environment dominated by rules. Let me share with you some startling realities. While most church-going men who are regular in attendance are slightly less likely to look at porn than the unchurched, men who self-identify as (and this survey used a specific word, a specific sect, of our evangelical churches that—if I said it today—many of you would equate with legalism)...men who attended those churches are ninety-one percent more likely to look at porn than unchurched men. There’s a traceable link between legalism and isolation that feeds sexual secrets. Women, we’re not off the

hook! Only seven percent of women who had an abortion while attending church felt there was one person that they could talk to, in their churches, about their dilemma. Only seven percent of the women in our churches...I can only imagine, what would happen if we would foster a community of grace so that these women felt like, when they found themselves in a crisis pregnancy, they could come to just one of us? Ladies, how many of those babies could we have saved!? A commitment to life mandates that we foster an environment of grace for women found in crisis pregnancies. And here is something that our world is really struggling with, and we really need to deal with in the church. According to recent research, seventy-three percent of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered individuals felt the Christian church was unfriendly to them. What would happen if we started creating a safe place for our brothers and sisters struggling in this area by admitting that the ground at the foot of the cross is level. There is no “worse” sin. None! Paul instructs in verses 11 and 12 that, “the grace of God...[trains] us to renounce ungodliness and...live self-controlled, upright...godly lives.” Now, I’m not talking about “cheap grace.” He’s not talking about cheap grace. He’s talking about grace that’s strong enough to carry the truth, but gentle enough to hear a confession. Do we have that in our churches? I think we’re very quick to instruct; the “thou-shalt-not’s” flow quickly off of our lips. But are we quick to confess our own struggles, so that we can create an environment of grace, declaring that the ground at the foot of the cross truly is level? (Beckett, 2018)

Affiliating with subversive mavericks. Another way Dannah Gresh cultivates the notion that she is more moderate than conservative is by affiliating herself with people who are boundary pushers. Sometimes, this affiliation is established through references to friends or

ministry partners who question and push against commonly-held conservative Christian social and political mores. For instance, within the timeframe that the Pure Freedom Master Class was held (June 14-17, 2018), she referenced at least three times (once from the stage, once in a private conversation with me, and once on social media) the name of Nicole Braddock Bromley. From the Pure Freedom Master Class pulpit, Dannah Gresh noted that “Nicole Bromley helped us teach [sexual theology] in the Dominican Republic” (D. Gresh, personal communication, June 15, 2018); as I was preparing to leave the Gresh Farm after the final session of the Pure Freedom Master Class, she told me directly, “You should check out Nicole Braddock Bromley; she’s been doing #MeToo for more than 10 years” (D. Gresh, personal communication, June 17, 2018); and several hours after the Master Class ended, she tweeted, “@Nicole_Bromley For a long time you were #OneVoice but I see God using #MeToo to create a choir to sing songs of healing!” (Gresh, 2018s).¹⁵

Through her organization, OneVOICE, Nicole Braddock Bromley regularly speaks to high school and college-aged students about topics such as sexual abuse, harassment, assault, and sex trafficking. While Braddock Bromley is clearly affiliated with numerous conservative Christian organizations to which Dannah Gresh has ties (e.g., FamilyLife Today and Moody Publishers), during the calendar-driven boundaries when data was generated and subsequently collected for this project, Braddock Bromley began engaging in overtly progressive political behavior on her social media accounts. Most notably, during the Fall 2018 election cycle, Bromley tweeted: “Just over here filling out my absentee ballot. #mood” alongside an image of

¹⁵ As I discuss in the next, and final, curatorial strategy (curated deflection), careful observation of the data set indicates that Dannah Gresh’s knowledge of my research topic and mindfulness of my presence at the Master Class seemed to instigate a short-lived burst of social media activity in which she magnified her affiliation with Nicole Braddock Bromley, whose ministry, OneVOICE, focuses on developing sexual abuse and sexual assault awareness within young adult populations.

fall leaves and acorns bearing the text: “My favorite season is the fall of the patriarchy” (Nicole Braddock Bromley, 2018). This is worthy of note because, as is mentioned in Chapter 3 of this dissertation, patriarchal practices, beliefs, and systems are integral to the biblical womanhood model upon which evangelical Christian sexual purity efforts (including Dannah Gresh’s) are built. While Dannah Gresh did not retweet or repost any of Nicole Braddock Bromley’s critiques of “the patriarchy,” neither did Dannah Gresh publicly distance herself from or challenge Nicole Braddock Bromley.

Other times, Dannah Gresh affiliates with rebellious nonconformists by incorporating their content into her own. For example, during a Pure Freedom Master Class session in which attendees were presented with information about the concept of “inner healing prayer and deliverance” for those needing to “break ungodly soul ties” (which may exist as a result of rape, extramarital affairs, or even from reading *Fifty Shades of Grey*), Dannah Gresh explained the importance of “verbal forgiveness of any and all sexual partners and abusers” (D. Gresh, personal communication, June 16, 2018). To drive home the point of the importance of forgiveness, she played Nadia Bolz-Weber’s viral MAKERS series video entitled “Forgive Assholes.” During the two-minute video, Bolz-Weber encourages viewers to consider the power of forgiveness:

When someone else does us harm, we’re connected to that mistreatment like a chain...[Forgiveness is] not an act of niceness. It’s not being a doormat. It really, to me, is more bad-ass than that...If we’re not careful, we can actually absorb the worst of our enemy and on some level even start to become them...So what if forgiveness instead of being a pansy way of saying, “It’s okay” is actually a way of wielding bolt cutters and snapping the chain that links us? Like, it is saying, “What you did was so not okay that I

refuse to be connected to it anymore.” Forgiveness is about being a freedom fighter. And free people are dangerous people. Free people aren’t controlled by the past. Free people laugh more than others, free people see beauty where others do not, free people are not easily offended, free people are unafraid to speak truth to stupid, free people are not chained to resentment. That’s worth fighting for. (MAKERS, 2018)

As is demonstrated by the language in the title and within the quoted segment above, Bolz-Weber, a Lutheran pastor and public theologian, uses a shock-and-awe style to garner attention. Her display of her heavily tattooed body, frequent use of curse words, and employment of an acerbic speaking tone—all stand in stark contrast to the kind of woman Dannah Gresh and Pure Freedom Ministries encourage their target audience to aspire to be. And yet, the use of Bolz-Weber’s statements on the topic of forgiveness simultaneously undergirds Dannah Gresh’s teachings on the necessity of forgiveness (in order to heal from sexual trauma, including rape) and infuses Gresh with a certain level of raw, street cred that moderates her otherwise theologically conservative point.¹⁶

Another example of Dannah Gresh’s affiliation with boundary pushers by way of incorporating their content into her own is found in the musician Lauren Daigle. Both Dannah and Bob Gresh posted to Facebook promoting the music of Lauren Daigle at the exact point in time when numerous conservative Christian leaders were publicly reprimanding her (Daigle) for

¹⁶ It is also provocative for Dannah Gresh to use Bolz-Weber’s image and words to bolster her point since Bolz-Weber has long been public about her antipathy toward all manner of “purity codes” (e.g., Bowler, 2015). In fact, in February of 2018, Bolz-Weber announced her plans for her “vagina project”—an endeavor in which she teamed up with artist Nancy Anderson to melt down purity rings (mailed to Bolz-Weber by her social media followers) and then forge them into a metal sculpture of a vulva (Griswold, 2019). During the announcement of the “vagina project,” Bolz-Weber spoke directly to audience member and feminist icon Gloria Steinem, saying, “I thought I could give it to you, Gloria...as a thank you gift from us all” (MAKERS, 2018).

not taking a negative stance on the subject of same-sex marriage. In 2018, Daigle, a contemporary Christian music singer-songwriter, began experiencing growth in notoriety after performing live on *Ellen: The Ellen DeGeneres Show* in October and on Jimmy Fallon's *The Tonight Show* in November. Yet, she also experienced pushback from a number of conservative evangelical Christians for appearing on *Ellen* due to DeGeneres' identity as an openly lesbian married woman and LGBTQIA activist. Conservative scrutiny of Daigle intensified in December of 2018 during a radio interview on *The Domenick Nati Show* when she was asked whether she believed that homosexuality was a sin. Daigle responded that she wasn't sure:

I can't honestly answer on that. In a sense, I have too many people that I love that they are homosexual. I don't know. I actually had a conversation with someone last night about it. I can't say one way or the other. I'm not God. So when people ask questions like that, that's what my go to is. I just say read the Bible and find out for yourself. And when you find out let me know, because I'm learning too. (Warren, 2018)

After the interview was posted online, numerous conservative Christians responded saying Daigle had failed by choosing to "fraternize with the devil by not condemning homosexuality" and that she "could no longer be considered a Christian" (Merritt, 2018).

In the wake of Daigle's falling out with many in the conservative Christian community, both Dannah and Bob Gresh used social media to publicly articulate appreciation for her music. In a December 1, 2018, Facebook Live video post, Dannah Gresh tagged Lauren Daigle, saying, "Does your heart need rescued? Oh, you have just got to listen to Lauren Daigle's song, Rescue! And let me set it up for you!!!!" She continued, offering her followers a "biblical treatment" of the song (Gresh, D., 2018nn). Seven days later, on December 8, Bob Gresh posted on his Facebook page a YouTube link to the official audio video of the same song. As a preface to his

post, he typed these words:

When I'm going through some really down times (like the last few days)...and I don't feel like getting out of bed (like the last few days)...I turn this song up as loud as possible...and get out of bed. Wash. Rinse. Repeat. #NowPlaying P.S. Sometimes I have to listen to it twice. (Gresh, B., 2018)

While they do not publicly articulate support of Daigle's stance (or, as was problematic for many conservative Christians, her seeming lack of a stance), Dannah and Bob Gresh's public affiliation with Daigle during a time of scrutiny and criticism is certainly worthy of consideration when observing the various ways they attempt to curate moderation.

Conveying an attitude of sensible reasoning. A final way Dannah Gresh curates moderation is through her attempts to communicate that her content and practices are based on judicious, reasonable, rational choices. Doing so allows her to appear less rigidly conservative and more amenable to progressive, liberal ideas and concerns. For example, in several instances, she clearly conveys an attitude of sensible reasoning when she articulates a wariness of and a desire to distance herself from the Republican party. Several times throughout the Pure Freedom Master Class that I attended (from June 14-17, 2018), she mentioned with disdain "the leadership in Washington, D.C." (e.g., "Our kids need better role models; we need better role models," D. Gresh, personal communication, June 14, 2018), thereby distancing herself and her ministry from President Donald Trump. In addition, during our in-person interview, she conveyed disillusionment and frustration with the Republican party and with "Republican Christians." In fact, she indicated that she and Bob do not vote a straight party line:

When Greg [a guest speaker at the Pure Freedom Master Class] was talking today, he said "American Christian." I wanted to say, "Republican Christian." You know what I

mean? We're unaffiliated because we got so tired of people playing the Republican card against their Christian testimony. You know what? Sometimes, every now and then, we vote for democrat candidates. So, we are not affiliated. (D. Gresh, personal communication, June 15, 2018)

Another way she conveys an attitude of sensible reasoning is through acknowledging the complexity of issues and people. Both Dannah and Bob Gresh insisted that Pure Freedom Master Class attendees help their children and mentees seek out multiple sources of information when trying to understand current events. Several times Bob Gresh noted that in his role at Grace Prep High School he requires students to research issues from multiple and varied news sources: "They need to see how FOX News and MSNBC cover the same story. They need a fuller picture. They need to see that it isn't so simple" (B. Gresh, personal communication, June 15, 2018).

Dannah Gresh emphasizes the importance of recognizing complexity when she admonishes parents and mentors to encourage young people to ask hard questions. In an August 27, 2018, Facebook post, she pointed to the tendency of churches to not make space for hard questions as a reason for why young people are leaving the church in record numbers:

One of the reasons today's young adults are leaving the Church is because they feel marginalized when they ask questions and doubt. I think Jesus is not afraid of their questions, but the way we answer them often leaves a mark. A bad one. (You might call that a question mark.) I'm working on some teachings for teens on this topic and giving them freedom to ask the hard questions and present their doubts. What are some questions you see your teens, college aged students, or young adult children struggling with? I need to know to prepare my teaching. (Gresh, 2018cc)

In our personal conversation about the complexities of people and situations, Bob Gresh

noted to me, with some level of frustration, how those critiquing the purity movement seem unable or unwilling to understand the complexities involved in what he, Dannah, and others are trying to do: “People seem to only respond to caricatures and stereotypes. There’s not much room for [the complex].” To drive home his point, he quoted a line from the song “Wonderful” from the Broadway Musical *Wicked* and explained how the moderate stance he and Dannah take with their ministry is not a stance that is easy to finance:

I take the kids to *Wicked* as part of Grace Prep’s curriculum. Have you ever seen *Wicked*? The Wizard says, “There are precious few at ease with moral ambiguities. So we act as if they don’t exist.” They’re only a black or a white. They need a black or a white. They need a [Sean] Hannity or a Rachel Maddow. But people aren’t interested in anything in the middle. There’s no money in it. We aren’t on either side. And, you know, a lot of ministries can’t survive, because donors like the red meat. (B. Gresh, personal communication, June 15, 2018)

Over the course of my personal interview with Dannah and Bob Gresh (on June 15, 2018), their Secret Keeper Girl brand manager inserted herself into the conversation, articulating her belief that critics find it difficult to discuss and categorize Bob and Dannah’s efforts because their “reasonableness” makes them unsuitable for wholesale categorization with the purity movement:

I think something really interesting is that your whole thing is about the purity movement and so you’re like, “Oh, I want to interview people who are leaders in the purity movement and leaders in this...” And for me, knowing you guys and knowing everything...Before I came to work here, I would’ve lumped you guys in there also and been like, “Yeah, they’re one of them.” But now that I’ve been here, and [learned to]

know you guys, and gotten to know the ministry, and gotten to know what you actually think and believe and everything... There's a whole different category for you, I don't really know what it is yet... [But] people don't like that you're reasonable. Like, I think that anyone could sit down with you and come into it with all of these preconceived notions and think that they're going to leave feeling justified in the fact that they don't like you. And then they would say something to you and you would make them leave feeling so confused. Like, "Oh, wait, she's actually really cool." (C. Dunbar, personal communication, June 15, 2018)

This statement prompted Dannah and Bob Gresh to reminisce about how one of the most vocal critics of the purity movement they encountered attended a Secret Keeper Girl event and ended up dubbing it as "moderate" on the spectrum of purity events—or at least as not that bad.

Presented below is a brief transcript of their reminiscent conversation (in which I also participated):

Dannah: Dianna Anderson!

Bob: Dianna Anderson! She's the one that came to our Secret Keeper Girl show. And we were like, "Oh, this is gonna be..."

Christine: So, you knew she was coming?

Bob: Yeah, she told us she was coming. Then we were like, "Oh my goodness!"

Dannah: We'd sent an invitation to them.

Bob: It's online somewhere. She came and said, "I came there and was surrounded in painkillers and da da da da. And she did say something like... Well, she left before we did the modesty stuff, but she said, "You know, I have to say that..."

Dannah: "...as far as the modesty movement goes, this isn't the worst one."

As a means of further curating moderation by highlighting sensible reasoning, Bob reminded me of the story he recounted for me earlier in the day about how their ministry received criticism for naming a modesty assessment task "Grandpa's Mirror." He noted how they subsequently changed to their content as a result and how he considered the decision to be a prudent marketing tactic:

Dannah really works hard—I really work hard—to watch that our stuff is accurate. So you know, we want to not make mistakes. And I talked to you about the Jezebel.com [incident] where we changed the name of a modesty talk. And I'm like, "This would be really great if we could do this and let's take as much ammunition away from our detractors as we can," because we want to reach out and it seems to make good marketing sense to me. We don't want to offend anybody within reason. At the same time, there are things we stand for and people aren't gonna like it... (B. Gresh, personal communication, June 15, 2018)

A final way Dannah Gresh conveys an attitude of sensible reasoning is by positioning herself as invested in similar issues that are of concern to more progressive, liberal Christians. Of particular note is the inclusion of LGBTQ experiences within her content. In her interview with Joshua Harris, she conveys a spirit of sensible reasoning when she mentioned that she agrees with critics who told her she could not ignore this topic. Presented below is a brief transcript of a portion of their interview:

Joshua: When you think about questions about gender identity, the LGBTQ community. You—in your books, you talk openly about same-sex issues, girls that are wrestling with same-sex attraction and those types of things. Has

engagement with that topic changed your thinking about how you talk about purity or how you think about relationships? Because it's no longer, "Well, stay away from the boys." There is this recognition that all different kinds of expressions of brokenness and struggle and so on.

Dannah: I think, one thing is, you know, being able to talk more openly about those hurts and those needs—people struggling with same-sex attraction has been in part brought about by brave critics who've said, "Your ministry is incomplete if you're not talking about these things." And they're right. They were right. (Van Der Wyngaard & Russell-Jones, 2018)

As additional examples of Dannah Gresh's portrayal of sensible reasoning, at the Pure Freedom Master Class (which I attended in State College, Pennsylvania, from June 14-17, 2018), she invited Penn State English literature doctoral candidate, and published author, Gregory Coles to address the attendees on his experiences navigating his Christian faith and his proclaimed identity as a gay person. Further, at the True Woman '18 Conference, Dannah Gresh shared the mainstage with Jackie Hill-Perry, an African American spoken-word poet, writer, and hip-hop artist whose works focus on her formerly gay identity. Of course, as is apparent in these brief descriptions, Dannah Gresh's acknowledgement of the existence of these categories, identities, and experiences is where her connection to moderation ends, but for more conservative audiences, inclusion of such stories likely makes her appear more open and progressive, and for audiences that lean more open and progressive, her inclusion of these stories potentially makes her ministry appear more palatable.

Deviant cases: Curated contradictions in curated moderation. As is demonstrated above, Dannah Gresh curates moderation in three distinct ways: (1) by eschewing rules-based

legalism, (2) by affiliating with subversive mavericks, and (3) by conveying an attitude of sensible reason. While these moderating tactics appear within all of the data sets examined in this study, it is intriguing, though likely not surprising, to note that they are employed with greater frequency in settings that are private, that are limited in audience reach, and that are less likely to be circulated to a mass audience (e.g., in one-on-one conversations, during interviews, and at the Pure Freedom Master Class that I personally attended). On the one hand, it makes sense to reserve more complex discussions for more private spaces. On the other hand, it is compelling to consider why publicly articulated issues in books, speeches, and social media posts remain simpler, less flexible, and more politically and religiously conservative. Worthy of consideration, too, are categories of instances that arise in direct tension with Dannah Gresh's curated moderation, the most prevalent of which include: (1) repackaging legalistic concepts and (2) using caricature to depict adversaries. As stated in earlier accounts of "deviant cases: curated contradictions," while one may be tempted to dismiss deviant cases as insignificant aberrations, further investigation proves there is reason to scrutinize how Dannah Gresh's subversion of her own curated conventions (in this case, moderation) may serve strategic aims.

The first way Dannah Gresh subverts her own curated moderation is through acts of what appear to be a revamped vehicle for delivering legalistic ideals and rules. The revamp relies heavily on the Bible or on the term "biblical" to present a concept as true, trustworthy, or invested with God-mandated direction. Dannah Gresh frequently uses a cover of "biblical proof" to infuse her efforts with spiritual erudition, and by doing so, she is assisted in curating the notion that her efforts and teachings are good, right, and correct. This can be seen in an October 2, 2018, Facebook post, when she uses the term "biblical accuracy" to validate a time of healing prayer that she led for victims of sexual abuse who were in attendance at True Woman '18:

As a team, we felt it necessary to approach the topic of sexual abuse at Revive Our Hearts True Woman. Together with Mary Kassian and Jackie Hill Perry, we discussed it with biblical accuracy in an effort to create a safe place for women to heal. What a beautiful sight it was to see them reach out for the hand we offered. The altar was flooded, the prayer room was full, and women were ministering to each other in their seats. It was such a tender time! (Gresh, 2018ff)

In a July 23, 2018, Facebook post, she uses the term “biblical training” to explain the activities that attendees will experience at a Pure Freedom event in the Dominican Republic:

My first official *And the Bride Wore White* retreat for teen girls in the Dominican Republic. Thirty two teen girls will go through deep biblical training in sexual theology and practical encouragement to heal from moments of past impurity and to live a life of sexual integrity. Please pray for Marlene Luna as she leads this wonderful team of women including our intern Lisa Marie Yabra and team member Sara Luna! Your prayers matter!!! And, if you are one of my precious ministry partners, this is the fruit of your work! MUAH! (Gresh, 2018bb)

However, beyond employing the term “biblical” to validate her ministry efforts, Dannah Gresh also uses the term to invoke proper, correct, or right understanding of biblical sexual behavior. Because of her curated moderation, this could easily be overlooked, but as is evidenced in this emblematic Pure Freedom blog post from December 30, 2014, that was reposted to Facebook on June 11, 2018, and again on December 8, 2018, the use of moderation serves to cushion otherwise rigid expectations for “biblical” sexual behavior. This can be seen in the pairing of “biblical truths” with curatorially moderate assertions that “purity is a process” and that “purity is not synonymous with virginity and abstinence.” Consider the following excerpts:

Recently I opened my blog to moderate comments on a post titled “Was Mary A Virgin?” Suddenly, I was being accused of “slut-shaming” for using the word virgin. What!? It was the VIRGIN Mary who I was writing about! The comments—including “This is slut shaming... Wrapped up in a pretty package” and “Such dialogue and scrutiny over a woman’s virginity (aka ‘purity’) only feeds into patriarchal-based slut shaming”—were just the crest of a wave of frustration I’ve heard all year long as those following me lament that the language of sexual purity is out of style. The big claim? The word purity has no efficacy. So, let’s put it on trial today and see where we land because as a leader in the Christian sexual theology conversation, I want to know: do you think we should stop using the word purity? But here’s the deal. The debate—which I expect may get heated—must lean first and foremost on the truth of sexuality as defined in the Bible, not the opinions of men and woman [sic]. (Gresh, 2014d)

I believe it is a process. A direction. A constant pursuit of righteousness marked, sadly, by our humanity as we fall and get back up again and head in the right direction. It is not a state of our sexuality, but a state of our becoming something we once were not. Søren Kierkegaard wrote a book called *Purity of Heart Is to Will One Thing*. Purity is the consistent will to be what God desires us to become. This process of becoming is described beautifully in Philippians: Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose. Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, “children of God without fault in a warped and

crooked generation.” Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the word of life. (Philippians 2:12-16a) (Gresh, 2014d)

Virginity and abstinence are not synonyms for purity. A close synonym for purity might be holiness. But here are some words that are not synonymous with purity: Virginity. Abstinence. I know lots of virgins who are far from pure. And I know a lot of former sex addicts who are among the most beautifully pure that I know. Here’s the thing: as I look at the written discontent regarding the word purity, bloggers are beginning with a very faulty definition of the word purity. They are equating it to virginity and abstinence and nothing could be more fallacious. An argument built on a faulty foundation can’t be used as we put the word purity on trial. This faulty definition—not the word purity itself—is the cause of much hurt, unnecessary guilt, and misunderstanding. Abby S’s comment on one of my blogs demonstrates:

Regardless of my opinion on premarital sex...I think it’s important that we STOP using the word ‘pure’ to describe a virgin and this is why...For one, some (NOT ALL) women who have been raised on this mentality feel impure/dirty after having sex on their wedding night simply because they feel that they have somehow sinned, causing their “purity” to be stripped (and yes this does happen). Secondly, not all who wait are pure and in all honesty, none of us are pure (virgin or not) because of impure thoughts. Also, you’d be surprised as to how many “pure Christian teens” have found what they believe to be loopholes when it comes to God’s laws that they then use to justify sexual activity. Just because you aren’t a virgin it doesn’t mean that you are a bad person, that you’re going to hell,

or anything else you may have been lead to believe. God sees all sins as equal and last time I checked we were ALL sinners, which means that any punishment you deem fit to give to an individual who has decided to have sex... You have to give yourself. VIRGINITY DOES NOT EQUAL PURITY!!! There...my rant is over.

Dannah Gresh assesses the commenter's critique pointing to "the word of God" and "God's plan":

Her rant was good. It ended with truth, but in the middle was a lot of confusion that I believe is the fault of misunderstanding caused by misinformed but well-intentioned Christian bloggers who are usually holding one [ear] to the world's whims rather than studying deeply the word of God. The evangelical modesty and purity movement is not without its weaknesses and faults. I've publicly stated that before in "A Modest Proposal For My Critics" and "Believing in A Better Modesty Movement." But I also think there is more strength in the Christian teachings of sexuality than weaknesses and have enjoyed the opportunity to defend a conservative view of sexuality in places like FoxNews, CNN.com, and in my TED Talk. The science does the work for us. God's plan makes sense. But are we presenting it well? That's the question we need to answer and I need your help to do it? As I seek to grow by gaining your opinions here, let me honestly state that I think any lack of efficacy in the word purity is not the fault of the word, but the world. (Gresh, 2014d)

Another example in which Dannah Gresh employs moderation to cushion otherwise rigid expectations for "biblical" sexual behavior is found in a blog post from June 20, 2018, in which she says the reader has agency to "choose [their] own sexual ethic" within a clear "biblical" understanding of what that right choice should be:

When Paul wrote back to the churches, he didn't agree with either the mainstream or the religious view of sexuality. He presented his view that was based on the ancient truths of the Old Testament. There were two main things that Paul taught about sexuality. First, he taught that sex is a pure and holy act. In verses 16-17 he states, "Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, 'The two will become one flesh. But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him.'" Here, he draws on his Old Testament knowledge by referencing one of the very first verses in the Bible, Genesis 2:24. Paul understood that sex transcends the physical and involves the whole person. He understood Yada. Second, he taught that we are free to choose. Paul introduces the concept of freedom in verse 12: "All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful." This verse is sometimes confusing, but he's basically saying, "You can choose your own sexual ethic, but ask yourself this question: is this really good for me?" He also stated that it was okay to stay single, which was another radical thought for this time. The culture was centered on relationships and childbearing. Widows were expected to remarry within two years of their husband's passing, or they would be fined. Single women often became prostitutes. But Paul said to the church that singleness was an option. This was a big step in female empowerment at the time! Paul encouraged the church to approach sexual ethics with a hope and a future. Tim Keller puts it this way: when we approach the topic of sexuality, we have hope in three things: an ultimate family, an ultimate purpose, and an ultimate lover. (Gresh, 2018w)

A second way Dannah Gresh subverts her own curated moderation is through her use of caricature to depict adversaries and "lost souls." While they articulate concern for how their detractors use stereotyped, one-sided depictions of them and their ministry, Dannah and Bob

Gresh very much rely on the employment of caricature when discussing those whom they identify as misguided and problematic, those with whom they disagree, and those whom they consider to be living a life outside of “God’s best.” One such example emerged during our interview when a Pure Freedom Master Class session topic was revisited. Earlier in the day, Dannah presented on the tragic aims and outcomes of feminism and the Sexual Revolution. During this session, she showed emotionally evocative video clips in which Margaret Sanger and Alfred Kinsey were portrayed as sexually depraved, morally bankrupt, and responsible for upending America’s reign as “a conservative, Judeo-Christian nation” (Wiles, 2018).¹⁷ Resulting Master Class conversations about abortion, The Pill, and the Kinsey Scale (of sexual orientation) led attendees to express anger, disgust, and outrage as they mentioned the ways that Sanger and Kinsey had negatively impacted American culture. To her credit, during the Master Class discussion and during our personal interview, Dannah Gresh tempered these representations, saying, “Now, I only presented you with a snapshot of [Kinsey and Sanger]. They’re nuanced individuals...not everything they did was bad. It’s just that a lot of where they took us was” (D. Gresh, personal communication, June 15, 2018). Nonetheless, later Master Class conversations involving Kinsey and Sanger revealed that attendees continued to view them unidimensionally and in unequivocally negative light.

Another instance of the use of caricature to depict adversaries is found in the exchange about Dianna Anderson, which I documented earlier in this section. Recall that Bob indicated that I could locate Anderson’s piece online:

Bob: It’s online somewhere. She came and said, “I came there and was surrounded in painkillers and da da da da.” And she did say something like...Well, she

¹⁷ This claim, made in reference to Dr. Alfred Kinsey, was issued by Dr. Judith Reisman who was featured in a Conquer Series video segment shown at the Master Class.

left before we did the modesty stuff, but she said, “You know, I have to say that...

Dannah: As far as the modesty movement goes, this isn’t the worst one.”

The account to which Bob Gresh referred was a 2013 news piece published by *Rewire.News*. In the article, Anderson details her observations of a Secret Keeper Girl event that took place in her former hometown at her former home church.¹⁸ Though she was charitable and nuanced in her assessment of Dannah Gresh’s intentions (“the organizers want young girls to realize their worth and to affirm girls as they are”), Anderson did not hold back in critiquing the event for emphasizing classism, ableism, beauty/appearance, and for feeding “into the legacy of patriarchal rules and oppression” (Anderson, 2013). However, Anderson did not articulate anything close to, “As far as the modesty movement goes, this isn’t the worst one” (D. Gresh, personal communication, June 15, 2018), and in contrast to Bob Gresh’s memory that the article indicated she took pain killers as a recreational means of enduring the event, Anderson, in fact, wrote that she “took a Xanax shortly before attending the event” as a part of her regular and necessary treatment for “an ongoing anxiety and depressive disorder”—a mental health diagnosis that Anderson wrote she felt was diminished and minimized through the Secret Keeper Girl Tour’s repeated emphasis on ableist and disparaging employment of the word “crazy” (Anderson, 2013).

The use of caricature, or misrepresentation, also shone through in Pure Freedom Master Class sessions in which people who identify as LGBTQ were described inaccurately and reductively. In a session in which Dannah Gresh attempted to appear moderate by recounting an

¹⁸ Based on the content of Dannah and Bob Gresh’s account, I confirmed with Dianna Anderson that the piece to which they referred was an article entitled, “Secret Keeper Girl: An Inside Look at Evangelical Cognitive Dissonance” (D. E. Anderson, personal communication, March 18, 2019).

experience she had with “successfully” counseling a young woman who identified as non-binary, she simultaneously challenged and reinforced gendered norms as well as the caricature of what a lesbian “looks like” (i.e., not stereotypically feminine):

Peter Hubbard (2013) wrote *Love into Light: The Gospel, the Homosexual and the Church*. This book is phenomenal. Hubbard has reviewed nearly everything that has been written about this topic. His book says that love and light need to be infused in the conversation. He asks, “What if homosexuality isn’t a threat but an opportunity?” This helped me when I was working with a Christian girl who had acted out on her lesbian tendencies. She came to me and said, “I don’t want to do this, but I can’t stop...and I really just don’t want to be a girl.” We don’t really know why Christians struggle with same-sex attraction. We don’t need to try to make up what that is about. But this girl said, “I would really just like to know who I am: a girl, a boy, a transgender, a lesbian?” I told her, “We are image bearers—that’s who we are,” and then we prayed. I took her emotion of shame of being a girl—she dressed like a boy and hated being a girl—and I said, “Let’s let God’s spirit guide you to remember when you first felt that emotion.” She remembered something from kindergarten—that boys decided only the boys could play with blocks. She tried and tried, but the boys said, “You are a girl and can’t play with blocks.” Then she cried. You know, Christian stereotypes put girls in pink box and boys in blue box. This is unhealthy. There is a spectrum of gender—Eileen [Dannah Gresh’s office manager who was in attendance at the Pure Freedom Master Class] is a black belt and a hunter. So, God filled this girl with pictures. We didn’t tell her what was right or wrong. We didn’t tell her to stop having homosexual sex. But one week later, she came back, and she was wearing a dress. A few months later, she was wearing makeup. And,

then—she told me, “I bought a curling iron.” God gave her a desire to be a girl. She broke up with her girlfriend. She is not attracted to men; she is attracted to women, but she is living out her reflection of the image of God. (D. Gresh, personal communication, June 15, 2018)

Another example of the reductive depiction of people who identify as LGBTQ is located in a story told by a Pure Freedom employee at the Pure Freedom Master Class who, in the midst of describing his family’s ongoing struggle to come to terms with his sibling’s non-binary identity, demonstrates frustration with his inability to easily classify his sibling’s gender and sex:

My sister is a lesbian. When my family fell apart, my sister came out as a lesbian. I struggle with putting her/him at arm’s length. She/he told me she/he was getting married. We chose to go. It ended up being powerful in his life. He wrote me afterward and said, “I’m no longer a lesbian, I am a guy in a girl’s body.” I wrote back, “I love you.” He was upset and then we had to begin the conversation with our kids. At this point, two of our kids know and two think they’ve always had an uncle. I am not walking this well. We text and stay in touch. Neither of us really know how to handle this. We’re so fundamentally in disagreement and most everything goes to conflict in our lives. In honor of my brother, he has been gracious. He’s respected the conversations with our children. He told me he was going to be having chest surgery. It was awkward because he has a better chest than mine. Do we understand by the time my kids are in college they are going to ask the question what are you and what were you? I want to do a better job of lavishly loving my brother. He’s moving in with a new girlfriend. What do I say? Congratulations? It is very complicated. What does he do if he comes to Christ? (F. Bergstrom, personal communication, June 15, 2018)

To be fair, during our personal interview, Bob Gresh did offer me a front-row seat to his emerging thoughts about complexity as he grappled with Pure Freedom Master Class guest speaker Gregory Coles' insistence on using the term "gay" to describe himself rather than the label used frequently within evangelical circles to discuss LGBTQ relationships and people (i.e., "same-sex attracted"). Presented below is a brief transcript from our interview:

Bob: When he started speaking...I didn't like [that he was using] the word gay.

Dannah: [Bob didn't like that Greg] was using [gay] as an identifying term. He didn't like he was calling himself a gay Christian.

Bob: So, I wrote in my notes: "Is it same-sex attracted? Is it homosexual?" But then I noticed he didn't explain, and I was like, "Oh, okay. That doesn't make sense to me."

Dannah: I would still say, I'm really sensitive to people finding their identity in not something they do and orientation that they have, but God.

Bob: She doesn't like me saying, "Once an addict, always an addict." I identify myself as an addict...Sometimes I say, "addict in recovery," or whatever, but I'm like eh, I'm just gonna ignore the simple.

Dannah: But I also thought what [Greg] said was brilliant and I thought that in the academic setting that you're in—knowing the Penn State culture—I think it's probably better that you're offending Christians than non-Christians, I guess. I don't know, I'm going to mull over what he said. I really enjoyed him.

Despite Bob's private honesty and vulnerability in discussing his evolving understanding, what remains clear is that in the more public setting of the Pure Freedom Master Class, Dannah

Gresh, and those who represent her ministry, engage in discussions of LGBTQ matters in exceptionally partial, convoluted, and inaccurate ways. This is problematic when someone with such a large following is billed and looked to as an expert on matters of sexuality. When her presentations and discussions demonstrate limited knowledge or awareness of LGBTQ experiences and concerns, she does not simply participate in the erasure of the LGBTQ experience, she participates in its denial. Further, her clunky, clumsy approach to this topic allows her to lean on her curated imperfection as an excuse and to perpetuate the notion that non-heteronormative sexual attraction and non-binary expressions of sexuality are “behaviors” that are sinful, dysfunctional, wrong, and in need of correction.

Ample evidence indicates that Dannah Gresh clearly works to curate moderation. This is apparent in her attempts to include content related to hot-button issues and concerns of the times, as well as critiques launched directly toward the purity movement. In order to maintain her curated erudition, she must convince her audience of committed followers, and her detractors, that she is not blind or deaf to the critiques of purity efforts. Thus, at times, she attempts to situate herself in alignment with her critics by (1) eschewing rules-based legalism, (2) affiliating with subversive mavericks, and (3) conveying an attitude of sensible reason. And yet, as demonstrated above, she contradicts her own curated moderation by (1) repackaging the notion of legalism and (2) using caricature to depict her adversaries. Though at the outset Dannah Gresh’s simultaneous curation of moderation and maintenance of her conservative ideals and identity may seem to be at odds, her attempts to integrate both (despite, or perhaps because of, her clumsy and limited implementation) may actually assist her in reaching an audience segment that is slightly more progressive than her core group of followers and may assist her in exploiting her fourth and final curatorial strategy: curated deflection.

Curated deflection. The verb “deflect” suggests both figurative and literal movement away from something—a bending from an original position, or a turning aside or a swerving away from an originally set course (Deflect, 2019c; Harper, 2019c). To deflect something is “to deviate from an intended purpose” or to “cause (something) to change [its] orientation” (Deflect, 2019c). The Cambridge Dictionary (2019a) defines this transitive verb, whose root originates from the Latin *deflectere*, as a method of preventing “something from being directed at you.” The Collins English Dictionary (2019b) notes that “if you deflect something such as criticism or attention, you act in a way that prevents it from being directed toward you or [from] affecting you” and that “to deflect someone from a course of action means to make them decide not to continue with it by putting pressure on them or by offering them something [else that is] desirable.”

Maher and Chaddock (2009) define deflection as an ideal strategy for bouncing “action or responsibility away from oneself and toward another person, time, or place” (p. 28). Explaining how deflection operates as a strategic linguistic device, Cottrell (2017) asserts that “language can be used to lull [an] audience into a false sense of security about whether an argument is valid, or [to] divert the audience from the line of reasoning” (p. 98). Examples of such linguistic maneuvers that can be used to deflect an audience from engaging in critical evaluation include employing a straw man argument, creating an illusion of addressing or refuting an argument, and suggesting that an argument has already been proven (Cottrell, 2017).

Ware and Linkugel (1973) describe four “factors of verbal self-defense” that rhetors use to “reconcile a derogatory charge with a favorable view of [their] character”: (1) denial (a renunciation of “any participation in, relationship to, or positive sentiment toward whatever it is that repels the audience,” p. 275), (2) bolstering (“any rhetorical strategy which reinforces” an

affiliation with something the audience holds in a favorable light: a “fact, sentiment, object, or relationship,” p. 277), (3) differentiation (any rhetorical bid that attempts to separate “some fact, sentiment, object, or relationship from some larger context within which the audience presently views that attribute,” p. 278), and (4) transcendence (any attempt to “direct the audience’s attention “from the particulars of the charge at hand...toward some more abstract, general view” of the speaker’s reputation, p. 280). Anderson and Zanardi (2009) note that any strategic employment of deflective devices affords one the possibility of diminishing “the chance that [they will face] a viable opponent” or viable criticism (p. 30). Deflection, then, can be thought of as a kind of strategic verbal sleight of hand that focuses, or re-focuses, a conversation or topic.

While Dannah Gresh certainly deploys curated erudition, curated imperfection, and curated moderation as means of managing and holding critiques at bay (i.e., deflecting), she also marshals the rhetorical force of very specific deflective techniques when engaging with critiques of the sexual purity movement and of her role and actions therein. Dannah Gresh curates deflection in five significant ways: (1) by showcasing engagement with critics and critiques, (2) by shifting blame to purity movement adherents, (3) by dissociating from the purity movement at large, (4) by claiming certain issues are beyond her control, and (5) by emphasizing support for #MeToo activism.

Showcasing engagement with critics and critiques. One means by which Dannah Gresh curates deflection is located in her displays of engagement with critics and their critiques. On her more publicly visible platforms (e.g., in her blogs and on social media), she sometimes draws attention to her critics’ qualms and offers a response. One such instance is contained in the following segment from a piece she wrote for the Revive Our Hearts True Woman blog on April 7, 2015 (“Does Teaching Purity Contradict God’s Grace?”), and which she posted to Facebook

on December 13, 2018:

“I’m just not seeing the message of grace presented in these purity and modesty movements,” a woman recently wrote to me. “Why did Jesus die on the cross? We are righteous because of Jesus, not because of our works...I am all about...waiting to have sex until marriage and using common sense in dressing in a manner that is respectful to yourself and those around you. But these are conversations that play such a minor role in the fabric of our lives. The Gospel is about Jesus and God’s grace, it’s not about purity.” Her inquiry is deserving of consideration. Frankly, I was deeply troubled by it and wanted to right myself if [I’d] been wrong. My heart pondered this question: “Is the way I teach modesty and purity...in contradiction to the powerful grace of God?” After a lot of prayer and study, I have an answer...It is a great lie of the enemy of our souls and of God to believe that the conversation about modesty and purity plays a “minor role” in the fabric of our lives. It is one of the most major themes that exists. If marriage and sexuality are a picture of the greatest spiritual truth there is—that Christ came with grace—then how motivated do you think Satan is to see that picture destroyed in your life; in the lives of your children? He is motivated. Maybe you and I should speak MORE, not less about the call to modest and pure living, being careful to include the grace-filled stories that compel us to have a voice! (Gresh, 2015b)

Other times, she asks critics how she can do better. In a previously mentioned December 14, 2018, Facebook post, linked to a June 14, 2018, blog post titled “Your Brain on Sex,” Dannah Gresh shares “three myths about sexuality,” in which she asserts:

When you have sex, a cocktail of chemicals is released in your brain, and this is why things like casual sex or “friends with benefits” aren’t really possible...When it comes to

sex, it doesn't matter if it is with your husband/wife, or if you hooked up with a random guy/girl on Tinder. This dopamine rush can create an addiction to your partner that isn't easy to recover from...So what's the impact? Well, we find that casual sex isn't so casual. Your body makes a promise whether you do or not. (Gresh, 2018p)

A concerned follower initiates this exchange in which Dannah Gresh engages:

FB Follower: It's so imperative that with every post like this, we are also faithful to speak truth and healing and hope to sexual abuse and assault survivors.

Dannah: How would you have changed the blog/post? I'm open to your ideas. I think it is something I'm super sensitive to and it breaks my heart if/when I inadvertently cause hurt. The subject of sex has dozens and dozens of complex conversations such as abuse, assault, past sin/pain, gender confusion, sexual anorexia, etc. So, I often find myself at the end of a blog, book, podcast, etc with the feeling and awareness that I've not covered it all. But I wonder how to do that so that every single issue is met sufficiently. Supporting those who have been victims of sexual abuse and survival has been something that is very important to me. P.S. My team asked me to write a blog post on this...how does all this brain chemical stuff work in instances of rape, abuse, and assault. I'm energized to do some research. Watch for it soon.

FB Follower: Dannah Gresh—I am so glad that you will devote a separate blog to this. Thank you for recognizing the immense pain that sexual abuse and assault victims carry. Thank you for desiring to support them well. It certainly isn't something that can be comprehensively in every post, but the

“asterisk” is immensely important in every post. We can’t silo the conversation for abuse survivors. There are too many out there, and they may only read one post like this. When they read “when it comes to sex, it doesn’t matter if it is with your husband/wife or if you hooked up with a random guy/girl on Tinder” and what they hear is “When it comes to sex, you were sexual with your abuser and now you’re bonded to him (or her) whether you want to be or not.” The same is true of marriage posts and the “asterisk” when it comes to domestic violence / abuse. Most of us hear the asterisk even when it isn’t there, but those who need to hear it the most often miss it. For example, “Your body makes a promise whether you do or not.*” Then at the bottom of the page, maybe the * says something like, “This does not refer in any way to those who have experienced sexual assault or abuse. If you have experienced the pain of sexual assault or abuse, we want you to know that help is available. God is a healer, and it is never our desire to shame or remove hope from those who have experienced abuse. You can seek help through (list resources, e.g. RAINN).” Please do not recommend that someone talk to their pastor as most pastors do not have adequate training and more often than not add to a survivor’s pain. I’ll look forward to seeing your post. You might consider accessing and drawing from some of the materials that Boz Tchividjian has through his ministry addressing abuse: GRACE—Godly Response to Abuse in the Christian Environment.

Dannah: Thank you. Doing some research. The neurochemicals of sex act

differently within committed sexual relationships and non-committed. But they still create a glue. I am fascinated to research how they may act in the context of abuse. Thank you for this little nudge. I cannot be sure what I will find but am excited to learn and help advocate compassion.

During my personal interview with her (in June 2018), Dannah Gresh stated that she and Bob are always open to critique. Presented below is a brief transcript of part of our interview conversation:

Dannah: If you talk to, especially my younger team members, they...ask hard questions, and that keeps us honest, I guess. We've never really shied away from critique, have we? We've always kind of been like, "Could this be true? Are we doing this wrong? What needs to change?"

Christine: Could you give an example?

Bob: I have a perfect example for you here...So, Dannah used to tell a story about when we were at Cedarville [University] and I came to visit her. And she had an apartment, so I came in...it didn't take too long [until] we're making out, we're horizontal on the couch, and I was like, "I have to get away. We can't do this!" And I, kind of, keystone hopped off the couch and we fall down. Well, over the...twenty years of telling it, it became that...I pushed her. And Dannah sometimes can tell it—it's kind of a speaker's thing...I call it my twenty-turtle theory, where you see ten turtles walking around a road and you get this thinking, that somehow you wanna say that there's twenty turtles. You have to constantly rephrase what you're saying. So, she said, "Bob pushed me up against the wall."

- Dannah: Wait. I should say...I used hyperbole. So, it wasn't just what I said, but the way I said it was intended for humor, and...everybody laughed.
- Bob: So, I would sit there and be like...“That sounds worse than it was!” And they would laugh, because they got the context. But there were some people listening in on Grove City Podcast that weren't there and said she had suffered from dating abuse...
- Dannah: Well, I should say that [Bob] voiced his concerns to me before he knew there was concern from outside sources. He's like, “I don't think you can say that that way.” And I was like, “Okay, sure.” Not realizing that there were other people that felt that way.
- Bob: Because people would laugh in the context of things. And so...those three bloggers came out. One of them you would know, I can't remember her name, but she's in all of the negative things about purity culture...
- Dannah: Are you talking about Dianna Anderson?
- Bob: Yeah.
- Dannah: Miss Dianna Anderson and two others...bloggers—one of them I would prefer to remain confidential, anonymous. I remember her name. But I got on their blogs right away and responded and apologized for using hyperbole, but assured them that I had not been abused in any way, and asked if we could have a conversation on the phone. Two of them, right away, approved my comments on their blog and we had kind of a blog dialogue. One of them didn't, and I don't really remember which one didn't...And I had asked all three of them if we could talk on the phone,

and just said, “I’d like to learn from you. This is obviously a learning experience for me. I’d like to apologize to you personally. Yada, yada.” One of them took me up on the offer to talk. The conversation started out very offensive, but as I just apologized and said, “I shouldn’t have done that, that was wrong. You are right—that probably does trigger women. You are right—that’s the kind of conversation in the Christian culture that’s not safe for women.” That kind of thing. And then she just broke down and burst into tears and her sister had experience some sexual abuse as a young girl—probably a tween—if I remember correctly. Inside the church. And when it was brought to light, her sister was blamed for the way she was dressed. Which I would call that spiritual abuse, and so, we had a very productive, healing conversation...and, at least, I would classify it that way. And I think she would, too, because she basically said, “I have never had a Christian leader reach out to me when I voiced concern”...I think that was the saddest thing, for me, that she’s reached out to other leaders with critique and never had anybody ever reach back...There must be a point at which, you can’t respond to everything. I don’t respond to everything, but I kind of think there aren’t that many leaders out there that are so perfect that sometimes what is pointed out that they shouldn’t be apologizing for. And I think, in the #MeToo movement...I don’t know if I want to say names, but there’s a particular leader that was called out recently that...when he was called on some of his public statements, he should’ve apologized, and he didn’t. So now he

lost his position. He's lost everything now. And he didn't do, in terms of what we think as...like, he didn't abuse a woman, he just was involved in rhetoric that can make things unsafe for women and...You should apologize when you do that. (D. Gresh & B. Gresh, personal communication, June 15, 2018)

In her interview with Joshua Harris, Dannah Gresh uses the same example to demonstrate how she and Bob lean into, rather than shy away from, critique and criticism. Presented below is a brief transcript of a portion of their interview:

Joshua: So now I'm really asking [if] there is some way that I can go back and share how my own thinking has evolved and changed? And is that helpful to anybody? And what responsibility do I have for someone that's like, "I tried to follow this." And...you know...with good intentions...maybe some of them aren't even mad. They're just saying, "I really tried to follow what you said and it led to negative consequences in some ways..." So. Have you experienced that with any of your writing? Where people are saying—blaming you—for stuff?

Dannah: Of course. Of course.

Joshua: What do you do with that? How do you process that?

Dannah: Well, the big thing that my husband and I have kind of made a commitment to is we dialogue with the people that are at odds with what we've written or spoken.

Joshua: You reach out to them.

Dannah: Yeah! And that's time consuming. Sometimes it's led to some really neat

healing encounters. The person that was angry or hurt by what I taught or what I wrote had some really deep issues of hurt. And when I reached out—I remember this one time, I used hyperbole when I was speaking at a Christian university. And the hyperbole created some triggers in women who were—who had experienced abuse. Probably what I said wasn't important. I was trying to humorously tell a story about when Bob and I were dating. And in the blogosphere, I set off these ripples. The next day I wake up and there's this...

Joshua: Controversy and hurt.

Dannah: Yes. Right. And so I chased down every blogger. And I wrote comments on their blogs. And I asked for phone numbers. "Can we have a conversation?" I retracted the way I said it. I explained that what I said...I was trying to be funny and I realized that I wasn't funny, I was hurtful. And one woman, that did give me her phone number, said "Let's talk." We talked multiple times. She had a sister who had been sexually abused by a church leader. And she was maybe 11 or 12, as I remember the story, when she was abused and the church didn't handle it well. And what that little girl came to believe was, "It was my fault because I didn't dress modestly." So then you have Dannah Gresh showing up with modesty and purity teaching. Well, I'm gonna be salt in that wound. But when I picked up the phone and talked with her, we weren't 20 minutes into the conversation that she was in tears and she said, "Do you know that I have called other Christian leaders on the carpet—and she named them, names

that you would know if I said them right now—and they just ignored me and they pushed me aside. I can’t believe that you’re calling me.” Even that—just that phone call was the beginning of a healing for her. And you know what, I also learned from her. (Van Der Wyngaard & Russell-Jones, 2018)

By showcasing her engagement with critics and their critiques, Dannah Gresh is able to do several things. First, she is able to publicly demonstrate awareness that she is the target of criticism, which makes her appear as though she is in touch and mindful. This assists her with shoring up her reasonable and erudite persona. Second, she is able to create the sense that she values dialogue and opportunities to improve her content, thereby helping her maintain her curated imperfection. When she says she carefully considers and even alters her content, she further supports her curated moderation making herself and her messages appear flexible and malleable (in direct opposition to the common notion that evangelical sexual purity efforts are legalistic, restraining, and confining). And, finally, by publicly drawing attention to specific critiques, she is able to control the narrative, by maintaining some power over how those critiques are interpreted or defined.

Shifting blame to purity movement adherents. Another way that Dannah Gresh uses deflection to absolve herself and her ministry from culpability is by removing blame from herself and transferring it back to purity movement followers themselves. This deflective blame shift occurs when she indicates that readers were too zealous or exacting in their application of her resources (and the resources of others). For example, in the following exchange, she uses Joshua Harris’ experience to deflect responsibility for purity movement followers who rigidly employed his words and teachings and years later found this approach to be damaging. By curating

deflection with Harris' experience in this way, she absolves herself by association. Presented below is a brief transcript of another portion of their interview:

Joshua: I didn't have sex before marriage...but I did things I regretted. And then I wrote a book trying to help people avoid pain I experienced. You did, too...Some people are saying that, "I never experienced the mistakes [sexual sin], but I am experiencing a different problem because [of the book]. I was afraid and I...I put all these rules in place." Have you ever had that kind of experience when people have read your books?

Dannah: Well, sure, like they think that because their brokenness isn't the same brokenness I have, they can't understand why they're not okay. But I wrote that book...I have written every book I write with the expectancy that that woman [reading] is broken—that that girl is broken. We're all broken, we're just trying to figure our way back to being fixed. And here's the scary thing, when you read my story or your story and you try to fix your brokenness with the way that we fixed our stories, it's probably not going to work. That's why the book of Revelation says that "We overcome the enemy with the blood of the lamb and the word of our testimony." I think it is important to have a dialogue about our brokenness and say this is where I've been broken. I'm so thrilled that you wrote *I Kissed Dating Goodbye* because we got to hear Josh Harris' story. But when that story gets misconstrued and twisted and there are expectations placed on it, then I don't think you ever...did you mean to place some of the expectations that were placed?

Joshua: No, I don't think so. But when I go back through and I read the book I understand why the way that I argued for things would make a person feel [like] "I need to do it this way to get God's best."

Dannah: Okay, can I tell you my experience of reading *I Kissed Dating Goodbye*? I had a contract to write *And the Bride Wore White*. And I was so excited because nobody had written a book about sex and purity and dating since like Elizabeth Elliott. So, I was going to come out with this book and finally have a voice for the new generation, right? And then I started hearing about this guy—Josh Harris—and I was like, "Somebody beat me! And it's big." You were the buzz name. Everybody was talking. I remember sitting in my backyard by my pool reading this book and thinking, "I'm not reading what I've been hearing about this book." To me, I read it through a lens that had been through a lot of healing. So, I read the book and I said, "This is a great book." When some of what I was hearing was people jumping on what I would say were...legalistic bandwagons...And I was like, "I need to talk to this guy."

Joshua: We had a conversation back then? Wow!

Dannah: My big question was, "Is this what you intended?" And you absolutely were quick to say, "No...my intention wasn't to create this it-has-to-be-this-way mentality"...But when we take our brokenness and we try to filter it through some of the words—and I'm not saying that maybe you wouldn't have written some of the words differently. I have revised *And the Bride Wore White* multiple times and I think to myself, "I can't believe

I said it that way.” Because I’ve grown in my experience as I’ve worked with people. But I’m not so sure it was the fault of the book so much as it was the fault of this runaway train of thinking. (Van Der Wyngaard & Russell-Jones, 2018)

Later in that same interview, Joshua Harris asks Dannah Gresh for her take on critiques of purity culture and its inability to deliver on promises. In her response, Dannah Gresh attempts to deflect responsibility by minimizing the extent of her role in the sending of problematic messages and by claiming that she has been careful to clarify that “it is not about not having sex; it’s about waiting.” Presented below are additional comments from their interview:

Joshua: It seems to me that people who are talking about purity culture—and my only engagement with that term is coming from people who are critiquing an evangelical perspective on sexuality—they seem to be describing this environment where—and we would critique it as well I think, to a certain extent—where your value is tied to your virginity. If you’re not, you know, pure, in that sense, then you have less worth, you feel degraded—all those types of things.

Dannah: Uh huh. Damaged goods.

Joshua: Damaged, or even just have this like warped view of sexuality, have trouble embracing sex as a good gift. Even though people say, “Sex is good in marriage.” But they have this fear...

Dannah: Well, absolutely. I mean that’s one of the things I’m grappling with right now—is girls who grew up reading my books write to me and say...

Joshua: “I’m having trouble in my marriage”?

Dannah: “I’m having trouble saying ‘yes.’ You told me to say ‘no,’ so how do I say ‘yes’?” I’m not sure that’s my fault. Um. Maybe I have contributed to them hearing so many messages in their brokenness. But I’ve been much more careful to change the nuances of how I communicate to be like, “It’s not about not having sex, it’s about waiting.” And when you’re married, it should be phenomenal fun. Like, this is a beautiful gift. (Van Der Wyngaard & Russell-Jones, 2018)

During our personal interview (at the Pure Freedom Master Class in June of 2018), Bob Gresh curates deflection by shifting blame to adherents when he recounts observing Dannah in the moment when she was answering Joshua Harris’ questions for the *I Survived I Kissed Dating Goodbye* interview:

[Joshua] said, “Dannah, do you think people were hurt or were upset by your book?” And I was like, “What is she gonna say to this?” And she’s like, “Of course, people were. It’s very simple. Of course, people say they were hurt. It’s my story and this is my thought on the matter. It’s my thought. I’m not forcing you to think the same way.”

Bob Gresh further engages in deflection by way of shifting blame to adherents when he points to the powerful influence of celebrity status:

Josh Harris was at our house, doing this documentary. And they’re just like on sort of an apology tour because people were hurt by his book. He sold millions of books—and yes, there were people that...I mean, I’m sorry, but it’s a book. If you read a book and you think you have to do exactly what that guy said every day, it’s like—wow. Something went wrong. But what goes wrong is celebrity. It’s celebrity. They idolized him, or they idolized Dannah, or whoever...That’s why one of the first things we talk about is that

people at the podium—they are no better than you are. So, people get hurt by these books or whatever. And there’s more going on than somebody being devastated by a book. You know? And so, I do think there is a swing back against purity itself, against the word, against everything—by people who’ve been hurt, by the movement. And I think it would be easy to give up and say, “We’re going to go into other things; we’re going into things that are less controversial.” (B. Gresh, personal communication, June 15, 2018)

In the examples above, Dannah and Bob Gresh shirk responsibility by faulting their readers’ interpretive prowess and by indicating that those readers should have read their texts according to how they, the authors, intended for them to be read. This employment of the “intentional fallacy” (Wimsatt & Beardsley, 1946), expecting that “an author’s actual intentions should constrain the ways in which it is appropriate to interpret” a work (Huddleston, 2012), guides Dannah and Bob Gresh’s curated deflection as they articulate that readers should somehow intuit their original or underlying intentions rather than understand, interpret, and live out what they actually wrote. When Dannah Gresh essentially asks Joshua Harris, “Did you mean for these people to interpret your words in this way and to get hurt?” and when Bob Gresh says, “If you read a book and you think you have to do exactly what that guy said every day,” they absolve Joshua Harris and Dannah Gresh of responsibility for their roles in readers’ misguided application of purity practices. To say, “This is my story, not yours; what is right for me may not be right for you” may be a curatorially moderate thing to say, but it deflects attention away from the fact that self-help texts, especially Christian self-help texts, are notorious for claiming to provide the right answers for how to live. To reframe a text based on authorial intention deflects attention away from the fact that purity movement leaders (Dannah Gresh at least) often claim to have a direct line to the truth for the purpose of fruitful living.

Dissociating from the purity movement at large. Another curatorially deflective tactic in which Dannah Gresh engages is the act of dissociating herself from the purity movement as a whole. She differentiates herself from the broader purity movement primarily by critiquing practices she purports to find offensive or unhelpful. Interestingly, her critiques mirror some of those that are issued by staunch critics of the purity movement. For instance, on the second day of the Pure Freedom Master Class (which I attended in State College, Pennsylvania, from June 14-17, 2018), she noted the Silver Ring Thing's use of pledge card signing and ring-wearing ceremonies and she indicated that she finds little value in these types of purity movement practices. In fact, she referred to the limited long-term efficacy of "purity decisions," stating, "Research tells us that if a student makes a decision for purity, it delays sex by 18 months—not necessarily until their wedding night" (D. Gresh, personal communication, July 15, 2018). She then pivoted to describe a different, unnamed, purity organization that also engages in practices she does not condone:

So, this organization sold a t-shirt. I probably wouldn't have sold it. The t-shirt said: "Don't drink and park. Accidents cause kids." What I don't appreciate about this message is that it is saying that kids are accidents, kids are bad, you shouldn't have sex because it causes kids. It trivializes the act of sex by making it into a barroom joke. I wouldn't have sold it. That t-shirt is so unaffirming of life. We teach modesty at our events. You shouldn't sell "Modest is Hottest" t-shirts. I have no desire to do that. The Christian community is guilty of putting so many contradictory messages out there. We have to be careful with our messages and make sure they are consistent. It isn't just the culture that is saying these things; Christians do it, too. (D. Gresh, personal communication, June 15, 2018)

In her interview for the *I Survived I Kissed Dating Goodbye* documentary, she distances herself from father-daughter purity balls and their commonly employed object lessons. Dannah Gresh explains her ideas to Joshua Harris, as follows:

Do you know one of the things that I really hate? I'm gonna tell you. I'm gonna offend someone...I have spoken at some purity balls. These are special events where girls dress up, they come with their dads. The ones that I have spoken at were not...I had a lot of questions before I went to speak at them. I felt comfortable there. I thought these [particular purity balls] were good. But I've also heard [of] these purity proms where girls are given a rose with all the petals ripped off and they're like, "If you don't have your virginity to give on your wedding night, you're like this rose without petals"...Does that sound stupid to you? Does that sound hurtful to you? Or the whole chewing up gum and like, "Here, you chew it, you chew it, you chew it. Now, spit it out. Who wants this?" Christians have been kind of stupid in the way they have presented some of the biblical teachings on modesty and purity. I don't think Jesus would have done the gum trick. You know? (Van Der Wyngaard & Russell-Jones, 2018)

Similarly, in her April 2013 *Christianity Today* guest blog post (which is linked to in a Pure Freedom blog post she placed on her Facebook wall twice during 2018), Dannah Gresh distances herself from aspects of the purity movement that she believes are too rigid in their prescriptions for women's attire:

In some Christian settings, women might as well wear burqas. (It should also be noted that I often see Muslim women who find a way to honor their faith in adorably modest attire that is not repressive.) In those settings where the female body is hidden in shame, men seem uncomfortable. I do not find this same sense of discomfort in environments

where women demonstrate a healthy expression of their feminine beauty. (Gresh, 2013d)

In this same piece, she sets herself apart from a segment of the purity movement that she labels as “shallow”:

The shallow end of the purity and modesty movement often offers a girl the false promise of a guy in exchange for her purity ring or modest attire. We have convinced girls they can make a deal with God: a purity pledge now and a wedding ring later. Purity is not something you use to bargain with God. It is something you do to obey him. When you put the focus on God and respect for the inner qualities of worth he has planted in each of us, the outside stuff—our beauty and power of allure—isn’t that big a deal and is easily brought under the control of our inner character. (Gresh, 2013d)

Over the course of our personal interview at the Pure Freedom Master Class (in June of 2018), she also distanced herself from the purity movement, indicating that her approach of sharing her moral failure narrative (i.e., curated imperfection) put her at odds with the purity movement from the start. Presented below are a few examples from brief transcripts of our personal interview conversation:

Dannah: Would I separate myself from the purity movement?

Christine: At times, it seems you do, which is why I ask.

Dannah: There’s been a lot of stuff about the purity movement that offends me. The first thing would be that people didn’t have the right to say that they’ve messed up, so I went first. I’m like...“Everybody’s signing purity pledges and saying I’m the driven snow!” But that wasn’t my story and...by then, I knew it wasn’t the story of everybody else. And I was like, “Let’s not create this unrealistic”...I guess Bob and I operate under the premise that

people are all gonna mess up. They're gonna need grace. And I know there must be some people out there who have these incredibly unstained sexual histories by God's grace. I mean, I kind of know a couple of them and I believe they are, truly by God's grace, just sheltered and pure. Both of them full of grace. But, they are so few and far between...So, I never intended to be in the movement, I think my first step was kind of a backlash against the movement. So, I was a little surprised that I got embraced and accepted...I just wanted to tell my story. You realize in the year 2000 this is not at all a cool thing to say: "I've been sexually active!"...So, I guess I've never really felt like I've been a part of the movement.

Bob: I think, like I said yesterday, Dannah's helped shift the movement from a pre-marital sex slashed and ruined...[mentality]. I think Dannah shifted that by saying, "Hey, you don't really cross a line and then can't get back over. That's a constant process." I always say, "You know, when we got married Dannah wasn't a virgin, but she was pure. And I was a virgin and wasn't pure." So...I think Dannah helped define that concept, because that would've been a very foreign concept back at that time. Because I didn't have intercourse, but I was viewing pornography and she was kind of the opposite. I think she did a good job of re-defining that. Otherwise, it was just...[a message of]: "You cross the line and...[you] never get back"...We think the biblical version of that is grace.

Bob: The other thing that was being used a lot back then was either a piece of chewing gum going around a circle or a paper heart that they would rip out a piece of it and that was what was left...

Dannah: Or the trampled rose.

Bob: Yeah, and that's kind of... We didn't come from that.

Dannah: Like, I *am* the "trampled rose," so, let's not use that object lesson. I don't like it. There have been a lot of hurtful object lessons, I think, that I'm trying to distance myself from.

And, yet, in the next sentence, she acknowledged that despite her attempt to define herself over and against the purity movement, she is reluctantly a part of it:

Dannah: I don't know that you can have a voice, though, and unfortunately, I don't think you can be separated from the movement if your message looks similar enough, but I never saw it to be a part of the purity movement. It just kind of happened.

Thus, she attempts to differentiate herself by claiming that her focus is not so much on sexual purity as it is on sexual healing and sexual freedom:

Dannah: I'll tell you what is more important to me than the purity, is the freedom. I think the way I categorize myself is that I'm part of the freedom and healing movement... It's a tragedy that the movement didn't, from the beginning, pursue methods of healing. We're missing the boat. We're missing the boat. Jesus didn't judge the woman at the well, he wasn't afraid to talk about her sin. Obviously. Like, he brought it up, but he healed her. He didn't tell her to stop sinning; he healed her. And I think

that’s the model we see in the scriptures—is more of a healing, grace-fueled conversation. The name of my ministry is “Pure Freedom,” but I really think what’s been ultimately important to me is the freedom. I think purity is a piece of that. I think that living a pure lifestyle gives you freedom, but the freedom is what matters to me. (D. Gresh, personal communication, June 15, 2018)

By describing herself in opposition to practices and messages commonly associated with the purity movement, Dannah Gresh curatorially deflects attention away from her prominent leadership role within it.

Claiming certain issues are beyond her control. Another deflective technique Dannah Gresh uses to maneuver around and through critiques and criticism is a reliance on the defense that certain issues or circumstances are out of her control. In more private settings, her candor increases regarding what she means when she says, “I think the root of any critique is that God’s rules are outdated” (D. Gresh, personal communication, June 15, 2018). Bob Gresh expounds on this “it’s-not-our-fault-it’s-God’s” notion when he claims that critiquing purity culture has become “very popular”:

It’s become very popular and cool to come after purity culture...I believe that there is a pendulum swing against modesty because it’s [been employed] so legalistically...And some people are like, “We are so hurt by modesty—it shamed our bodies, it did all these things.” And so now it’s like, the word “modesty” is bad, the word “abstinence” is bad. And, so, modesty and purity culture and everything—it’s horrendous and it hurts everybody. And it’s not moderate on either side. So, it’s like, “Let’s do away with purity culture.” And I’m kind of like...that’s a weird thing to say, that we don’t like the word

“purity” anymore. And finally, we’re kind of like, it doesn’t really matter if you like the word “purity” or not, that’s what’s in the Bible. (B. Gresh, personal communication, June 15, 2018)

This deflection via deference to God and God’s word is applied to issues related to gender and sexuality, too. At the Pure Freedom Master Class, Dannah Gresh began a lecture indicating that a binary view of gender is one of the ways “we know God more fully,” because “gender reflects his image”:

It is God-like that we can procreate. It is God-like that we are male and female. Our maleness and femaleness is God-like. To be joined three-in-one is how we look like the trinity, like God. This gets hard. Here’s where things get hard. I want to say transgenderism and gender fluidity don’t matter. They just need to be loved. Who wants to show people Bible verses that make people feel rejected? Not me! But the primary reason that same-sex sex, transgenderism, and cross dressing, and gender fluidity are wrong is because they are a rebellious refusal to look like God.¹⁹ (D. Gresh, personal communication, June 15, 2018)

Claiming that certain things are beyond their control is also how Dannah and Bob Gresh navigate the critique that the purity movement is racist. Presented below is a brief transcript of part of our interview conversation:

Bob: Our audience is very white...

Christine: Well, I was going to ask about the critiques about the purity movement being racist or having racist...

¹⁹ This example confirms the assertion of anthropologist Sophie Bjork-James (2018), who explains that “Evangelical rejection of LGBT individuals and practices...is rooted not simply in prejudice, [but also in] a culturally specific notion of personhood and a set of beliefs about how Christian bodies should orient themselves to the divine” (p. 648).

Bob: Well, that's part of our story actually...In fact, this Master Class started as an outreach to Brooklyn. After the show [at Brooklyn Tabernacle], we said, "We wanna train thirty...of your women. So, can you pick—we'll pay for thirty women to come to State College"...The first time, a bunch of them came.

Dannah: Yeah, thirty plus. So, two of the leaders came to the first Master Class. And then we went there in August and did a day of the Master Class and offered them to come take the whole thing here. And only one of the women was here...Nobody said why. We reached out to them multiple times...

Bob: We've always been very concerned about the diversity on the stage.

Dannah: We've had a diverse cast of Secret Keeper Girl for the past—I'd say five years. I've been seeking a diverse cast from before that. It's difficult. I've even reached out to women of color in leadership. Prominent names that you would know, and said, "I would love to disciple women of color. I would love to have women of color on the platform for the sake of them representing little girls in the audience." And it's been hard. I can't change that I'm white...I can recruit people to the team that are diverse. (D. Gresh & B. Gresh, personal communication, June 15, 2018)

Emphasizing support for #MeToo activism. A final, and perhaps most cunning, way that Dannah Gresh curates deflection is by drawing attention to her support for #MeToo-related activism. Take, for instance, how she frames the movement as positive and necessary on occasions when she is sought out to serve in the role of an advisor on the subject of #MeToo. In

an October 17, 2017, Facebook post (just two days after the #MeToo hashtag was first used), she praises a Moody Bible radio program for inviting her to talk about #MeToo:

A big hats off to Moody Radio's The Morning Wake Up Call for talking with me live this am about #MeToo! I have been thinking, Jesus would have been the first to defend these women. He drew a line in the sand in front of a woman who was about to be stoned. He talked with a woman at a well whom no one else would. His regard for women was always respectful and protective. Christians should be the first to the conversation. And I was so proud of this conversation! So proud!!!!

Similarly, during a February 8, 2018, segment on Revive Our Hearts Radio titled "The Truth about Sexuality," when the host asks her, "How can we help our teenage young women process this [#MeToo] cultural phenomenon?" Dannah Gresh acknowledges that there is a crisis in need of attention:

Our daughters are growing up in a world where male strength is distorted—greatly.

Sadly, this makes them very vulnerable. I see a lot of people speaking out against the men who have victimized us. It's a collective voice now; it's women. All of us are saying that men have not treated us well. There is a crisis. We definitely have something we need to address in our culture. (Basham, 2018b)

In a May 23, 2018, Facebook post (which she also tweeted on the same day), Dannah Gresh lauds Albert Mohler (president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary) for making a public statement earlier that day about the sex abuse scandals that were just beginning to come to light within the Southern Baptist Convention. Linking to a post on ALBERTMOHLER.COM entitled, "The Wrath of God Poured Out—The Humiliation of the Southern Baptist Convention: Cultural Commentary from a Biblical Perspective," Dannah Gresh asks her followers:

Do you think God is purifying His Church? I'm thankful for men like Albert Mohler who has the guts to speak truth in hard circumstances. #MeToomovement has given voices courage to speak up, and given leaders backbone to do the right thing when they do. (Gresh, 2018l, 2018m)

During our personal interview (at the Pure Freedom Master Class in June of 2018), Dannah Gresh positively framed the #MeToo movement when she explained that it has prompted her and Bob to ask themselves if they are handling situations “well,” specifically in terms of “protecting” women:

And one thing that we've done that the MeToo has caused us to sit down—not just him and I together, but also with our pastor just a few weeks ago, and say, “Did we handle this situation well? Did we handle that situation well? Were we quick to be protective?” And I think that's good every time you are forced to re-evaluate, “How have I done things and am I doing them well and will I continue doing them well?” That's good. We shouldn't be afraid of that, right? (D. Gresh, personal communication, June 15, 2018)

Careful surveillance of the data set reveals that my “consequential presence” (Clarke, 1975, p. 99) at, and involvement with, the Pure Freedom Master Class directly impacted Dannah Gresh's #MeToo-focused data production at that particular point in time. Indeed, after she learned more about my research topic through our side conversations and through our interview, she engaged in a several-days-long spate of social media activity, curatorially emphasizing her support for #MeToo-related activism by pairing the hashtag with references to Nicole Braddock Bromley (mentioned earlier in “curated moderation”), whose ministry (OneVOICE) focuses on building awareness with young adult populations about the prevalence of childhood sexual

abuse, sexual assault, and sex trafficking.²⁰

The first post, tagging Braddock Bromley and linking to her website, came on June 17, 2018, just hours after I left the Gresh Farm following the final session of the Pure Freedom Master Class event. The post even mentioned me by name:

This week is gonna be Nicole Braddock Bromley, ONEVOICE week on my social media. This weekend God used a new friend (Christine) to ask me: how are you using your influence to get those concerned about sexual theology to biblically and lovingly support the movement of women finding the courage to tell their story of sexual abuse or assault? Nicole was telling her story when no one else was! And she has been so faithful to stay the course. I have used her to help me unlock the hearts of abused women, and to raise awareness on a community God has assigned to me. She is a passionate and effective communicator. How is your church, school, or community preparing to help the abused and invite them out of hiding? Why not bring Nicole in to help? (Gresh, 2018t)

Nicole Braddock Bromley responded to the post, and Dannah Gresh clarified that, in fact, I did not actually pose the question she initially attributed to me!

Nicole Braddock Bromley: Aww, wow! Thank you, friend! You're a true gem,
Dannah. And fantastic question, Christine!

Dannah Gresh: To be clear, the Holy Spirit asked the question! Christine is just being faithful to investigate the situation. She didn't ask this directly but I am so thankful for our dialogue that

²⁰ Nicole Braddock Bromley has engaged in overseas ministry efforts with Dannah Gresh in Jarabacoa, Dominican Republic, and she wrote a piece ("A Special Letter on Sexual Abuse") for abuse survivors in Dannah Gresh's 2012 update of *And the Bride Wore White: Seven Secrets to Sexual Purity*.

prompted this thought in my quiet time with the Lord!

Blessings on your work!

That same day, Dannah Gresh tweeted about Braddock Bromley and the following exchange unfolded:

@dannahgresh: @Nicole_Bromley For a long time you were #OneVoice but I see God using #MeToo to create a choir to sing songs of healing!

@Nicole_Bromley: Yes! Just as I wrote in *Hush*, together our voices can become OneVOICE penetrating the darkness to expose sexual violence and set captives free.

@dannahgresh: For such a time as this, girlfriend!!!! You are prayed for so hard from a little farm in PA!!!

@Nicole_Bromley: That means sooooo much to me! And I want to bring my boys to your little farm someday!

@dannahgresh: You must come!

One day later, on June 18, 2018, Dannah Gresh issued a second Facebook post with a link to Nicole Braddock Bromley's OneVOICE podcast site where Braddock Bromley details numerous topics including how to spot a predator, how to support survivors of sexual abuse, and how to make church a safer place:

Greater understanding of sexual abuse will make you wiser to the risk and also a safe person to be a part of the solution to a wide spread problem. Nicole Braddock Bromley, ONEVOICE podcast features information like how to profile a predator, that impact an

abuse survivor's thoughts and feelings, and how to make your church a safe place.

<http://www.iamonevoice.podbean.com> (Gresh, 2018u)

Dannah Gresh made a third Facebook post on June 19, 2018, and included yet another link to Braddock Bromley, this time to a FamilyLife Today feature (Rainey, 2016) detailing the story of how Braddock Bromley began the process of finding help to address the sexual abuse she experienced at the hands of her step-father for over ten years:

She was sexually abused by her step father. When she finally told someone, the unthinkable happened and she spiraled her [sic] into an even deeper silence. Once you hear her story, you will understand why she has devoted her life to giving women courage to tell their stories of abuse. Nicole Braddock Bromley, ONEVOICE (Gresh, 2018v)

A follower indicated their happiness with this promotion of Nicole Braddock Bromley and Dannah Gresh indicated that the relationship between the two of them has been a long-term relationship:

Follower Comment: Nicole is wonderful. Glad you 2 are getting together.

Dannah Kay [Gresh]: I have adored her for a long time!!!

At the time of this writing (April 2019), Dannah Gresh has not posted anything about Nicole Braddock Bromley on Facebook since her June 19, 2018, post about the FamilyLife Today feature. In fact, their last publicly visible exchange on social media was a December 4, 2018, Twitter conversation in which Dannah Gresh solicited information about treatments for dry, cracked hands (Gresh, 2018oo).

A final example of Dannah Gresh's curatorially deflective support for #MeToo activism can be seen in a mainstage panel session at the True Woman '18 conference. The session

(“Gender Issues and Sexual Abuse”), held on September 28, 2018 (just one day after the Kavanaugh hearing interviews and the day that the United States Senate Committee on the Judiciary voted to send Brett Kavanaugh’s nomination to the floor), focused on “unpacking” the subject of sexual abuse in the culture and featured Mary Kassian and Jackie Hill-Perry (with Dannah Gresh serving as moderator). As the mainstage conversation unfolded, Bob Lepine²¹ was invited to the stage to read aloud his “Open Letter to #WhyIDidntReport”²²:

Dannah: We could talk about a lot of things, but probably one of the most here-and-now topics is the issue of sexual abuse and the cultural conversation.

Mary, how is your heart feeling about that topic right now?

Mary: You know, just even watching the play, the skit, that preceded Jackie’s talk. Wasn’t that heart wrenching? Just, heart wrenching to see that acted out in front of us. Just, the disrespect, the abusiveness—verbally and physically and sexual threats. And that is such a real issue in our culture today. And a lot of the discussions that are going on have stirred up, I think, for a lot of women in their hearts—this whole issue of sexual abuse. And I think we need to talk about it. Because there are many women in this room that have experienced sexual abuse.

²¹ Bob Lepine is a senior vice president at FamilyLife and a co-host of the nationally syndicated FamilyLife Today radio broadcast. He serves on the advisory board for Nancy DeMoss Wolgemuth’s Revive Our Hearts Ministries, the home of the True Woman Movement.

²² The hashtag #WhyIDidntReport surfaced as a #MeToo-related initiative when Dr. Christine Blasey Ford came forward as the letter writer accusing Judge Brett Kavanaugh (President Trump’s Supreme Court nominee) of sexual assault. When President Trump tweeted, asking why Blasey Ford waited so long to say something, abuse survivors used #WhyIDidntReport to “highlight the difficulties, fear, anger and shame that so often surround sexual harassment and assault” (Fortin, 2018).

Dannah: Can we just break it down and define it? What is sexual abuse? Because it's not just children who are sexually abused. It's not always an adult woman who's been raped. It's broader than that. So, what does it include?

Mary: Sexual abuse can be verbal, it can be physical, it can be psychological. Sexual abuse can occur whenever there is a power and abusive relationship in terms of just pressures.

Dannah: Jackie, how deep are the ramifications of sexual abuse? You are a survivor of sexual abuse. You have broken the silence for other women. Does that still affect you today?

Jackie: I think so. I think there will be remnants maybe forever, but I do see continual healing. I am not affected by it in the same ways that I used to be. And so, for that I am grateful. It is something that happens to the psyche of a person when a person in a position of power—that you believe is supposed to keep you safe—harms you in that way. It shapes how you see everything. It colors how you see everything. And so I think the ramifications are huge. That's why I am so thankful for therapy. That's why I mentioned it earlier. Because for too long, we have said, "Just go to church. Just go to church." It's like, we need church and we need counselors. We need people to help us walk through these things in healthy ways.

Mary: And God has gifted different people in the body to serve us in those ways. I think some of the biggest issues with survivors of sexual abuse or victims of sexual abuse is keeping it in the dark. Is not wanting to talk

about it. But when it is hidden and kept in the dark, it has such power over you...And when you bring it out into the light—and God wants to heal you of the shame of it, because some women feel so shameful. Some women feel, “It was my fault or I did something that provoked this.”

Dannah: Those are lies.

Mary: Those are lies. Satan wants to keep you in bondage through those lies, through guilt, through shame—telling you to keep it in the darkness. So, if that is you, what you need to do, first step, is to bring it out into the light and tell someone.

Dannah: You know, as I was watching my Twitter feed last night, many women right now are triggered by events happening in our country and by the women that are breaking the silence. And one of the things I saw was women saying last night, “Why aren’t men tweeting about this?” “Why aren’t men talking about this?” And, this week, Mary, we got an email from a man who cares deeply about this issue. And I wanted to bring him into the conversation. So, Bob Lepine, would you join us? Bob sent us an email. His heart was broken by what he was seeing from a pastor’s heart, from a godly man’s heart. You wrote something and I want to know why.

Bob: Well, first of all, this conversation is such an important one. And I know that all week long—and even Jackie as you mentioned it this morning—just the word “abuse” and “abuser”—there are some women who get [a] knot in their stomach when they hear the word, because this has been so...This is a scar that is so profound on the soul of any human being—to

be sexually abused. This is like no other kind of abuse, and to your point, it does stay with a woman for a long time. And last week, I woke up on Saturday and I was going through my Twitter feed and there was a tweet from Beth Moore.²³ And all it said was, “Because he lived in my house #WhyIDidntReport.” It took me a minute to catch on to what she was saying, but I followed that hashtag and saw thousands of women who were explaining why they had never spoken about it. In fact, I wrote down some of these because this was so...

Dannah: Heartbreaking.

Bob: Yeah. It was a slap in the face...So here's somebody who said, “I thought it was my fault. I was embarrassed and ashamed of being stupid enough to trust him.” Somebody else who said, “I was molested at eight by a school janitor. Frightened into silence. Raped at 18 by two boys at a party. I blamed myself. Felt shame. My parents never knew. I told my daughters five years ago when I was 60.” Now, you think about the years of carrying that burden inside—that scar on your soul with no one to cry out to. And then you think, “Well, you can cry out to the Lord.” But in the back of your mind, there is this thought, “Wait! He was supposed to be there when that happened. How can I cry out to him?” And so, women doubting God's goodness and wondering, “If God is my rock and my deliverer and

²³ Beth Moore is an evangelical Southern Baptist celebrity who has authored numerous best-selling Bible study books and whose Living Proof Live conferences repeatedly sell out. In the fall of 2016, she “provoked a firestorm” when she tweeted against then presidential candidate Donald Trump’s sexually predatory attitude toward women, and in the spring of 2018, she became “a leading critic of sexism in the evangelical church and a player in the #MeToo reckoning that roiled the Southern Baptist Convention” (McAlister, 2018).

my fortress, how could this happen? How could he allow something like this to happen?” And that’s what prompted me just to sit down and I wrote an open letter to #WhyIDidntReport.

Dannah: Well, you know. It touched me. I sat in my office and cried, because the words were so tender. So would you read at least some of it—share some of it? I think it could help some of these women be set free.

Bob: Yes, and we put this on the website at FamilyLife.com for anybody who wants to read the whole thing, but I said...let me skip here...“I’m sure anyone who’s experienced abuse has been wondering about the reality of God’s providential care for His children. It’s natural to have questions or doubts about God’s goodness when you face this age-old question of: How can a good and loving God allow evil to happen? And it’s one thing to deal with that on a theological level. It’s something else to deal with it personally, when you’re saying, ‘How could He let this happen to me?’ You can give bumper-sticker answers, but those don’t solve anything. I thought of Job, who went through profound grief, profound sadness, and he took that to God, at the end of Job, and started asking all the questions: ‘Why? Why? Why?’ And God let him pour it out, and then God took a deep breath. I can’t imagine the tone of God’s voice, but I think it was a tender, gentle, stern: ‘Who is this that darkens [my] counsel by words without knowledge?’ (Job 38:2). At the core of this issue, you have to come to grips with whether the profound abuse you experienced is more powerful, so powerful that it overrules anything you’ve ever read or

experienced or believed is true about God. Is it stronger than God is? Is your pain so great that it invalidates the rest of anything you've ever known or believed? And I don't think it's by accident that, in the placement in our bibles, Job is here and then Psalms is next. God never answered Job and said, 'Here's why...' He just said, 'I'm God!' And then the psalms give us language to take our despair and our grief and to verbalize it as praise to God. Now that seems counterintuitive. But you read Psalm 13: 'Oh, Lord, how long will You forget me? How long will You withhold favor from me?' That's inspired by the Spirit of God, and God invites: 'Now bring that to me...' and that's where healing can be found. As you bring your grief to God, the afflictions you have experienced will produce in you an eternal weight of glory that is beyond comparison. That's what the Bible says."

Dannah: I want to affirm that. Last night, as I was praying for women in this room, knowing that we would be having this conversation...Jackie, you write in your book that it could be triggering.

Jackie: It is triggering.

Dannah: Are you feeling "triggered" today?

Jackie: No, I think because I've learned how to prep myself and prepare myself for this conversation. But I think anytime—especially when you don't discuss it often—that to hear abuse or to be reminded of it does something in your heart where you want to run, you want to flee, you want to cry, you want to get mad.

- Dannah: You want to go back to your hotel room.
- Mary: Or get angry!
- Jackie: Exactly!
- Dannah: Yeah. You bring up the Psalms. The Lord gave me this verse to pray over those women that are feeling triggered right now. Psalms 118:5: “Out of my great anguish [and you’re feeling that anguish, the depth of that, that shame, that distress] I called on the Lord...and he set me free.” He wants to set you free. We are not having this conversation to trigger you; we are having this conversation, directed by prayer and the Lord, so that we can be a part of participating in your freedom today.
- Bob: And I just want to say, on behalf of Christian men, I am so sorry for how any man did to you the evil that was done to you. That was wrong, and my heart breaks that God’s daughters had that kind of evil perpetrated on them and that your soul has that scar on it! I’ll read how I finished my response: “I believe Jesus is deeply sorry for your pain as well. It’s true He could have stopped it, and He didn’t, and I can’t tell you why He didn’t. No one can. But I can tell you He gave His life to fix it. He died so that the wrongs of this life will be made right, so your tears will one day be dried and your darkness will be over forever!”
- Dannah: Thank you, Bob. That is what I felt when I read what you wrote. I hope that some of these women felt it in the core of their being. There are good men, there are godly men, there are safe places, and you can run to them and find your freedom. Thank you for helping me unpack this.

By curatorially highlighting her involvement with and concern for #MeToo-related matters, Dannah Gresh is able to draw attention to her long-standing and deep concern for issues related to sexual abuse. By leaning on these displays of burden and care, she is able to tacitly or enthymematically indicate that there is no reason to be concerned with her, her ministry, or her teachings, because she and her efforts are in alignment with the concerns of the #MeToo movement.

Deviant cases: Curated contradictions in curated deflection. As demonstrated above, Dannah Gresh curates deflection in five significant ways: (1) by showcasing engagement with critics and critiques, (2) by shifting blame to purity movement adherents, (3) by dissociating from the purity movement at large, (4) by claiming certain issues are beyond her control, and (5) by emphasizing support for #MeToo activism. While she relies heavily on these deflective strategies, curatorially contradictory instances do emerge. Of these deviant cases, those that stand out as noteworthy include: (1) altering the topic at hand, (2) disengaging from significant critiques, and (3) promising concerned followers changes to programming that, in the end, are merely cosmetic, not substantive, in nature. These three curatorial moves, in particular, provide insight into how Dannah Gresh shrewdly curates deflection in the midst of a call-out culture that regards evangelical Christian sexual purity efforts with concern.

One way that Dannah Gresh curatorially deviates from her engagement with critics and critiques is through altering the topic at hand. At times, this manifests when she redirects the conversation. Take, for instance, her tendency to publicly commend the #MeToo movement only to, within the next breath, dispute its logic. As described earlier in this chapter (in the section titled, “Engagement with #MeToo/#ChurchToo Hashtags”), she sometimes lauds the efforts of #MeToo only to immediately undercut it when she asserts that the movement is misguided at

best, or complicit at worst, for calling out sexist behavior and sexual harassment while many involved with the movement (Hollywood actors and the culture-at-large) simultaneously enjoy attending and benefiting from the production of erotic films such as *Fifty Shades of Grey*:

I can't understand why there is a #MeToo campaign that everybody's excited about and at the very same time many women across the nation are celebrating the release of *Fifty Shades of Grey*, the third movie in the trilogy. This seems like a horrible disconnect to me. (Gresh, 2018c, 2018e)

Dannah Gresh alters the subject at hand in the same way (commending the #MeToo movement, disputing its logic, and linking it to the cultural reception *Fifty Shades of Grey*) during a February 8, 2018, segment on Revive Our Hearts Radio, titled "The Truth about Sexuality," when the host asks her, "How can we help our teenage young women process this [#MeToo] cultural phenomenon?" Dannah Gresh responds:

Our daughters are growing up in a world where male strength is distorted—greatly. Sadly, this makes them very vulnerable. I see a lot of people speaking out against the men who have victimized us. It's a collective voice now; it's women. All of us are saying that men have not treated us well. There is a crisis. We definitely have something we need to address in our culture. I am on the one hand blessed that the conversation is happening. It's almost like there is a cleansing happening in our nation. Men who have not treated others with respect and dignity are forfeiting very powerful positions and rights. I think that is good. I think that is evidence of godliness in all of us that we have this distaste for abuse. On the other hand, I can't understand why there is a #MeToo campaign that everybody's excited about and at the very same time many women across the nation are celebrating the release of *Fifty Shades of Grey*, the third movie in the trilogy. This seems

like a horrible disconnect to me. I've studied this because women are acting like: We don't want to be victimized by men, but on the same token, we really like men's aggressive, bondage-dominant sadism and masochism celebration happening through the *Fifty Shades of Grey* books and movies. It's not just women outside the church who are celebrating. One Barna survey noted that there are no statistical differences in the percentage of church and non-church women who had read *Fifty Shades of Grey*. This breaks my heart! I can't understand why there is not more of an outcry. It does impact our daughters. Our daughters are vulnerable. We find that young women aged eighteen–twenty-four who read *Fifty Shades of Grey* are 25 percent more likely to have a partner who verbally abuses them, and 34 percent more likely to have a partner who exhibited stalking tendencies. As I have tried to raise awareness of that, one little voice saying, “Hey #MeToo culture, can we be upset about this, too.” People say, “Well, maybe those girls were already at risk.” All the more reason... We just took girls who were vulnerable and made something evil and transgressive and normalized it for them. Now they are more vulnerable. Of course, if that's not the case, we are taking girls who were not vulnerable and are telling them that it is okay for them to be abused. There is no such thing as sexy abuse. It is just abuse. That's one thing that I'm concerned about. In light of the #MeToo conversation, it's a great opportunity to talk to our daughters about their value, how precious they are, that they are created as image bearers of God. But also to say that you have some responsibility in how you present that value to the world. One of the things you need to do is protect your own mind and your own heart so you don't create a place where you are more easily preyed upon. The average age of the first inception of pornography right now is about eleven years old. Of course, it is more

common for boys to have that encounter at that young age with visual pornography—videos, photos—but girls have a proclivity toward words. That’s what *Fifty Shades of Grey* shows us. You can take words and create pornographic material that is appealing to women because it is in a story line. When Dr. Juli Slattery and I wrote about our concerns for the *Fifty Shades of Grey* phenomenon...It’s really doing to women what the Internet did for men. It is taking down the walls of pornography and making it acceptable and normal in our culture. It’s doing that for women. Erotica is now acceptable and normal in our culture. I think this is a really important conversation for us to have with our daughters. Some of the Scriptures that come to mind is the Bible verse that talks about being double-minded. If you are double-minded, the Bible says that you are unstable in all of your ways (see James 1:8). So when we have a culture that says #MeToo is the bandwagon that everyone should get on (and I’m not saying that it’s not a good thing, it is cleansing our culture)...But at the same time, if we are not saying that *Fifty Shades of Grey* should also be something that we say is victimizing women, that’s double-mindedness. And the Bible says that makes us unstable in all our ways. I think this is a great opportunity for us to talk to our daughters about how we can protect our minds and our hearts and our spirits so that we are not vulnerable. (Basham, 2018b)

Other times, she alters the topic at hand by redefining or resituating the subject under discussion. For instance, in the following exchange, Joshua Harris asks Dannah Gresh for her assessment of critiques of purity culture and whether she can define the phenomenon itself. In her response, Dannah Gresh simultaneously denies the existence of purity culture, only to turn around and quickly herald its benefits. Presented below is a portion of the interview between Dannah Gresh and Joshua Harris:

Joshua: What's your understanding of the critiques that are coming about what people are calling purity culture? Like, how would you define purity culture?

Dannah: Well, here's the thing. I'm not sure that we have one. Even in Christian culture. I'm not sure that we are by God's definition...that we have achieved what he's...But I will say that there is a difference in behavior in purity culture because one Boston University professor, examining the sex lives of college students—the average Penn State University, Ohio State University, the big schools—80 plus percent of the student population is fully sexually active. And most of those students—they also graduate [having had on average] 5.7...sexual partners [for the females]; the males 7.2. So, when they are sexually active, they are having a lot of sex with a lot of people. But she also examined other types of schools including evangelical schools. And the numbers were inverted. So, about roughly 20 something percent were fully sexually active, and 80 percent were not necessarily living by God's standard a pure lifestyle. So, I say that to say this—that even secular research bears out that when there is a purity mentality, purity teaching, purity thought, it does affect the way people behave. (Van Der Wyngaard & Russell-Jones, 2018)

Bob Gresh alters the topic at hand when he questions why critics have to be so negative. During our personal interview (at the Pure Freedom Master Class in June of 2018), he cast doubt on the helpfulness and the purpose of Christine Gardner's book, *Making Chastity Sexy: The Rhetoric of Evangelical Abstinence Campaigns*, and her treatment of Pure Freedom Ministries as

well as her comments during Joshua Harris' interview for *I Survived I Kissed Dating Goodbye*.

Bob Gresh noted:

But it's easy to criticize. So, like, with Christine Gardner's book, I read it and I liked seeing the other side of the story...And even in her interview with Josh Harris, I'm like, "Okay, she's got a lot of good points, but man, say something...Like, you're acting like this guy's the worst guy in the world when he's, like, basically apologized." And I just thought, "What have you done? What's it like to be positive? You wrote a book against something?" And maybe I didn't read the book close enough. I can't remember a lot of it, but it just seems it's easier to be negative. (B. Gresh, personal communication, June 15, 2018)

And, in the case of an April 1, 2013, Secret Keeper Girl blog post titled "A Modest Proposal for My Critics (which is tagged in a December 30, 2014, Pure Freedom blog post titled "Should We Stop Using the Word 'Purity'?" and which she reposted to Facebook in June and December of 2018), Dannah Gresh alters the topic at hand by appearing to address some of the critiques of her faultfinders but instead issuing a kind of manifesto:

Meanwhile, some Christians are saying out loud that the modesty movement might be harmful to women. I'm reading what they have written and seeking God's heart so that I can learn from them. In fact, I'm even fine-tuning the language at my Secret Keeper Girl website to reflect some thoughts in their critique. (I so appreciate the good thinking of writer's [sic] like Jonathan Merritt who walks the fine line of embracing truth and demanding grace. He is posing questions, not casting undue and untruthful criticism.) My heart is aching at some of the things I'm reading from other writers: "Dannah Gresh's Secret Keepers is teaching girls to hate & be ashamed of their bodies. Absolutely

deplorable, esp under the ‘good xian’ guise.” Since my name keeps popping up, may I speak in to this? Here is where I can agree with my detractors. Some Modesty Advocates Are Legalists Who Objectify Women! So many times when the Church addresses modesty, it’s from a heart of rule-based living. “Your skirt should be two inches below the knee.” “Your shorts need to come to the tips of your fingers.” “A Christian woman should never wear pants.” Others can choose to dress like that, but they cannot make it a mandate for me. Making these Biblical mandates and overly obsessing about the female body is both objectifying and shame-based. But that doesn’t mean we can’t have a healthy conversation about what’s appropriate for public showcasing of our beauty. Failure to do so places our daughters in the risky position of experiencing the consequences of expressing their beauty through their sensuality. According to a task force report by the American Psychological Association, the hyper-sexualization of little girls by making them grow up too fast and expressing themselves through more sensual fashion increases the risk of eating disorders, depression and body image issues. The Medical Institute for Sexual Health has determined that girls (and boys) who “look older than they are” are at risk of an earlier sexual debut. How does a girl look older? By the way that she dresses and the make-up she wears. Years ago, something in my fashion-loving self just knew that I needed to be a woman who sounded the alarm to say: “Let’s let little girls be little girls!” Most Modesty and Purity Advocates Have Inadvertently Made These Virtues About Getting The Boy! For many years, the shallow end of the purity and modesty movement has offered the false promise of a guy in exchange for her purity ring or modest attire. How sad I am for that! Without even realizing it we have convinced girls they can make a deal with God: a turtle neck now and a wedding ring

later. Modesty is not something you use to bargain with God or hide the female body. Here's where I can agree with the critique of Sharon Hodde Miller: . . . language about modesty should focus not on hiding the female body but on understanding the body's created role. Immodesty is not the improper exposure of the body per se, but the improper orientation of the body. . . . When we make ourselves central instead of God, we display the height of immodesty. The purpose of the body is to glorify God. Do we do that when we embrace the "skin-is-in" fashion that puts our daughter's [sic] at risk? Good critiques like Miller's and Merritt's have been shaping and forming the way I have been communicating my messages about modesty and purity. Accountability through kind dialogue is always welcome! The modesty and purity movement must be careful not to unintentionally send a message that purity and modesty are about saving yourself for a man. The purpose of these messages is to protect and respect yourself, and—ultimately—to obey and glorify God. When Christianity Today's her•menueutics columnist Elrena Evans posted about me and my efforts to teach modesty, she wrote: "the underlying assumption the Secret Keepers seem to endorse is that the female body, if not bad, is at least overwhelmingly tempting and tantalizing: something that must be covered, hidden, and locked away." The goal of Secret Keeper Girl is for a little girl to believe that she is a masterpiece created by God. For that reason, I'm going to take even her critique to heart as I write content that is careful not to express otherwise. She did find some areas where I can improve. But with all due respect, the female body is tempting and tantalizing. God created women to be especially beautiful. Why do they use women's faces to sell men's razors? Why was the Grammy awards modest standards focused on female body parts? Why don't men wear belly shirts (Forgive us, God, for the eighties!)? Because female

beauty is a powerful force. Advertising gurus have discovered that if you put the photo of a woman in an ad, you can increase the length of time someone spends looking at it by as much as 30%! It doesn't quite work that way when you use a photo of a man. Proverbs 5:18,19 reads "May your fountain be blessed and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth. A loving doe, a graceful deer—may her breasts satisfy you always, may you be ever intoxicated by her love." That's a steamy verse. A more literal version of the last phrase might be, "may you be intoxicated by her sexuality." The female body is powerfully tempting and tantalizing and in the context of marriage this is a wonderful thing, but this is not the core message of Secret Keeper Girl. Our underlying message is that a girl is a masterpiece created by God. Still, we do not throw out pieces of God's truth when we talk about a woman's body or beauty. And the fact that her body is intoxicating is definitely a part of His truth. We do our best to present that in an age appropriate way and over 40,000 moms loved how we did it at our live events last year alone. Should a girl's beauty be locked away? Scriptures don't directly address modesty all that much. There are four verses that give us specific advice and they don't tell us if jeans are OK or how low our neckline can plunge. So we are left to surmise and come to our own conclusions about how much skin is too much. And that is why debate is good, but please be careful in how you present your opinions or you lead people to believe that the good work of some of us...well, isn't good. So here is my modest proposal for you: when you're tempted to take things out of context and lead others to believe the worst, try thinking the best as I will choose to think of you. (Gresh, 2013c)

A second way in which Dannah Gresh deviates from her own curatorially deflective practices is in the form of violating her own commitment to engage with detractors. One way this

practice manifests is in remaining silent after a follower issues a challenge. For instance, after her February 8, 2018, Facebook post, stating “I can’t understand why there is a #MeToo campaign that everybody’s excited about and at the very same time many women across the nation are celebrating the release of *Fifty Shades of Grey*...This seems like a horrible disconnect to me,” most of those who commented posted statements of support (e.g., “I agree!” “Right?!?” “So. True.” or “Amen, Dannah!”). However, when a follower responded with “I agree. I also had issues with the various female actors who spoke up about #me too yet their neckline plunge [sic] to their navels...” and another follower replied:

Because sexual assault inflicted on anyone isn’t the victims [sic] fault? I’ve been sexually assaulted and harassed while wearing baggy clothes? Even dressed “immodestly” is NOT in invitation to touch someone without their permission. It will literally always happen no matter what is being worn. It happens everywhere in every walk of life and every gender and sexual orientation. Abusers cause sexual assault. Nothing else.

Dannah Gresh did not respond to, or moderate, the thread. Disengagement from critique is also found in a #MeToo-focused post from October 30, 2017, when she asks her Facebook followers whether they, too, find irony in the emergence of #MeToo complaints in the midst of social endorsement of *Fifty Shades of Grey*:

While the viral hashtag #MeToo opens up a dialogue concerning the crisis of respect for women, the final installment of *Fifty Shades of Grey* is prepped to release in theaters February 9th...and women are celebrating it. Does anyone else find this ironic?

Reader engagement with this post was high, with 487 responses, 55 comments, and 109 shares.

Yet some of the reader responses took Dannah Gresh to task. Consider the following examples:

These are two totally separate issues. Women being harassed in the work place (or at all)

is an issue that stands on its own and should not be downplayed or linked to a movie. I am very disappointed that you would post this as you are implying women brought harassment on themselves by supporting a movie like this. You are better than this.

There is a slight difference here. Those women did not give consent. That female character in the book did. 2nd. As this country did not mind a candidate having Playboy in his office nor condone his views on grabbing women by the p0\$\$y, he was easily elected to lead our country. I say we had this problem way before the movie coming out now. Smh.

To open conversation...do the women in this book consent? Yes. Do the women who are sexually abused consent? No. Edit: no I have not read the books or watched the movies. I guess I'm just really tired of them being lumped together.

If you haven't watched the movies then you should [not] judge what they're about.

You're just making an assumption without knowing what it's really about.

Though she does frequently interact with her followers on social media, she did not interact with responders on this post, not even to take to task the poster who responded with a loaded and coded comment about Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton's political stance on abortion: "Those same women are the ones who paid a few thousand to go hear Killary Clinton talk in Toronto a fewweeks [sic] ago." While one could easily lean on the argument that it is not humanly possible to moderate every follower comment, it is important to note that Dannah Gresh acknowledges that she has staff who maintain careful watch on what unfolds on her social media (at the Pure

Freedom Master Class, which I attended in June of 2018, she indicated that several of her staff members assist her with this) and that she states publicly that she and Bob Gresh have “made a commitment to...dialogue with the people that are at odds with what we’ve written or spoken” (Van Der Wyngaard & Russell-Jones, 2018).

A third and final way that Dannah Gresh deviates from her curated deflection is located in promising concerned followers changes to programming that, in the end, are merely cosmetic and not substantive, in nature. To illustrate, in a December 28, 2018, Facebook Live video, she explains in an “exciting announcement” that during the year of 2018, a number of her “mom followers” have held her “accountable” and, as a result, she and her staff will be making some changes:

As we have grown, Secret Keeper Girl has come, I guess, a little bit under the accountability of moms who follow us, and we have identified a few very significant problems that we plan to resolve in 2019. Those problems include the name. The name Secret Keeper Girl has almost from the very beginning...it was very hard to describe why we chose it. We chose the name Secret Keeper Girl because we wanted to keep the deepest secrets of true beauty and modesty alive for the whole girl world. And if you read the first Secret Keeper Girl book that made a lot of sense, but we never expected a book to turn into a movement of moms a 100,000 or so strong—that’s how many followers we have on facebook alone and we have other mediums where moms are joining us that aren’t on facebook. So, we felt like it was really important to address that concern, because as the years have gone by, and #MeToo has become a more prominent conversation, moms have said that they’ve needed to have conversations with their daughters to explain that some secrets aren’t good to keep. And we agree with that. We

think that's a very valid concern. I have been a very vocal proponent for the church to be more vocal and active when little girls and women are in abusive situations. I have put my ministry on the line at times to defend those individuals who have been in abusive situations of some type. I could tell you specific stories about how the ministry has been threatened because I have been very, very vocal about defending those who were vulnerable. And, so, as that concern grew, obviously, I would want to do whatever it costs, whatever it takes, to fix that problem. So, we'll be addressing that problem in 2019 in a really exciting way that God has brought about an amazing story that just really blows me away. Another problem that Secret Keeper Girl has faced is that many moms think that it is just about true beauty and modesty. And we have covered so many more topics than that. First and foremost, Secret Keeper Girl is about bringing you and your daughter closer to each other and closer to Christ. We believe that parents were given the task within the scripture to disciple their children. We also believe that the Church cannot do it in one hour a week. One out of 169 hours, every single hour of which—except the sleeping hours, perhaps—that child is being impacted developmentally, morally. Values-wise, we believe that a church can't do it, a ministry can't do it, an author can't do it, books can't do it, an event can't do it. It has to be driven by parents... We're doing everything we can to put parents in the driver's seat of the spiritual development of their children. That includes our events, where...there's lots of mother-daughter/father-son connecting moments at Secret Keeper Girl and Born to Be Brave. That's because we are putting our money where our mouth is. We believe that you are the most important thing in their spiritual development. And the other thing that's most important in their moral development is Jesus being present and active in their life. And them coming to an

understanding of what the Bible says about morality, about their body, about their gender, about God, about their family, about what a family looks like. And so we want to provide tools and resources to you on all of those different topics. That includes gender in our books like, *It's Great to be a Girl* and *It's Great to be a Boy*, because we think it is worth celebrating. We think the differences are worth celebrating. We think the differences are important. And so we've created that set of resources for you as parents to take your children through—really important, age-appropriate conversations that don't rob them of any of their innocence, but establish truth in their heart and lives. We have resources—father-daughter date kit—on understanding boys. We think that's a really important one...So Secret Keeper Girl is much broader than modesty and purity and true beauty. And we want to have a platform that really positions us so people are more aware of that.

(Gresh, 2018yy)

While the name change that is promised will require significant rebranding effort and dollars, during the January 31, 2019, “Big Announcement Name-Change Reveal” via Facebook Live on the Secret Keeper Girl Facebook page, Dannah Gresh indicates that little will be altered but the name:²⁴

We've noticed through the years that Secret Keeper Girl has been used over and over again in scenarios...to help girls unlock the secrets that were holding them in bondage. And so, we feel like it's time to change our name to something that better reflects who we really are. We've noticed that the common denominator in freedom is not keeping secrets

²⁴ By including portions of this January 31, 2019, Facebook Live announcement, I step outside of the timeframe boundaries (October 15, 2017, to December 31, 2018) that I originally placed on data collection for this project. However, because Dannah Gresh promoted this “Big Announcement” in a December 28, 2018, Facebook Live post and because she indicated that the “Big Announcement” would address critiques launched at her ministry, I considered it prudent to include in this results chapter.

and telling your story and telling your hurt and telling your pain. And since we've been a ministry that's helped facilitate that, we want to have a name that better reflects that. So, it's with a lot of excitement that we're announcing that we're changing the name of Secret Keeper Girl to—drumroll, please—True Girl. I like this name. I hope you like this name. Do you love this name? Because I want to hear what you think about this name. In fact, go ahead right now and tell us what you think, because we are gonna...give away some True Girl hats...So, here's the really cool thing. As we were facing the problem of changing our name, my friendship and collaboration with a dear friend of mine, Nancy DeMoss Wohlgenuth, was increasing and growing. I had even traveled out to Niles, Michigan, to record some programming with Nancy to see if maybe I could give her some lift on some of her interview programs—to lighten the load with her on some of her event content planning. And the ministry at Revive Our Hearts is just exploding—especially internationally. And it's really a move of God that I can't explain any other way than that God is just blessing the movement of truth and revival in women. I was sitting at the True Woman event this past fall when I realized, “Ah! One of the names we're thinking of naming Secret Keeper Girl to is True Girl, and I'm at a True Woman event. Could these two problems—Nancy needing some more encouragement and lift and support, under her thriving and growing ministry and me needing to change my name—could they be one solution?” And I think you know that we think the answer is “Yes.”

And, so, on Monday, we formalized a partnership with Revive Our Hearts and my ministry—which is actually called Pure Freedom—so that we can have True Woman and True Girl, where we're discipling girls from age eight and under to age 88 and above. And we're really excited about that. (Secret Keeper Girl, 2019)

During a Q&A time with viewers, Dannah Gresh indicated that the Secret Keeper Girl (True Girl) “mission and vision will not be changing at all,” “we’re being more collaborative,” “we’ll have a lot more lift,” “Revive Our Hearts will bring us more notoriety,” and “we’re not really changing a lot, we’re just changing our name” (Secret Keeper Girl, 2019).

Chapter Summary

My aim in this chapter was to identify and explain the primary strategies Dannah Gresh relies upon as she negotiates the #MeToo/#ChurchToo “call-out climate” in which purity culture, purity-focused teachings, and purity-focused initiatives are called into question and are deemed as harmful. Through an examination of blog posts, speeches, social media posts, promotional materials, interviews, and side conversations, it is evident that Dannah Gresh and her ministry team members employ a variety of image management techniques. Dominant tactics used by Dannah Gresh and her Pure Freedom ministry team are chronicled in this study as a four-part Framework of Strategic Curation, including: (1) curated erudition, (2) curated imperfection, (3) curated moderation, and (4) curated deflection.

The unearthing of these multifaceted strategies reveals at least three things. First, the communication strategies Dannah Gresh employs are sophisticated and complex. Dannah Gresh is a shrewd and skilled communicator. Her style affords her a great deal of control over how her messages are received and interpreted by disparate target audiences. Second, these techniques are a part of a long-standing repertoire of strategies that are, and have been, accessed and employed by Dannah Gresh on an ongoing basis. She and her team have used these tactics for far longer than the 63-week period that brackets my data-gathering timeline (October 15, 2017, to December 31, 2018). Third, and finally, in sometimes subtle and sometimes obvious ways, Dannah Gresh demonstrates awareness of the concerns related to her ministry’s aims and goals

and the methods she uses to achieve those aims and goals. Nonetheless when Dannah Gresh addresses concerns, and sometimes makes changes, the changes and acknowledgements are on the whole benign, doing little to actively reform or redirect purity culture on the whole and her role within that culture.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In this research project, I investigated ways in which a prominent and popular evangelical Christian sexual purity movement leader navigates the cultural landscape of criticism and critique directed toward sexual purity movement efforts. Though a significant amount of research has examined the social and political implications of the movement, as well as the long- and short-term emotional and physical impact of purity movement teachings on the movement's target audience (Bearman & Brückner, 2001; Brückner & Bearman, 2005; DeRogatis, 2015; di Mauro & Joffe, 2009; Diefendorf, 2015; Doan & Williams, 2008; Freitas, 2008; Gardner, 2011; Gish, 2016; Kieser, 2014; Klein, 2018; Lord, 2010; Manning, 2015; Moslener, 2015; Price, 2011; Regnerus, 2007; Rosenbaum, 2009; Schermer Sellers, 2017; Williams, 2011), to date no studies have explored purity leaders' responses to critiques of the movement. Thus, with the aim of addressing this void in the scholarship, I explored the communication tactics one purity movement leader employs when responding to criticism of purity movement teachings during the rise of the #MeToo and #ChurchToo movements. Specifically, this study's multifaceted research question asked: How are leaders within the purity/modesty/abstinence-before-marriage movement responding to critiques of purity culture? Are they acknowledging critiques and accompanying criticism? To what extent are they accepting these critiques? Reframing critiques? To what extent do they appear to be changing their central stance/message as a result of such critiques?

To address the questions posed as part of this dissertation research, I used a multimethod crystallized approach (Ellingson, 2009), with a specific concentration on Dannah Gresh and her Pure Freedom Ministries. I conducted ethnographic participant observation; in-depth, semi-structured interviews; and analyses of blog posts, formal and informal speeches and interviews,

social media posts, and several of Dannah Gresh's best-selling books. All data were analyzed via an inductive and iterative process, employing open and axial coding (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) to identify the dominant strategies that Dannah Gresh used to mitigate criticism during the 63-week bound timeframe (October 15, 2017, to December 31, 2018). In the subsequent sections of this chapter, I briefly: (1) summarize the results detailed in Chapter 5, (2) explore the theoretical implications of those findings, (3) consider practical implications, (4) acknowledge the limitations of the study, and (5) propose recommendations for future research endeavors.

Summary of Findings

The results of this study reveal that Dannah Gresh utilizes a four-part system of strategies (which I call a Framework of Strategic Curation) in order to mollify critiques directed toward her role (and her teachings) within the evangelical Christian sexual purity movement. First, as a means of situating herself as a knowledgeable expert, she strategically employs *curated erudition* by (1) drawing on first-hand experience, (2) employing cerebral-sounding buzzwords, (3) projecting a scholarly demeanor, and (4) recommending resources that promote answers to societal ills. Second, in order to infuse her persona with a sense of authentic relatability, she taps into the connecting capacity of *curated imperfection* by (1) illustrating the rhetorical power of acknowledged moral failure and (2) encouraging the exploitation of moral-failure narratives. Third, to portray herself as measured, tolerant, and even cutting edge in her beliefs and practices, she invokes *curated moderation* by (1) eschewing rules-based legalism, (2) affiliating with subversive mavericks, and (3) conveying an attitude of sensible reason. Fourth, and finally, for the purpose of managing and holding critiques at bay, she employs *curated deflection* by (1) showcasing engagement with critics and critiques, (2) shifting blame to purity movement

adherents, (3) dissociating from the purity movement at large, (4) claiming certain issues are beyond her control, and (5) emphasizing support for #MeToo activism. Employment of these strategies, especially in tandem, allows Dannah Gresh, in the delivery and maintenance of her purity-focused efforts, to appear credibly trustworthy, vulnerably human, tolerantly objective, and lacking in culpability for current and long-standing concerns associated with purity culture. The overarching implications of these findings are further examined in the subsequent sections of this chapter.

Theoretical Implications

I believe that there are two primary theoretical contributions that this dissertation makes to the scholarly literature. Specifically, this study augments current scholarship by (1) contributing to an understanding of the role that commodification plays in contemporary expressions of evangelical Christianity and (2) introducing the “Framework of Strategic Curation” as a tool for illuminating crisis-driven brand management tactics. Such theoretical contributions might assist, respectively, with expanding already-established theories of political economy, and with providing a theoretical construct for the purpose of explicating brand and image management strategies that arise in times of crisis.

Commodification and feminist political economy. The first theoretical contribution of this project is its enhancement of scholarly understandings of how religious ideals, values, and beliefs can be infused with commercial value. The study of commodification (e.g., Baudrillard, 1998; Bell, 1996; Bourdieu, 1984; Cohen, 2003; Frank, 2000; Friedan, 2001; Hochschild, 2003; Jhally, 1997; Kuttner, 1997; Marx & Engels, 1978; Miller, 1987; Radin, 1996; Veblen, 1899; Weber, 2001) examines how acts of consumption serve as identity expressions (Friedman, 1994), as well as entrance fees to specific social groups and specific social discourses (Benwell &

Stokoe, 2006). Commodification refers to the virtual transformation of something that, at one time, was not considered to have commercial value. When something is commodified, it is infused with a notion of exchange value and is considered worthy of purchase, sale, and consumption. Some condemn commodification, believing it to exacerbate corrupt production practices and to exploit disenfranchised population segments (Turow, 1997). Others question traditional approaches to commodification research, maintaining that consumption practices are not entirely nefarious and that they, in fact, afford consumers creative autonomy through shopping habits and choices (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006). Keat, Whitely, and Abercrombie (1994), for instance, assert consumers have more authority and agency than most critical consumption scholars acknowledge.

Riordan (2002) acknowledges opportunities for consumers to assert their agency, yet still urges scholars to “investigate the social relations arising from patterns of commodity consumption not just as a cultural phenomenon but as an economic practice shaping lives” (p. 8). Riordan (2002) is especially concerned with consumption and economic practices as they shape women’s lives. She endorses the use of feminist political economy as a theoretical lens for analyzing the ways in which women’s day-to-day existence is impacted through consumption practices. Feminist political economy inserts gender as a key factor when exploring traditional categories of political economy—namely the power dynamics located within social relations that result from “the production, distribution, and consumption of resources, including communication resources” (Mosco, 2009, p. 2).

According to Riordan (2002), traditionally marginalized and exploited groups “need to understand their lives as gendered and economic and shaped by both capitalism and patriarchy” (p. 4). She calls on communication scholars to examine “how economics and gender are sutured

into our smallest day-to-day actions” (Riordan, 2002, p. 4). To do this, feminist political economy “interrogates issues many women relate to, such as identity, subjectivity, pleasure, consumption, as well as visible and invisible labor,” and points to “how capitalism naturalizes male bias” in these areas (Riordan, 2002, p. 9). Mosco (2009) purports that this lens is especially helpful for gender-focused media studies because it exposes ways in which media markets subordinate women “in significant ways” (p. 114).

The findings of this dissertation confirm Weddle Irons and Springer Mock’s (2015) assertion that Dannah Gresh has, indeed, “birthed a purity empire” (p. 93). As I demonstrated in Chapter 5, not only has she generated numerous products and resources available for purchase (e.g., books, workbooks, programs, and event tickets), but she also perpetually points and refers to those resources in a significant number of her blog posts, social media posts, and public speaking engagements. Pure Freedom Ministries is, indeed, a capitalist enterprise that engages in the commodification of religious ideals such as biblical womanhood and sexual purity. This study contributes to an understanding of feminist political economy by demonstrating how strategic communication maneuvers (in the midst of volatile communication climates) can serve to reinforce and defend patriarchal beliefs and practices by “suturing” them into the “smallest day-to-day actions” (Riordan, 2002, p. 4) (e.g., care and concern for tweens’ and teens’ physical, spiritual, emotional development) and by infusing them with market value (Andersen, 2002).

Theoretical potential for the framework of strategic curation. The second theoretical contribution of this dissertation is located within the capacity of the “Framework of Strategic Curation” to serve as a theoretical construct to illuminate understanding of brand and image management techniques that are employed during times of crisis. The Framework of Strategic Curation emerged (during the coding and analysis phases) as a descriptive tool, allowing me to

categorize and organize Dannah Gresh's communication strategies. Comprised of four curatorial communication strategies (i.e., erudition, imperfection, moderation, and deflection), the framework demonstrated how Dannah Gresh attempts to shift and shape the narrative surrounding critiques of purity culture by relying on careful displays of intellect, fallibility, equanimity, and self-exoneration. With additional development and application, this framework holds potential for anticipating and deciphering ways that high-profile leaders (of many types) might attempt to shore up their public image as they operate within, and emerge from, climates of critique and criticism. One avenue for refining the Framework of Strategic Curation is to consider its usefulness in clarifying or augmenting one of the most frequently applied crisis communication theories: Benoit's (1997) theory of image repair discourse, which, relying on Ware and Linkugel's (1973) work with apologia as a genre of criticism, examines message types constructed and delivered in times of crisis.

Another route to consider is building on contemporary theories of curation that, according to Dallas (2016), tend to be applied only to the study of curatorial (i.e., collection and display) practices in the fields of art and museum studies (e.g., Graham & Cook, 2010; Obrist, 2014; Smith, 2012; Smith, 2015) and archival science and information management (e.g., Beagrie, 2006; Dallas, 2007; Yakel, 2007). Formalization of the Framework of Strategic Curation could expand the current scholarly treatment and conception of curatorial studies by offering a potentially transferable mechanism (that extends beyond studies focused on art, museums, libraries, and digital preservation) for analyzing strategic crisis communication practices. To develop the Framework of Strategic Curation, future scholarship might consider the level of its applicability, helpfulness, and completeness in examining other purity movement leaders', religious leaders', morally motivated leaders'—indeed, all types of leaders'—

communication strategies during times of duress brought about by scrutiny and critique.

Practical Implications

The practical implications of this dissertation are at least three-fold. Specifically, my study demonstrates the importance of understanding: (1) how synergistic marketing practices should be examined for underlying ideological allegiances, (2) how curatorial strategies have the potential to obfuscate problematic ideological notions, and (3) how the enactment of only superficial alterations in the wake of criticism and controversy suggests that a brand is prized above the consumer. Awareness of these implications could benefit decision makers overseeing church content and programming, parents or mentors seeking resources to assist in the navigation of issues arising during tween and teen years, and those who are simply attempting to better understand how certain ideas and ideals are fostered within contemporary evangelical Christian culture.

Synergistic marketing practices and ideological allegiances. The first practical contribution of this research project comes in the form of a recommendation to investigate affiliations and allegiances when considering whether to adopt the resources of a leader whose works are cross-promoted and synergistically marketed by other organizations and leaders. When I embarked on this project, I knew little-to-nothing about either Dannah Gresh or Nancy DeMoss Wolgemuth. Indeed, although my conservative evangelical Christian upbringing certainly brought me into contact with the notion of sexual purity practices and the concepts of biblical manhood and womanhood, I did not know the names, stories, or convictions of these two authors, speakers, and teachers. As my research for this study on Dannah Gresh progressed and unfolded, I came to suspect a growing connection between Pure Freedom Ministries and the Revive Our Hearts True Woman Movement, but my suspicions were not confirmed until I

attended the True Woman conference (via Internet live stream) in September 2018; watched a series of promotional teasers unfold on social media (e.g., Gresh, 2018yy) for the Secret Keeper Girl “Big Announcement Name-Change Reveal” (Secret Keeper Girl, 2019); and read a press release from National Religious Broadcasters (2019) indicating that the Secret Keeper Girl brand would become “True Girl” in May 2019, that it essentially would be integrated into the Revive Our Hearts family of resources, products, and programs, and that Dannah Gresh would immediately begin assuming a prominent leadership role within the Revive Our Hearts organization. The following text from the press release makes clear some of the terms of the formalized alliance:

In addition to a strategic brand alignment, Wolgemuth and Gresh will also be joining forces as Gresh takes a more active role in the various outreaches of Revive Our Hearts. In the days ahead, Gresh will be a featured presence on the weekday Revive Our Hearts radio and podcast programming; she will also join the speaker team for the ministry’s biennial True Woman conferences. Furthermore, as her own brand, True Girl, suggests, Gresh will collaborate with Wolgemuth and Revive Our Hearts to cultivate the next generation of women’s leaders, as well as to develop more tools and resources targeting that group. (National Religious Broadcasters, 2019)

With verification that myriad elements of Dannah Gresh’s Pure Freedom Ministry are synergistically marketed and cross promoted to augment and support Nancy DeMoss Wolgemuth’s Revive Our Hearts, what emerges is evidence that Dannah Gresh is not merely expanding her personal brand with the help of a dear friend but is, in fact, using her sexual purity resources (targeted to tween and teen girls and their mothers) as an audience-delivery conduit to the True Woman Movement. Stated another way, Dannah Gresh’s ministry efforts are a pipeline

to the Revive Our Hearts empire and to its practice and promulgation of complementarianism. Because the complementarian theology of the True Woman Movement states clearly how women and men should conceive of themselves (“created in the image of God...equal in value and dignity, but [having] distinct roles and functions in the home and in the church,” Revive Our Hearts, 2018b) and makes explicit what is “right” (e.g., modesty, binary gender expressions, heterosexual marriage, submission to “God-ordained male leadership,” Revive Our Hearts, 2018b) and “wrong” (e.g., sexual relationships outside of marriage, active LGBTQ sexual practice, abortion, “selfish insistence on personal rights,” Revive Our Hearts, 2018b), those who are considering resources produced by Dannah Gresh and Pure Freedom Ministries should understand that such materials (no matter how curatorially moderate or benign they may appear) are inextricably tied to conservative ideological ends.

Thus, my dissertation work serves as a call to understand how parachurch organizations (in this case, Pure Freedom Ministries and Revive Our Hearts) can facilitate cradle-to-grave buy-in to conservative ideologies (recall that in Dannah Gresh’s name-change announcement, she indicated that the new, formalized partnership between Revive Our Hearts and Pure Freedom would facilitate “[the discipleship of] girls from age eight and under to age 88 and above,” Secret Keeper Girl, 2019). Therefore, those seeking faith-based resources to help youth as they navigate developmental, theological, and social issues should not make such decisions without understanding the connections, convictions, and investments of the “empires” producing and benefiting from those materials.

Curatorial strategies and obfuscation of problematic ideological notions. A second practical contribution of this study manifests in the form of a call for vigilant awareness of how the Framework of Strategic Curation can be used to obfuscate problematic ideological notions.

Specifically, throughout this dissertation research, I demonstrate how the shrewd implementation of deflective curatorial strategies (including curated erudition, curated imperfection, and curated moderation) draws focus and attention to certain things, while simultaneously diverting focus and attention away from others. Of particular importance to this project and to its overarching purpose (unearthing how leaders within the purity/modesty/abstinence-before-marriage movement respond to critiques of the #MeToo and #ChurchToo movements) is the way in which Dannah Gresh curatorially deflects attention away from #ChurchToo-related conversations.

As is noted in Chapter 1 of this study, the #ChurchToo movement (launched through the online activism of Emily Joy Allison-Hearn and Hannah Paasch) criticizes evangelical Christianity as a whole (e.g., churches, church-affiliated organizations, faith leaders) for cultivating, excusing, and normalizing misogyny, sexism, and sexual harassment, as well as sexual abuse (Paasch, 2017; Quackenbush, 2017). At the center of the co-founders' critique is their assertion that #ChurchToo experiences are inextricably intertwined with, and a direct result of, the teachings and ethos of purity culture. Allison-Hearn further develops this argument when she is quoted in a February 2019 article published by *The Guardian* (Hesse, 2019), which was devoted to explaining the then breaking news story of the Southern Baptist Convention's sexual abuse scandal:

People want to pretend that sexual shame and purity culture has nothing to do with abuse. It not only affects how the church responds to abuse, but it's the reason it happens in the first place. When you have a church that's mired in purity culture, you have a group of young, naive women who are primed to doubt themselves, to doubt their own intuition, to doubt their sense of their own autonomy. They're primed to listen to men, particularly spiritual men, above their own intuition. And then there's little sex education. They don't

know the word “consent.” All of this adds up to a big, flashing vacancy sign for predators.

As I demonstrate in Chapter 5, Dannah Gresh attempts to absolve herself of responsibility for the aforementioned allegations launched toward purity culture (via curated deflection) by: (1) showcasing her engagement with critics and critiques, (2) shifting blame to purity movement adherents, (3) dissociating herself and her efforts from the purity movement at large, (4) claiming certain issues are beyond her control, and (5) emphasizing her support for #MeToo activism. However, she employs yet another curatorially deflective technique to distance herself from the critiques issued by the #ChurchToo movement: #ChurchToo-focused radio silence.

In the results chapter of this dissertation (in a section titled “Engagement with #MeToo/#ChurchToo Hashtags”), I chronicle the instances in which Dannah Gresh uses her social media presence to overtly address the #MeToo and #ChurchToo movements. My findings reveal that, during the bound timeframe of this project (October 15, 2017, to December 31, 2018), Dannah Gresh explicitly referred to the #MeToo movement on her social media feeds a total of 15 times (Appendix F lists these instances in detail); however, not one time did she respond to or acknowledge #ChurchToo. Simply put, Dannah Gresh never publicly mentioned the #ChurchToo hashtag or movement by name. Because this project is an attempt to understand how purity movement leaders respond to critique and criticism, and because that which is not included within a communicative act is just as important as that which is included, I would be remiss not to consider the significance of Dannah Gresh’s curatorial deflection of #ChurchToo.

To this point in this project, I have only broadly noted the basic premise behind #ChurchToo—that Emily Joy Allison-Hearn and Hannah Paasch wished to identify Allison-Hearn’s experience with sexual abuse in a church context as something that was more than an

anomaly and to note their belief that purity culture was, and is, complicit. What I have not acknowledged is that the co-founders of #ChurchToo (Allison-Hearn and Paasch) publicly identify as bisexual. Emily Joy Allison-Hearn, in fact, tacitly notes (in a November 13, 2018, string of tweets) her belief that it was the gender-expansive and gender non-conforming status of the #ChurchToo co-founders (as well as their call for evangelical Christianity to interrogate heteropatriarchal white supremacist practices) that kept them from being invited to an evangelical summit on #ChurchToo (i.e., the GC2 Summit on #MeToo/#ChurchToo held at Wheaton College on December 13, 2018):²⁵

From the beginning @hannahpaasch and I have been clear that the #churchtoo movement lives and breathes outside of us. It has to for the work to be effective. Not only that but it only exists because of the work of @TaranaBurke and the #metoo movement, by which it was inspired. Local #churchtoo gatherings with small budgets who can't afford to fly organizers in from out of state are still important, and beyond that we are both busy people who don't have time for every conference, gathering, podcast and/or interview. That being said, the folks at this "GC2 Summit on #churchtoo" have plenty of money and no excuses, and they were never going to invite us anyway, let alone someone as fantastic and worthy as @TaranaBurke. This event is about trying to wrestle back control of the narrative and preserve the echo chamber of conservative white evangelical thought on human sexuality. #churchtoo Which is hilarious because for the first six months #churchtoo existed publications like Christianity Today and others did nothing but publish articles about "evangelicalism's #metoo moment" WITHOUT using the

²⁵ Journalist Ruth Graham (2018) notes that the GC2 Summit, heralded by *Christianity Today* as "the largest inter-denominational response to sex abuse since #MeToo took off...featured a series of influential evangelical leaders, though the hashtag's founders were not among them, [examining] how church leaders can respond to sexual harassment, assault, and violence."

#churchtoo tag because they were so petrified of us. Anyway, have fun planning this “summit on #churchtoo,” y’all. (Emily Joy, 2018)

Allison-Hearn asserts that in order for sexual abuse, assault, and coverups to end within the evangelical church, evangelical Christianity will need to address its theology—particularly, complementarian theology, forgiveness theology, and anti-LGBTQ theology:

Unfortunately, [evangelicals] are coming to this fight with both hands tied behind by their backs by their own theology... We’re saying evangelical theology is part of the problem here... It feels to us that they want to fix the problem using the ingredients of the problem. (Allison-Hearn, cited in Graham, 2019)

It is important to consider what is accomplished in the omission or avoidance (i.e., curatorial deflection) of explicitly #ChurchToo-focused conversations. In her acknowledgements of #MeToo, Dannah Gresh is able to simultaneously align herself as both an empathetic ally and an erudite critic of the movement. However, for her to acknowledge #ChurchToo would be an admission that there are intrinsic problems with traditional gender roles and with traditional evangelical Christian theologies. As Bullard (2018) puts it:

The fact that there are abusive leaders in the evangelical church is utterly, unremarkably unsurprising. Where there are men in power, there will be men abusing it. What separates #ChurchToo from #MeToo are the power dynamics (at the intersections of gender, race, and sexuality) entrenched in evangelical purity culture, a sex-obsessed, white Christian moralism. #ChurchToo, like #MeToo, is concerned with calling out abusers and culling them from positions of power. It also echoes #MeToo in what it asks of society (and, respectively, the evangelical church) as a whole. Namely, *How exactly did we get here?* and *How exactly do we address this?*

To recognize and grapple with the accusations of #ChurchToo would require an overhaul of theologically entrenched sexist, racist, homophobic, and transphobic ideologies. In other words, to take #ChurchToo seriously necessitates acknowledgement and affirmation of evangelical Christian sexual purity culture's complicity in instances of sexual abuse that arise within church contexts. Such an admission would undermine empires—rendering old and new materials and resources (that are in circulation and for sale) irrelevant and harmful. Thus, my study suggests that the employment of curated deflection can reveal an intention to not only suppress criticism but also maintain and support the status quo.

Superficial alterations and the primacy of brand over consumer. A third practical implication of my dissertation research is the revelation that surface-level changes (in response to critique and criticism) suggest that brand preservation is of paramount importance. While Dannah Gresh does appear responsive to some critiques, I suggest that the changes she enacts are mostly cosmetic in nature and that she does little to meaningfully address or acknowledge the aspects of her ministry that the #ChurchToo movement would deem as problematically endemic to purity culture. Recall that in her “Big Announcement Name-Change Reveal” via Facebook Live, the rebranding of her flagship ministry from Secret Keeper Girl to True Girl is situated as a significant alteration, but not too significant of an alteration: “the mission and vision will not be changing at all,” “Revive Our Hearts will bring us more notoriety,” and “we’re not really changing a lot, we’re just changing our name” (Secret Keeper Girl, 2019).

While the name change was framed as an act of “[coming] under the accountability of moms who follow us” (Gresh, 2018yy), the superficiality of the modification implies that Dannah Gresh has deeper concerns for on-message branding (i.e., empire growth and protection) than she has for significant consideration of whether the #ChurchToo allegations might prompt

meaningful, thoughtful, altruistic investment in the spiritual, emotional, and physical health of the women she identifies as her target audience.

Thus, in this dissertation research, I illustrate how parachurch organizations can position and market themselves to achieve both ideological and capital ends under the guise of care, concern, and responsiveness. Dannah Gresh emphasizes that she is “passionate about helping...women” (Dannah Gresh, 2019), but her communication conduct (e.g., the wholesale retention of her catalog of products and resources and their key messages, the promotion to a prominent leadership role in the True Woman Movement, the avoidance of #ChurchToo-related concerns as well as the #ChurchToo moniker, and the implementation of only surface-level changes to her content and programming) in the midst of a climate of critique and criticism indicates that her primary passion is the growth, “lift,” and “visibility” of her brand and brand affiliates. When changes that occur during a time of heightened critique and criticism yield only surface-level, brand-enhancing modifications, the tacit message is that the brand (i.e., the empire) is of paramount importance.

Limitations

Of course, as with any research endeavor, this study is constrained by some limitations. The first limitation of this project is that its data-gathering methods (ethnographic participant observation; an in-depth, semi-structured interview; analyses of blog posts, formal and informal speeches and interviews, social media posts, and several best-selling books) were applied solely to Dannah Gresh and her Pure Freedom Ministries’ efforts. As Ellingson (2009) observes in her explanation of the limitations of crystallized research, “crystallization involves a trade-off between breadth and depth...using crystallization enables an in-depth experience, but breadth often suffers” (p. 17). Indeed, while my data sources are diverse and numerous, this study’s

examination of the communication strategies of only one purity movement leader yields findings that are not necessarily generalizable to all contemporary evangelical Christian sexual purity leaders.

However, it is important to note that generalizability is not a goal of qualitative research. Indeed, Tracy (2010) acknowledges that “formal quantitative understandings of generalizability are generally unhelpful and [are] not applicable for qualitative research” (p. 845). Instead of aiming for generalizability, qualitative researchers should strive for “resonance,” which can “promote empathy, identification, and reverberation of the research by readers who have no direct experience with the topic discussed” (Tracy, 2010, p. 844). Lincoln and Guba (1985) assert that resonance, or “transferability,” can be achieved by using “thick description” (Geertz, 1973; Ryle, 1949) to describe a phenomenon with enough detail that one is capable of discerning the extent to which findings and conclusions might be transferable to other settings, situations, and individuals. This research project contributes to a deeper understanding of the communication patterns of a highly influential figure within the sexual purity movement whose teachings, approaches, and resources are utilized not only by a large number of lay followers, but also by other evangelical Christian sexual purity movement leaders. As is noted in Chapter 5, this inquiry reveals numerous mutually beneficial, synergistic relationships between Dannah Gresh and other evangelical Christian organizations and individuals. Of the organizations with an overtly sexual purity focus, two in particular (Girl Defined Ministries and Across My Heart Ministries) are quite public with their reliance on Dannah Gresh.²⁶ I suggest that my study of

²⁶ To illustrate, Dannah Gresh wrote official book jacket endorsements for two of Girl Defined Ministries’ published books (*Girl Defined: God’s Radical Design for Beauty, Femininity, and Identity*, 2016, and *Sex, Purity, and the Longings of a Girl’s Heart: Discovering the Beauty and Freedom of God-Defined Sexuality*, 2019) and the Girl Defined Ministries Facebook page contains Dannah Gresh quotations (e.g., “Admit it. You want to be desired! the question is, Will

Dannah Gresh and Pure Freedom Ministries holds transferable potential, offering a fuller (i.e., broader) picture by considering the level to which other sexual purity movement leaders' communication strategies align with and mirror those of Dannah Gresh.

A second limitation that bears acknowledgement centers around my employment of one research method in particular—the semi-structured interview. I secured and executed only one interview with Dannah Gresh, which was also attended by Bob Gresh, as well as their Secret Keeper Girl brand manager. That interview, though certainly enhanced by the additional voices and perspectives, was also influenced by those voices and perspectives. While the presence of multiple perspectives in one interview is not necessarily a detriment to my study [Eisikovits and Koren (2010) note that “although the best-quality data can be collected from individual members..., dyadic [or even group] analysis holds much promise for deepening and broadening the content, as well as for trustworthiness” (p. 1642)], were I to plan this research project again, I would attempt to secure at least a second interview alone with Dannah Gresh so as to clarify any unclear concepts or ideas and to allow her the freedom to answer my follow-up or restated questions without the pressure of performing for (and with)—or being interrupted by—her ministry partners.

Also relevant to the semi-structured interview completed for this study, I must note that this was the very first research-oriented interview that I conducted. Though the data gleaned from the interview are rich, complex, and full of insights that are relevant to the research

you be desired by guys looking for cheap thrill in their minds, or will you be romantically and passionately pursued because your modesty demands it?” *Girl Defined*, 2013). Similarly, *Across My Heart Ministries* frequently post links on Facebook, referring to Dannah Gresh's content and ideas. In fact, they attended the Pure Freedom Master Class in June 2018, and mentioned in a Facebook post their excitement about learning from someone whose content has impacted their own teachings: “Inspired by Dannah Gresh and the truth she so beautifully articulates!! It's been awesome to meet her and learn from her in person. So much of what she's written influenced our purity retreats and our perspective on holistic purity” (*Across My Heart Ministries*, 2018).

question guiding this project, my limited experience in executing this method of data collection is apparent (1) in my somewhat less-than-sophisticated and sometimes unnecessary interjections of personal information (e.g., at one point in a complete non sequitur move, I interrupted Bob Gresh's thoughts about the #MeToo movement to discuss my then four-year-old son's fascination with the use of knives by the Kakamora pirates in the Disney movie *Moana*) and (2) in my rather verbose, rambling, and convoluted way of sometimes stating questions. To illustrate the latter, when I posed my first real question of the interview, I used a total of six sentences and multiple questions to kick it off:

So really at the heart of—and this is a question that I have envisioned really kind of being the question to lead up to—but the question is, “Can you talk about critiques that people make against the pursuit of a lifestyle of purity, and whether or not there are specific things that they say to speak out against the idea of purity and modesty?” And the hard-hitting question, that I don't think you're going to find so hard-hitting after sitting in our sessions is your estimation about how [the] #MeToo or #ChurchToo critiques impact the momentum of the purity movement. Let's start with the first one. That's a little bit more in with the lead up, right? So, can you talk about some of the critiques that you know are out there, [that] you're reading? Like Christine Gardner's book, or I'm not sure who else you're familiar with that's academic or maybe more in the popular culture right now.

This lengthy and meandering introduction to the interview (lacking in precision and clarity), gives evidence that I could have been better prepared, better rehearsed, and more committed to brevity in order to facilitate a smoother and more focused session. It also assists me in recognizing my complicity in an instance in which Dannah Gresh seemed to dodge a question central to this study. It would have been wise for me to internalize Dilley's (2000) admonition to

begin the interview by “putting the respondent at ease...[by] demonstrating [my] preparedness...with an easy-to-answer [first question]” (p. 133). Thankfully, the transcript and recording reveal that, as the interview proceeded, I progressively engaged in more self-reflexive practices by asking more clearly stated questions, listening for longer periods of time, and “offer[ing] information [only] to prompt reflection, clarification, or further explication” (Dilley, 2000, p. 134).

Another limitation of this project is located in my personal and emotional connection to the topic at hand. As is evidenced in this dissertation’s dedication (see p. iv) and in Chapter 2 (“Autoethnographic Context and Literature Review”), I am drawn to this topic as one who is concerned with, and dubious about the ends and means of, evangelical Christian sexual purity efforts. However, Deetz (1992) asserts that a positivist “immaculate perception” is elusive and “philosophically unsound,” insinuating that values, beliefs, experiences, and biases cannot be divorced from a researcher’s project conceptualization, data collection, and analysis (p. 148). In fact, by acknowledging my experiences, “assumptions, beliefs, and biases” early and reflexively in this dissertation project, I attempted to enhance my study’s validity through reflection “on the social, cultural, and historical forces that [shaped and continue to shape my] interpretation” (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 127). Likewise, my employment of a crystallized methodology (a type of methodological triangulation) steeped in “thick, rich description” serves as a “validity [enhancing] procedure” (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 129).

A final limitation requiring acknowledgement is the manner in which my presence and participation at the Pure Freedom Master Class impacted the data that Dannah Gresh generated. As I indicate in Chapter 5, Dannah Gresh’s heightened awareness of my topic, and of my focus on her ministry, seemed to instigate a short-term burst of social media activity in which she drew

special attention to her knowledge of #MeToo-related issues and connected them to her affiliation with sexual abuse/sexual assault awareness advocate Nicole Braddock Bromley. Indeed, I note that in one such instance, Dannah Gresh even mentioned me by name [“This weekend God used a new friend (Christine) to ask me: how are you using your influence...,” Gresh, 2018t]. Emerson et al. (1995) recognize that participant observers (regardless of how unobtrusive the ethnographer role type they assume) will, in some way, impact those who are being studied. This “consequential presence” is a phenomenon Clarke (1975) explains that ethnographers should anticipate, understanding that their presence will in some way influence the ways that participants communicate. While more objectivist approaches to research view researcher involvement as a detriment to, or a “contaminant” of, the data, Emerson et al. (1995) contend these points of impact and influence have the potential to serve as the locus of “learning and observation” (p. 3):

Hence, rather than detracting from what the fieldworker can learn, firsthand relations with those studied might provide clues to understanding more subtle, implicit underlying assumptions that are often not readily accessible through observation or interview methods alone. Consequently, rather than viewing reactivity as a defect to be carefully controlled or eliminated, the ethnographer needs to become sensitive to, and perceptive about, how she is seen and treated by others. (Emerson et al., 1995, p. 4)

Though my “consequential presence” certainly influenced Dannah Gresh’s communication choices and activities, my observations of how she publicly utilized her affiliation with Nicole Braddock Bromley (as well as her affiliation with me) afford penetrating insight into ways in which Dannah Gresh curates deflection to absolve herself of the ills associated with purity culture.

Recommendations for Future Research

Certainly, the data examined in this dissertation project are rife with possibility for unearthing communication-related insights beyond what is rendered within these pages. Indeed, the findings documented in my dissertation research provide a springboard from which to generate and consider additional opportunities for future research. Specific to Dannah Gresh and her Pure Freedom Ministries, one might explore the distinct strategies she uses to situate the Revive Our Hearts True Womanhood version of biblical womanhood as desirable, appropriate, and worthy of pursuit. Research questions might include: (1) How does Dannah Gresh use her personal brand (as well as the brands to which she is synergistically tied) to simultaneously challenge and reinforce gender essentialized norms?, (2) In her role as a prominent evangelical leader, how does Dannah Gresh both challenge and reinforce notions of how ideal biblical womanhood should be defined, practiced, implemented, and enacted?, (3) How does Dannah Gresh contribute to, or deviate from, broader conversations that encourage evangelical Christians to engage in the negative framing of public education?, and (4) How does Dannah Gresh's treatment of forgiveness (touted in blog posts and in her Pure Freedom Master Class curriculum as an essential component in the process of healing from "sexual pain") contribute to a communication climate in which victims of sexual abuse are expected to accept responsibility while perpetrators of sexual abuse are shielded from accountability?

Beyond Dannah Gresh and her Pure Freedom Ministries, it would benefit the current body of scholarship if future research projects were to examine how the findings and implications of this study (a first of its kind to investigate a purity movement leader's response to critique and criticism) might be applied when considering *other* purity movement leaders' communication strategies as *they* navigate communication climates of objection and

denunciation. Such a study might explore sexual abstinence-focused organizations' tendency to maintain distance from the purity movement proper by asserting that it (the movement) is over, passé, and no longer in operation. As is observed in the previous chapter (Chapter 5) of this dissertation, one of Dannah Gresh's curatorially deflective tactics is to dissociate from the purity movement at large. Similarly, other evangelical sexual purity leaders (e.g., Across My Heart Ministries, Phylcia Masonheimer, Girl Defined Ministries) seem to rely on a narrative indicating that: the purity movement of the past was problematic, it caused a great deal of damage, it is no longer in operation, and it is distinctly different from the efforts in which they are currently engaged. Future studies might consider ways in which these sexual purity leaders are attempting to craft a new, differentiated kind of sexual purity movement and whether it is, in fact, incommensurate with former manifestations.

Additional questions for future consideration might include: (1) Who benefits most (least) from the employment of the Framework of Strategic Curation and the narratives found within?, (2) Why might followers of Dannah Gresh (and followers of other purity movement leaders) who are privy to problematic issues inherent within purity culture messages continue to be invested in purity culture efforts?, (3) Why, if Dannah Gresh and other sexual purity leaders indicate that their endeavors are different from others within the purity movement, do they continue to affiliate with purity culture and purity messaging? Questions such as these, as well as the suggestions for future research considered above, give testament to the cyclical, unending nature of research, and they remind us that no one study can unearth all there is to uncover about a single phenomenon.

Conclusion

This multimethod crystallized project identified and examined the dominant strategies

employed by a prominent evangelical Christian sexual purity movement leader during a time of heightened critique and criticism. Results revealed the shrewd employment of a complex system (i.e., a Framework of Strategic Curation) that Dannah Gresh uses to stabilize perceptions of viability and correctness in the midst of a threatening communication climate. This study contributed to theoretical and practical understandings of brand maintenance tactics employed during a time of a communication crisis. The findings from this research reveal the importance of developing and maintaining awareness of not only how communication strategies can be used to obscure and conceal problematic messages, but also how problematic messages can be obscured and concealed for the purpose of profit (e.g., brand maintenance and brand expansion) and for the purpose of elevating, strengthening, and growing organizations committed to problematic ideological ends (in the case of this study, Pure Freedom Ministries and Revive Our Hearts Ministries, which are devoted to the propagation of patriarchal practices and to the disparagement of feminist efforts and aims).

While this study calls for more research in order to develop a more comprehensive scholarly understanding of how contemporary sexual purity movement leaders navigate critique and criticism, in this dissertation project, I initiated the process of filling a void where no such research currently exists. Additionally, this scholarly investigation illuminates the potential power of religious communication and the personae of those who employ it. This study's findings, and its results, demonstrate the importance of consistent and vigilant monitoring of the political, social, and capital objectives of all strategic communication, but especially communication that is religious in nature and that is crafted during a time when certain teachings are under scrutiny and when those teachings' objectives are being questioned.

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Dj9Eosles0Y9qU0qMCTdDutyhw0uN6GPZyEWPfTKwshIWKU9S0VssE1LYwldFr&
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APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL



Date: June 5, 2018

TO: Christine Crouse Dick, (cecd@ku.edu)

FROM: Jocelyn Isley, MS, CIP, IRB Administrator (785-864-7385, irb@ku.edu)

RE: **Approval of Initial Study**

The IRB reviewed the submission referenced below on 6/5/2018. The IRB approved the protocol, effective 6/5/2018.

| IRB Action: APPROVED | | Effective date: 6/5/2018 | Expiration Date : N/A |
|-----------------------------|---|---------------------------------|------------------------------|
| STUDY DETAILS | | | |
| Investigator: | Christine Crouse Dick | | |
| IRB ID: | STUDY00142601 | | |
| Title of Study: | Examining Evangelical Purity Leaders' Responses to #MeToo and #ChurchToo | | |
| Funding ID: | None | | |
| REVIEW INFORMATION | | | |
| Review Type: | Initial Study | | |
| Review Date: | 6/5/2018 | | |
| Documents Reviewed: | • Crouse-Dick_Email_Script.pdf, • Crouse-Dick_Human_Subjects-2018.pdf, • Crouse-Dick_Informed_Consent.pdf, • Crouse-Dick_Informed_Consent_REVISED.pdf, • Crouse-Dick_Interview_Protocol.pdf | | |
| Exemption Determination: | • (2) Tests, surveys, interviews, or observation | | |
| Additional Information: | | | |

KEY PROCEDURES AND GUIDELINES. Consult our website for additional information.

- Approved Consent Form:** You must use the final, watermarked version of the consent form, available under the “Documents” tab, “Final” column, in eCompliance. Participants must be given a copy of the form.
- Continuing Review and Study Closure:** Continuing Review is not required for this study. Please [close your study](#) at completion.
- Modifications:** Modifications to the study may affect Exempt status and must be submitted for review and approval before implementing changes. For more information on the types of modifications that require IRB review and approval, [visit our website](#).
- Add Study Team Member:** [Complete a study team modification](#) if you need to add investigators not named in original application. Note that new investigators must take [the online tutorial](#) prior to being approved to work on the project.
- Data Security:** [University data security and handling requirements](#) apply to your project.
- Submit a Report of New Information (RNI):** If a subject is injured in the course of the research procedure or there is a breach of participant information, an RNI must be submitted immediately. Potential non-compliance may also be reported through the RNI process.
- Consent Records:** When signed consent documents are required, the primary investigator must retain the signed consent documents for at least three years past completion of the research activity.
- Study Records** must be kept a minimum of three years after the completion of the research. Funding agencies may have retention requirements that exceed three years.

APPENDIX B: EMAIL RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

Project: Examining Evangelical Purity Leaders' Responses to #MeToo and #ChurchToo

Researcher: Christine E. Crouse-Dick, Department of Communication Studies

Contact Information: cecd@ku.edu

Dear <name of purity leader>,

My name is Christine Crouse-Dick and I am conducting a study about the purity movement. My dissertation research focuses on various communication-related aspects of how modesty and purity are taught. One area in which I am particularly interested is the way in which movement leaders (like yourself) navigate critiques that are consistently and persistently launched against the purity movement as a whole. While I have immersed myself in the texts you have produced as well as the various messages that materialize through your ministry in public spaces (e.g., interviews, guest appearances, YouTube-preserved speaking engagements, and so forth), I am interested in observing your ministry in person.

I plan to attend your <name of purity event> on <date of purity event> at <location of purity event>. I want to assure you that I will not interfere with your programming, and that I have no intention to do anything but learn. In addition to notifying you that I will be present at your event, I am writing to you directly to inquire whether you would be willing to set aside time to meet for a brief interview. I know that you are incredibly busy, however, because I am familiar with the scholarly literature and the goings on within the movement, I also know that you have a history of giving interviews to scholars and so I wanted to offer you the opportunity to be interviewed for this current project.

Thank you for considering my request.

Sincerely,

Christine E. Crouse-Dick

P.S. Should this mode of communication not be the channel through which you would prefer to communicate, please feel free to contact me via cell phone at 316-841-8144.

APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

Project: Examining Evangelical Purity Leaders' Responses to #MeToo and #ChurchToo

Researcher: Christine E. Crouse-Dick, Department of Communication Studies

Contact Information: cecd@ku.edu

INTRODUCTION

The Department of Communication Studies at the University of Kansas supports the practice of protection for human subjects participating in research. The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. You may refuse to sign this form, and not participate in this study. You should be aware that even if you agree to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to explore how, and to what extent, leaders in the evangelical Christian purity movement are changing, shifting, or retaining communication strategies in light of the critiques that are emerging from #MeToo and #ChurchToo. Using a qualitative approach, I will analyze whether and how language may be shifting in light of growing evidence that shows purity culture is a factor in faith-based contexts. To accomplish this, I am attending purity-focused events and I am interviewing event organizers as well as participants who consider themselves leaders in the purity movement.

PROCEDURES

You will be asked to participate in a 45-60 minute interview. All interviews will be recorded using an audio-recording device. You may still participate in the study if you do not wish to have your interview recorded. These audio recordings will be transcribed onto paper by the researcher. All recordings and transcriptions will be protected on a password-guarded computer in a locked office. Your name will be replaced with a pseudonym in all transcripts and any subsequent publications.

RISKS

There will be no more risk than incurred during conversations about this topic during everyday life. There is a slight risk that participants will be identifiable. The audio recordings increase the risk of being identified. The researchers will do everything to protect your confidentiality.

BENEFITS

By participating in this study, you are helping benefit the field of communication studies by contributing to the volume of knowledge on the purity movement. We believe this research is especially valuable as it helps contribute to a greater social conversation on communication strategies of church leaders.

PAYMENT TO PARTICIPANTS

There is no monetary compensation for this study.

PARTICIPANT CONFIDENTIALITY

Your name will not be associated in any publication or presentation with the information collected about you or with the research findings from this study. Instead, the researcher(s) will use a study number or a pseudonym rather than your name. Your identifiable information will not be shared unless (a) it is required by law or university policy or (b) you give written permission.

All data from this study will be kept until January 2024, at which time it will be destroyed. Permission granted on this date to use and disclose your information remains in effect indefinitely. By signing this form you give permission for the use and disclosure of your information for purposes of this study at any time in the future.

INSTITUTIONAL DISCLAIMER STATEMENT

In the event of injury, the Kansas Tort Claims Act provides for compensation if it can be demonstrated that the injury was caused by the negligent or wrongful act or omission of a state employee acting within the scope of his/her employment.

REFUSAL TO SIGN CONSENT AND AUTHORIZATION

You are not required to sign this consent and authorization form and you may refuse to do so without affecting your right to any services you are receiving or may receive from the University of Kansas or to participate in any programs or events of the University of Kansas. However, if you refuse to sign, you cannot participate in this study.

CANCELLING THIS CONSENT AND AUTHORIZATION

You may withdraw your consent to participate in this study at any time. You also have the right to cancel your permission to use and disclose further information collected about you, in writing, at any time, by sending your written request to: Christine E. Crouse-Dick, 1440 Jayhawk Blvd., Bailey 102, Lawrence, KS 66045.

If you cancel permission to use your information, the researchers will stop collecting additional information about you. However, the research team may use and disclose information that was gathered before they received your cancellation, as described above.

QUESTIONS ABOUT PARTICIPATION

Questions about procedures should be directed to the researcher(s) listed at the end of this consent form.

PARTICIPANT CERTIFICATION

I have read this consent and authorization form. I have had the opportunity to ask, and I have received answers to, any questions I had regarding the study. I understand that if I have any additional questions about my rights as a research participant, I may call (785) 864-7429, write the Human Research Protection Program (HRPP), University of Kansas, 2385 Irving Hill Road, Lawrence, Kansas 66045-7568, or email irb@ku.edu.

I agree to take part in this study as a research participant. By my signature I affirm that I am at least 18 years old and that I have received a copy of this consent and authorization form.

Type/Print Participant's Name

Date

Participant's Signature

RESEARCHER CONTACT INFORMATION

Christine E. Crouse-Dick
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APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Project: Examining Evangelical Purity Leaders' Responses to #MeToo and #ChurchToo

Researcher: Christine E. Crouse-Dick, Department of Communication Studies

Contact Information: cecd@ku.edu

Script/Opening Conversation: My name is Christine Crouse-Dick and, as you know, I am conducting a study about the impact of #MeToo and #ChurchToo on the purity movement. In this interview, I am going to ask you a few questions about your involvement in the movement and your observations about the ways purity teachings have (or have not) changed over time. You should know that **there are NO right or wrong answers** (just your opinions). Let's start by talking about your beliefs about, and your specific role in, teaching about purity.

Rapport Questions and Role in the Movement

- Tell me a little bit about yourself. What is your church background?
- What is purity, in your view? What is the purity movement, in your view?
- How did you get involved with the purity movement? What motivated you to get involved? Why do you continue to remain involved?
- Why is the purity movement important to you?
- How long have you been involved with teaching about purity?
- Can you tell me about the role or the roles you play in teaching about purity?
- Are you a Bible study leader, a Sunday school teacher, a pastor, a youth pastor, or simply a supporter of the movement? How did you become involved in this role (these roles)?
- What is your connection to <name of event, name of organizations endorsing the event, or leaders of event we are attending> ?

Teachings of the Movement

- How did you learn about <the leader/s whose event we are attending> and their approach to teaching purity?
- For you, what do typical lessons/teachings about purity involve? What is essential in this discussion? Modesty? Virginity?
- What does modesty/purity/virginity look like? What does a "lack of modesty/purity/virginity" look like?
- What makes these concepts so important? What is at stake?

Teachings of the Movement continued

- What is the primary problem for which purity is the solution?
- What can a “pure” person do that an “un-pure” person cannot do? Can an “un-pure” person become “pure?”
- What kind of space is there in the movement for people who have not embraced purity teachings?
- What does it mean if someone denies (or goes against) purity teachings?

Critiques of the Movement and Subsequent Changes

- Can you talk about critiques that people make against the pursuit of a lifestyle of purity? Are there specific things that people say to speak out against the idea of purity/modesty/virginity?
- How do you respond to these critiques? What types of things do you typically say in response? Do you think what you say is effective? Why or why not?
- How have you observed <the leader/s whose event we are attending> saying things about the critiques? Do you think what they say is effective?
- In your estimation, how do #MeToo or #ChurchToo critiques impact the momentum of the purity movement?
- Is the purity message changing? If so, how is it changing? If not, why not? Does the purity message need to change?
- Are the critiques of the purity movement valid in your estimation?
- For at least 15 years now, studies have been used to question the wisdom of abstinence-before marriage and abstinence-only teachings. Why continue to promote purity despite the critiques of the wisdom of abstinence-before marriage and abstinence-only teachings?
- Can you explain to me how you define and understand feminism?
- What does it mean to be a feminist, in your view?
- Can you be a feminist and still embrace the purity movement?
- Do you think feminism is a threat to the central message of the purity movement? How? Why?
- Do you yourself have any critiques of or reservations about the purity movement or about common purity teachings?

Script/Closing Conversation: Those are all of my questions. Is there anything else you would like to add? Is there anything you feel is important that I may have overlooked?

Thank you so much for your time. [During our interview, you mentioned XXXX. Would it be possible for me to get their contact information so I can see if they would be interested in being interviewed? May I use your name so they know how I obtained their contact information?]

To reiterate, there will be no personal identifiers in the data, so all of your answers are confidential. If I have any further questions, may I contact you for clarification if needed? If so, what is the best way to contact you?

Great! Again, thank you for all your help! I really appreciate it!

APPENDIX E: BLOG POST CATALOG

Below are the publication dates and titles of all blog posts examined for this dissertation project. The titles falling within the shaded areas were originally published between October 15, 2017, and December 31, 2018, the period I bracketed in order to bind my data gathering processes. However, Dannah Gresh and her team often use older blog posts to drive traffic to her sites. The titles which do not fall in the shaded areas were reposted to Dannah Gresh’s official social media feeds or via Secret Keeper Girl social media feeds between the dates during which data for analysis was gathered.

| PURE FREEDOM BLOG POSTS | | SECRET KEEPER GIRL BLOG POSTS | |
|-------------------------|---|-------------------------------|---|
| Original Post Date | Post Title | Original Post Date | Post Title |
| 6/20/18 | A Modern Understanding of Ancient Truths | 12/7/18 | Secret Keeper Girl Christmas Gift Guide |
| 6/16/18 | The Master Artist’s Design for Sex | 12/6/18 | How to Talk to Your Daughter about Social Media |
| 6/14/18 | Your Brain on Sex | 8/29/18 | How to Avoid an Awkward Car Ride |
| 6/14/18 | How to “Win” When Working with Communities | 7/13/18 | Three Truths About Creativity |
| 3/6/18 | Lies Young Women Believe: What I Do Now Doesn’t Affect the Future | 6/16/18 | The Master Artist’s Design For Sex |
| 2/27/18 | Lies Young Women Believe: I Can’t Handle the Loneliness of Staying Pure | 12/12/17 | Missionary Sherri’s Warm Mango Muffins |
| 2/20/18 | Lies Young Women Believe: God is Not Enough | 10/31/17 | The High Price Tag of Immodesty |
| 2/13/18 | Lies Young Women Believe: How We are Deceived by Satan’s Lies | 10/10/17 | Ten of the Best Resources to Talk to Your Kids about Sex |
| 2/5/18 | Lies Young Women Believe: And the Truth that Sets them Free | 10/10/17 | The Number One Way to Reduce the Risk of an Early Sexual Debut |
| 11/16/16 | Celebrities Before & After Photoshop | 9/26/17 | The Two Most Important Things You Can Teach Your Kids About Sex |
| 10/23/15 | Love Feast Day #10: Get Lost In His Proposal | 9/18/17 | Five Ways to Protect Her Heart from Future Sexual Pain |
| 10/23/15 | Love Feast Day #9: Get Lost In His Sacrifice | 6/28/17 | This is Your Daughter’s Brain on Fiction |
| 10/23/15 | Love Feast Day #8: Ge Lost In His Story | 5/22/17 | How Do I Talk to My Daughter About Her First Bra? |
| 10/23/15 | Love Feast Day #7: Get Lost In His Exclusive Love | 5/12/17 | To Sleep Over or to Not Sleep Over—That is the Question |
| 10/23/15 | Love Feast Day #6: Get Lost In His Friendship | 3/2/17 | Five Ways to Fight-Free Prom Dress Shopping |
| 10/23/15 | Love Feast Day #5: Get Lost In His Strength | 2/28/17 | Eight Great Modest Swimsuit Websites |
| 10/23/15 | Love Feast Day #4: Get Lost In His Intimacy | 2/27/17 | How Do I Talk to My Daughter About Disappointment? |
| 10/23/15 | Love Feast Day #3: Get Lost In His Words | 4/30/15 | Mother/Daughter Date: CHOCOLATE OVERLOAD |
| 10/23/15 | Love Feast Day #2: Get Lost In His Pursuit | 4/19/15 | How to Talk to Your Daughter About Mood Swings |
| 10/23/15 | Love Feast Day #1 | 12/11/14 | How Do I Talk to My Daughter About Having a Healthy BODY IMAGE? |
| 6/8/15 | ¿Cuando esta mi hija lista para tener un celular? Parte 1 | 11/21/14 | Love Feast Day #9: Get Lost In His Sacrifice |

| | | | |
|----------|---|----------|--|
| 12/30/14 | Should We Stop Using The Word "Purity"? | 9/10/14 | Devos for Moms Day 4 [Praying Over Our Children's Future] |
| 12/23/14 | Was Mary a Virgin? | 9/9/14 | Devos for Moms Day 3 [Praying Blessing Over Your Child's Gender] |
| 12/9/14 | Single Girl, Pick Your Fight! [VIDEO] | 9/9/14 | Devos for Moms Day 2 [Praying God's Purpose for Our Children] |
| 4/10/14 | Single Desire: How Can I Be Sexually Alive? | 9/5/14 | Devos for Moms Day 1 [Praying Peace for Our Children] |
| 3/7/14 | How Can I Satisfy My Sexual Desire If I'm Destined For Singleness | 8/5/14 | Cheerios Debunks Fatherhood Myths Perpetuated By Media |
| 1/18/14 | Is It OK To Sleep Over at My Boyfriend's? | 6/3/14 | How Do I Talk to My Daughter About GOALS? |
| | | 4/29/14 | How Do I Talk to My Daughter About Shaving Her Legs? |
| | | 4/21/14 | How Do I Talk to My Daughter About Anorexia? |
| | | 4/1/14 | How Do I Talk to My Daughter About Being Boy Crazy? |
| | | 2/10/14 | "How To" for Dads: Dating |
| | | 12/20/13 | Christmas Devos Day 5: You are Treasured |
| | | 12/19/13 | Christmas Devos Day 4: You are Wrapped in Love |
| | | 12/18/13 | Christmas Devos Day 3: You Get to Choose Joy |
| | | 12/17/13 | Christmas Devos Day 2: You are Blessed |
| | | 12/16/13 | Christmas Devos Day 1: You're Not Alone |
| | | 9/27/13 | How Do I Talk to My Daughter About Halloween Costumes? |
| | | 4/15/13 | How Do I Talk to My Daughter About DATING? |
| | | 4/15/13 | How Do I Talk to My Daughter About SEXTING? |
| | | 4/1/13 | A Modest Proposal For My Critics |

APPENDIX F: INSTANCES OF #METOO HASHTAG USAGE

Below are the posting dates and content of the 15 times Dannah Gresh used the #MeToo hashtag in social media posts between October 15, 2017, and December 31, 2018.

| Date Posted | Medium Used | Featured Content | Comment |
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| 10/17/17 | Facebook | None (cross posted on Twitter) | A big hats off to Moody Radio's The Morning Wake Up Call for talking with me live this am about #MeToo! I have been thinking, Jesus would have been the first to defend these women. He drew a line in the sand in front of a woman who was about to be stoned. He talked with a woman at a well whom no one else would. His regard for women was always respectful and protective. Christians should be the first to the conversation. And I was so proud of this conversation! So proud!!!! Since I said this publicly on air, I should say it here. I explained how often I have spoken to a friend about this whole thing and that I have some experience with it, though so minor compared to what many have known. I want to say this carefully because the challenge of the hashtag is that there are also a lot of very GOOD men out there. And I get concerned when some women categorize all men into Weinsteins. They aren't! But...here goes...#MeToo. I was in appropriately touched day after day in the hall of my public school in middle school by the same boy who waited for me each day. When I finally got the courage to tell someone, I didn't find help. The public school's guidance counselor's solution? "Try walking down a different hall." Then again as a young professional an older man made an advance, but when I refused he treated me like I was misreading it...only to call me inebriated later and say shamefully inappropriate things to me. My experiences are mild but I can say they caused no small amount of confusion and should never ever have happened. The real strength of men is found in the integrity of self-control and rising up to protect a woman. |
| 10/17/17 | Twitter | Link to her Facebook post with identical and expanded commentary | A big hats off to Moody Radio's The Morning Wake Up Call for talking with me live this am about #MeToo. I have... |
| 10/21/17 | Twitter | Christianity Today article entitled "The Unsettling Truth Behind the #MeToo Movement" | @CT_women 's @sometimesalight, you made me squirm a bit, but I like where you landed on #MeToo |
| 10/30/17 | Facebook | None | While the viral hashtag #MeToo opens up a dialogue concerning the crisis of respect for women, the final installment of Fifty Shades of Grey is prepped to release in theaters February 9th...and women are celebrating it. Does anyone else find this ironic? |
| 10/30/17 | Twitter | Link to her Facebook post with identical and expanded commentary | While the viral hashtag #MeToo opens up a dialogue concerning the crisis of respect for women, the final... |
| 12/11/17 | Facebook | None | In another #MeToo world, Joseph demonstrated God's heart. He stood with the girl we know as Mary. |
| 1/15/18 | Facebook | Link to New York | Well, it's another step in the right direction. |

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| | | Times article entitled "Airbrushing Meets the #MeToo Movement. Guess Who Wins." | |
| 2/8/18 | Facebook | Link to fightthenewdrug.org article entitled "8 Things The 'Fifty Shades' Trilogy Teaches About Sex and Relationships" | Tonight I walked by a theater with my man and we decided on a whim to see what was playing. The only thing starting just then was Fifty Shades Freed. We left, but I was so sad to see how many people were in line to buy tickets. With the current #MeToo conversation, I find it so contradictory that people are excited about this movie. There's no such thing as sexy abuse. It's all just abuse! |
| 2/8/18 | Facebook | Link to Revive Our Hearts episode on which Dannah Gresh appears with Nancy DeMoss Wolgemuth discussing "The Truth about Sexuality" (cross posted on Twitter) | "I can't understand why there is a #MeToo campaign that everybody's excited about and at the very same time many women across the nation are celebrating the release of Fifty Shades of Grey, the third movie in the trilogy. This seems like a horrible disconnect to me." Today on Revive Our Hearts |
| 2/8/18 | Twitter | Link to Revive Our Hearts episode on which Dannah Gresh appears with Nancy DeMoss Wolgemuth discussing "The Truth about Sexuality" (cross posted on Facebook) | "I can't understand why there is a #MeToo campaign that everybody's excited about and at the very same time many..." |
| 5/23/18 | Facebook | Albert Mohler blog post entitled "The Wrath of God Poured Out: The Humiliation of the Southern Baptist Convention" (cross posted on Twitter) | Do you think God is purifying His Church? I'm thankful for men like Albert Mohler who has the guts to speak truth in hard circumstances. #MeToomovement has given voices courage to speak up, and given leaders backbone to do the right thing when they do. |
| 5/23/18 | Twitter | Albert Mohler blog post entitled "The Wrath of God Poured Out: The Humiliation of the Southern Baptist Convention" (cross posted on Facebook) | Do you think God is purifying His Church? I'm thankful for men like Albert Mohler who has the guts to speak truth in hard circumstances. #MeToomovement has given voices courage to speak up, and given leaders backbone to do the right thing when they do. |
| 6/17/18 | Twitter | None | @Nicole_Bromley For a long time you were #OneVoice but I see God using #MeToo to create a choir to sing songs of healing! |
| 7/4/18 | Facebook | Link to <i>The Weekly Standard</i> article by | "As anyone following events can see, the ongoing sex scandals that gave rise to MeToo are more than just placeholders in the |

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| | | Mary Eberstadt entitled “A Time of Reckoning: MeToo is a Direct Result of the Sexual Revolution” (cross posted on Twitter) | news cycle. They reveal a shift in the cultural plates of the last half-century.” |
| 7/4/18 | Twitter | Link to <i>The Weekly Standard</i> article by Mary Eberstadt entitled “A Time of Reckoning: MeToo is a Direct Result of the Sexual Revolution” (cross posted on Facebook) | “As anyone following events can see, the ongoing sex scandals that gave rise to MeToo are more than just placeholders in the news cycle. They reveal a shift in the cultural plates of the last half-century.” |