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Current sex education curriculum focuses on pregnancy and disease, but very little of the curriculum addresses the social, emotional, or moral elements. Christian churches have made strides over the last two decades to design an abstinence curriculum that contains a moral strand, which addresses spiritual, mental, social, and emotional challenges of premarital sex for youth and singles. However, many black churches appear to be challenged in four areas: *existence, purpose, developmental process, and content of teaching tools* as it relates to abstinence curriculum.

Existence refers to whether or not a church body deems it necessary or has the available resources to implement an abstinence curriculum. *Purpose* refers to the overall goals and motivations used to persuade youth and singles. *Developmental process* describes communicative power dynamics that influence the recognized voices at the decision-making table when designing a curriculum. Finally, *content of teaching tools* refers to prevailing white middle class messages found in Christian inspirational abstinence texts whose cultural irrelevance creates a barrier in what should be a relevant message for any population.

The first component of the research answers the question of why the focus should be black churches by exploring historical and contemporary distinctions of black sexuality among youth and single populations. The historical and contemporary

distinctions are followed by an exploration of how the history of black church development influenced power dynamics, which in turn affects the freedom with which black Christian communities communicate about sexuality in the church setting. Thirdly, there is an assessment of the intersection of church pedagogy with prevailing SES of mega versus small-independent black churches, and how that intersection molds and shapes the purpose of abstinence education in particular church settings. I explore communicative power dynamics as presented in Mark Orbe's (1998) co-cultural theory to assess the impact that contextual identity plays in black church settings, which directly affects the variation of voices that influence curriculum development. Finally, the issues of race, class, and gender and their relationship to the availability and consumption of Christian inspirational texts on the topic of abstinence via political economy is presented.

My analysis focuses on interviews from five ministers, who served as youth, singles, or college pastors North Carolina. A combination of narrative (Casey, 1993), co-cultural, and qualitative content analysis methodologies were used in the research. Using narrative methodologies, assess for inter-textuality, silence, selectivity, and slippage. Co cultural methodologies guide my assessment of communicative orientations and practices that influenced the participants' approach to abstinence curriculum development. Finally, I use qualitative content analysis methodologies to decode messages that depicted messages of race, class, or gender in the content of Christian inspirational abstinence texts. An overwhelming presence of nonassertive

separation and assimilation discourse was reported in the ministers' narratives in reference to leadership and parental roles in developing curriculum. Other prevailing orientations were aggressive separation and assimilation in the early experiences of the participants pre-ministry, as well as for the youth and singles who they currently serve. The qualitative content analysis revealed that prevailing messages of race, class, and gender which marginalize readers.

The implications of the research are that black churches have to work diligently to create a curriculum that recognizes the voice of the sexually active teens in their congregation, as well as to encourage parents to contribute to the process of teaching abstinence away from the church. Additionally, Christian authors, both black and white, must be careful not to overlook the opportunity to consider the multiple sexual experiences from a multi-ethnic/cultural perspective. A broadening of the currently narrow space of imagery and discourse in texts may reach and influence otherwise marginalized readers.

ABSTINENCE CURRICULUM IN BLACK CHURCHES: A CRITICAL EXAMINATION
OF THE INTERSECTIONALITY OF RACE, GENDER, AND SES

by

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To the Trinity

To my parents:

Jerry Crossling and Valerie Campbell

To my stepfather:

Ordencie Campbell, Sr.

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

I am a product of the sex education movement in this country. I have made the unfortunate observation that when it comes to sex education, typically, the only concern is the *evidence* of sex as opposed to the *act* of sex. I am also the product of black churches' attempt to educate me on the importance of an abstinent lifestyle, whereby I was informed that God had wonderful things in store for me that did not need to be intercepted by having a baby or becoming ill. It was not until a very progressive middle school teacher took it upon herself to educate me holistically that I even understood my own commitment to remain abstinent (see Appendix A). Over the years my concern has grown for the way in which black churches engage in the process of developing and implementing abstinence curriculum. The purpose of this dissertation is to do a holistic overview of the historical, social, and economic factors, that impact the development and implantation of abstinence curriculum in black churches to include the existence of curriculum, its purpose, the content of the teaching tools used, and the communicative process by which it is developed.

Indicators of sexual activity, pregnancy, and disease have been under the prevention radar for nearly four decades. The most consistent learning environment for sex education is within the schools. Elementary, middle, and high schools across the

country have embraced a vigilante-style approach to educating students on the varying types of sexually transmitted diseases that can be acquired, as well as the intricate details of contraception. The “prevention” curriculum, to which this approach to sex education is referred, involves condom demonstration and distribution, or mock parenting assignments where students are assigned a “baby” to take care of for a predetermined period of time. Students are shown medical videos that display the effects of varying STDs, or documentaries of teen parents who share the woes of single parenting.

I watched public service announcements designed to push the prevention curriculum. In the late eighties and early nineties, television stations generated images that warranted the attention of our nation launching the war on teen pregnancy and disease. These efforts ranged from public service announcements to ABC Afterschool Specials such as *I Think I'm Having a Baby* (1981) where hour blocks were dedicated to film scripts depicting the unfortunate teenager who had to quit the cheerleading squad and drop out of high school due to an unplanned pregnancy. I saw the newsstands in America were graced with ads such as the Time Magazine cover that read, “Losing the Battle (1992) or another cover with famed basketball player, Erving “Magic” Johnson on the cover as the new spokesmen for HIV/AIDS awareness (1996). The media’s goal was to provide an image of unprotected sex that encouraged condom use or abstinence.

Earlier historical movements bear heavily on today’s attitudes about sex education, to including the sexual revolution (Levy, 2005). Contraception was a “hot

topic” of the movement because it gave women more control over their bodies and right to procreate. Those who were against birth control suggested that contraception decreased sexual responsibility and the importance of love and commitment in the process of making the decision to have sex (Fitch, 1964). There were further arguments that giving women the ability to avoid pregnancy, was opening the door to sexual promiscuity because the consequences were minimal. What some considered promiscuous, those of a more secular mind called liberating. Whatever the case, the American Food and Drug Administration has approved a number of contraceptive options ranging from birth control pills to vaginal rings that secrete hormones to prevent the release of eggs from a woman’s ovaries. A step further in contraceptive innovation is the creation of varying forms of the morning-after pill, to intercept the early stages of conception, all of which are advertised on television. However, abstinence is another alternative altogether.

Since the first wave of sex education, facilitators, educators, health officials, and parents have been vocal about whether or not a prevention- or abstinence-based curriculum best achieves the necessary goal of educating America’s youth about sexuality. I remember the quiet debate among parents and teachers on the day that we had to return to fifth grade with our permission slips marked, “yes,” or “no,” to participate in sex education classes. While the majority of us were in a room learning about ovaries and testicles, a segment of our class remained in a classroom doing “busy

work,” because their parents would not allow them to participate for “religious reasons.”

Parents were avid debaters on the topic with teachers, principals, and anyone else who would listen. Added to the list of debaters, were a host of Christian church leaders to include pastors, youth ministers, and other church auxiliary leaders who are in favor of an abstinence-only curriculum because it stresses the idea that one must engage in physical purity (meaning to refrain from sexual acts and intercourse) to maintain morals and values. However, at the turn of the 21st century, many church leaders called for a blended curriculum (Tapia, 1993; Trouten, 1999) that addressed both the issues of the abstinence and the prevention model. Eventually, many sex education initiatives, secular or faith-based, have made the primary objective educating teens about the practical limitations of having children out of wedlock, or the multiple perils of sexually transmitted diseases. Communities are legitimately nervous about the rate of unplanned pregnancy and disease, but are there not moral elements of the curriculum that need our attention?

I recognize that an intentional moral curriculum of sex education in schools may be challenged by the mandate of separation of church and state, for many of the moral teachings in the United States about sexuality emerge from religious teachings within Christian churches. To avoid the challenge of the mandate, Christian churches have developed a separate curriculum that incorporates morality into decision-making about sexual activity using Biblical principles. There has been some debate regarding whether

or not there should be preventive measures included in the curriculum (i.e. education about contraception, which is considered a more secular approach). However, the dominant preference of Christian churches is the abstinence curriculum, whereby youth and singles are encouraged to wait to engage in sexual intercourse in a marriage covenant, as a mandate from God as referenced in the Bible:

Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. (I Corinthians 6:18, NIV version)

I openly admit that as a devout Christian, I have experienced the spiritual, emotional, and relational woes of premarital sex, and the joys of making the decision to remain sexually inactive until marriage. I see refraining from premarital sex as one the most simultaneously spiritual and practical commandments that God has ever given, and yet my motivation for following the commandment has evolved over time. In my younger years, I believed that it was best to remain abstinent to avoid making God angry. Later, in college, I chose abstinence because I did not want to face God's consequences of having to leave my friends at school and return home due to pregnancy. I also saw it as a way to avoid the "punishment" of God giving me a disease. Interestingly, I never saw pregnancy alone as enough of a consequence from God to remain abstinent, because I believed pregnancy to be a gift from God in any context. Into adulthood, I realized that having sex was a decision that affected my entire being. Therefore, abstinence was a way to maintain a sense of wholeness, a way to avoid the

anguish of having to separate my spiritual self (soul) from another in the event that a relationship ended.

Abstinence is the most certain way to prevent pregnancy and disease, but it also allows one to make clear decisions about the emotions associated with relationship development without the pull of physical passion and desire that may serve as a distraction from the core agenda of compatible dating and relationship-building. The clear decision-making ability, correlated with abstinence, is spiritual wisdom for a believer. I am an avid supporter of the abstinence curriculum at large.

My concerns, however, regarding curriculum development and implementation are deeper, especially for the current state of abstinence education in predominantly black, Christian Churches. The abstinence curriculum for black Christian communities faces challenges in four areas; existence, purpose, developmental process, and content of the teaching tools. Unlike many white Christian churches, there is no abstinence curriculum in many black churches. In the cases where a curriculum does exist, there is still a great deal of focus on the practical implications of sexuality associated with middle class values, as opposed to a direct emphasis on moral implications. In addition, the way in which church leaders and laity dialogue on the topic of abstinence leads to underlying power dynamics that prevents the development of a multi-perspective curriculum. Finally, there are limited resources to choose from in order to teach abstinence in a way that is culturally relevant, due to overwhelming whiteness found in

teaching materials, which ultimately impacts availability to and consumption by leaders and laity.

The first concern is that there is no structured abstinence curriculum in most black churches. Predominantly white churches implement curriculum derived from inspirational authors' texts or national Christian abstinence initiatives, such as *True Love Waits* (Hughes, 2002), as a part of the annual plan of study. However, it appears that the majority of black Churches haphazardly implement teachings that are primarily derived from Biblical references only. The basic message, "If you're not married, don't have sex. If you do, God will be displeased. You will be socially limited to the status of a whoremonger, and you will go to hell." The foundation of the message is the adherence to Biblical rules and societal norms. There is no unpacking of the intertwined spiritual and practical dimensions of why it is a wise decision to delay sexual gratification until marriage.

The failure to establish a curriculum in many black churches is directly related to the common attitude that the discussion on the topic of sex in a church setting is taboo. Historical influences on sexual identity for blacks have heavily impacted the way in which a conscious choice is made to reduce conversation about sexual activity in "respectable" settings. The result of the prevailing attitude is a quick overview of the commandment so as not to neglect the topic altogether, and then proceeds with other topics that involve a less risqué dialogue. Ministers wrestle with what is deemed the appropriate amount of conversation, partially due to the attitudes and opinions of

membership who may or may not feel it necessary for the conversation of sex to take place in the house of worship. Rather than sow discord between clergy and laity, the topic is underdeveloped in black churches. Even in the context of marriage, the discussion regarding sex is minimal. There are few references to the idea that sex is to be a pleasurable, explorative experience between spouses. If there is a challenge in the development of conversation regarding sexual experiences between married couples in predominately black churches, then it comes as little or no surprise that the dialogue in reference to single sexuality is null and void.

The second concern is the way in which the purpose of abstinence education in churches is influenced by church pedagogies. Mega-church pedagogy is influenced more so by middle class, utilitarian concepts in those predominantly black churches that actually *do* implement an abstinence curriculum. Churches, especially black churches at and below the poverty line have no actual curriculum to address abstinence and, at best, only use biblical passages that reiterate the mandate to abstain. These churches operate under what I refer to as small-independent church pedagogy. This differs tremendously in comparison to the middle class Christian message in many black churches, which suggests that being an abstinent single is God's way of opening opportunities to obtain an education and increase material wealth. Abstinence is the link to being free of the risk of having children out of wedlock, which will then prevent the disruption of plans for college, and in turn, hopes of being gainfully employed. For a Christian, residing in poverty for the majority of his or her life, who has no intentions of

attending college in the first place, middle class motivations to maintain an abstinent lifestyle are foreign.

Middle class singles ministers and pastors communicate the idea that, because God wants each of us to have a life of abundant prosperity, it is important to guard against unplanned pregnancy by remaining abstinent. This is a concept communicated by those who value education and gainful employment in a way that some sectors of black Christians do not. Those at and below the poverty line may not see these as actual incentives for maintaining an abstinent lifestyle. Therefore, the message is lost in translation for any community that is not oriented to middle class ideology. The message, most related to black church communities at or below the poverty line, communicates abstinence as a mandate only with strict repercussions for violation. There is a common theme of dos and don'ts that influence lifestyle messages across the board.

In my experience, the effort is minimal to address spiritual or relational implications in the middle class or poverty line message in black churches. The communication on the topic of abstinence for middle class and poverty line congregations is devoid of the implications for spiritual relationship development and maintenance. We should present a more holistic approach to teaching young as well as single blacks about the way in which abstinence is connected to the preparation for loving, spiritual, relationships between human beings, not solely as a tool for individual social and financial success.

A third concern is the lack of cultural relevance in the content of the teaching tools used to convey abstinence curriculum to both middle and lower socioeconomic populations in black Christian communities. Sexual behavior of youth and singles have little variation across race, however, the motivation for those behaviors lends itself to some differences. Sexual identity and meaning is different for black youth and singles based upon learning experiences, socio-economic positioning, and media. However, there is little or no variation in the teaching tools to correlate with the wide variety of black experiences. Many of the resources (i.e. texts, DVDs, and other components of initiatives) utilized to implement abstinence curriculum in black churches are not culturally relevant to the lived experiences of their membership, and in many ways are devoted to perpetuating a white, middle class cultural experience.

Those that are culturally relevant in the middle class, often times represent ideologies that are not relevant to the ethnic culture of blacks. A simple example is in the features of the narratives of many white authors' text on the subject. An author may reflect that their first encounter with sexual desire was at Christian summer camp with a high school sweetheart. While Christian summer camp may be a common experience to which white youth and singles can relate, the concept is foreign for many young and single blacks. At inception, the black reader (belonging to either class) loses interest because there is a cultural disconnect from the performed whiteness in the imagery communicated by the author. Failing to develop an abstinence curriculum that is

culturally relevant, assumes that there is one lived sexual experience for all young, single blacks.

Cultural relevance of content directly affects the marketing and availability of teaching tools of any kind to certain populations of blacks, which affects consumption. Black church leaders and educators are less likely to utilize content that does not speak to the lived experiences of their pupils. Book vendors are aware of the cultural irrelevance of materials. Rather than solicit authors to broaden the scope, they simply continue to boost marketing efforts for current customers. For those ministers and laity that are willing to adapt irrelevant content, there still is the issue of availability. Communities primarily occupied by blacks do not have vendors (in the form of Christian bookstores, or secular for that matter), whereby reading materials, videos, and DVDs are made readily available. There is minimal circulation of marketing materials to churches that do not belong to larger denominations. However, the smaller, nondenominational churches are the very congregations that are situated in predominately black communities. A lack of resources further perpetuates the limitations in curriculum for those populations.

The final concern that I have in reference to abstinence curriculum in black churches is the way in which communicative power dynamics influence the process of curriculum development and implementation. In some black church dynamics, irrespective of the prevailing social class of the church's population, there is still a hierarchical communication. This communicative model marginalizes voices within the

congregation that could be helpful in developing and implementing an abstinence curriculum. Age, sex/gender, leadership roles, and familial roles influence cultural dominance within the black church environment. Because all voices are not equally recognized, opportunities for innovative approaches to curriculum development and implementation are missed.

The state of abstinence curriculum in predominantly black churches raises a number of perplexing questions. When will there be an abstinence curriculum that will speak to the lived experiences of blacks, which emphasizes the richness of the gift of human connection, and the necessity of social responsibility to engage in loving, respectful treatment toward those to whom we are connected? Will there be a curriculum which suggests, that if he or she never attends college or earns enough money to travel around the world, there is still a sacredness in any other life plan that God has for him or her, and that if that plan involves a mate, sex is something to be shared in the fullness of that experience (whether they live in a mansion or a shack)? Can a curriculum be developed that actually inquires about the personal, lived, experiences of black young or single Christian so that they can serve as co-creators of the curriculum? Will there be content that black church leaders and teachers can select in confidence that the content will convey experiences that match those of their pupils? Many white Christian education models have already integrated some of these components.

The current lack of curriculum, followed by the purpose and process by which it is developed, and the content of the tools used in black churches serve as a hindrance to answering the aforementioned series of questions. It would appear that I am lending blame to the developers and facilitators of abstinence curriculum in black churches. However, I recognize the systemic nature of influences that impact the way that abstinence education is presented and the tools made available. My intent is to explore the racial, socioeconomic, historical, gender, and communicative influences on the development and implementation of abstinence curriculum in black churches to include, existence, purpose, process, and content by answering the following three questions:

1. What are historical and contemporary influences on the distinctions between black and white sex culture and its impact on the development of abstinence curriculum?
2. How does the historical development of black churches impact sexual discourse and the existence of Abstinence curriculum?
3. How does the intersection of socio-economic status and church pedagogy impact the purpose of abstinence curriculum in black churches?
4. What communicative power dynamics influence the process by which church communities dialogue about sex in an effort to develop an abstinence curriculum?

5. How does the content of teaching tools impact the availability and consumption of teaching resources to be used in an abstinence curriculum for black churches?

In *Chapter I*, I present the idea that the moral, social, and emotional components of abstinence education are missing. I explore the various approaches of secular curriculums, and then contrast them with Christian versions of the same. I reveal my support for abstinence curriculum. I offer a brief analysis of both historical and contemporary influences in attitudes about sexual identity in black communities, seated both within and outside of Christian faith. I then make suggestions of an ideal curriculum relating to the models of historical education figures. Finally, I share an overview of my research model, which included narrative, co-cultural, and qualitative content analysis theories. I end by briefly sharing the findings of both the interviews and content analysis.

In *Chapter II*, I explore scholarly literature which contributes to the topic of abstinence education for black Christians. I begin with a historical analysis of the impacts of slavery both ante-and postbellum on attitudes and perceptions of black sexuality. In *Chapter III*, I explore the history of the black church as it relates to structural power dynamics. In *Chapter IV*, I explore the impacts of race and class on the way in which teaching materials on the topic of abstinence are developed and implemented, and the lack of cultural relevance in most materials. I then relate these power dynamics to dialogue on the topic of sex in black churches via the basic premises

of Orbe's co-cultural theory (1998) in *Chapter V*. I discuss the multi-systemic impact of all of these factors on the development and implementation of abstinence curriculum for black church communities. Finally, I explore the concept of Qualitative Content Analysis as a means of assessing prevailing white, middle class ideology on Christian abstinence texts. In *Chapters VI and VII*, I reveal the results of both analyses.

Chapter VIII revisits the challenges of existence, purpose, developmental process, and content of teaching tools. I then explore the various historical and contemporary influences that affect the attitudes about and expressions of sexuality in black church communities. I recap the three-fold research model consisting of narrative, co-cultural, and qualitative content analysis, and why this model was best suited to address the research questions. I then synthesize the results of the narrative analysis and texts in order to answer the original questions of the research.

CHAPTER II

YOUTH CULTURE AND SEXUALITY

In this chapter, I consider the importance of making a cultural distinction between the sex culture of youth for whites and blacks. Youth culture, for the sake of this research, will be defined as age 30 and under. The purpose of making the distinction is to serve as the foundation upon which to build a sound abstinence curriculum that recognizes certain uniqueness of black sex culture. In keeping with phenomenological inquiry (Orbe, 1998), I combine my personal observations seated *within* (single, black woman, age 30) the culture which I am researching, with the multiple perspectives of researchers. I begin by emphasizing the pairing of sexuality with youth. I then explore popular themes within general youth sex culture. Finally, I tease out the distinctions of motivation and expression for black sex culture.

The evolution of youth culture and that of sex culture is simultaneous. The meaning and significance of what it means to be young, as well as what it means to be sexual, often appear to be expressed as one and the same. Middle-aged men in a television ad for male enhancement drugs, upon consuming the medication, are automatically transformed into long-haired punk rockers of the 1980s (a time when they were around the age of 18), indicating that to be sexually charged and ready to “perform” is reminiscent of the energized existence of one’s youth.

We live in a culture where a middle-aged or elderly spouse can be overheard referencing a night of sexual activity with his/her partner as being, “. . . like we were teenagers again. I don’t know what got into him (her),” as though to engage in sexual frolic is only an experience reserved for the young. Teens can be overheard joking about sex, but when the idea of parents, teachers, or any middle-aged person having sex is mentioned for any reason, the grimaces among young people are contagious, as a way of reinforcing that people of a certain age, “just don’t/shouldn’t do that,” or at least if they do, it is not worth mentioning. A final example is the young couple, who at the first sign of deciding that they can “skip a day” of sexual activity, or only engage in missionary-positioned sex (minus the exploration they may have been accustomed to) becomes alarmed and questions whether or not they are “turning into old fogies.” Simply stated, sex and youth are recognized simultaneously in our culture. Images like the aforementioned indicate that youth carry the torch for defining what it means to express a sexual “sense of self,” and other generations are left to compare their experience to a youth-defined standard.

Many themes are attached to youth culture that directly influence meaning in sex culture. In a technological age, *immediate gratification* is justified. Anyone who owns a cellular phone can text “boob or breasts,” on cellular text messaging, and images of topless women appear on the screen. Sex for many young people is not seen as something that one must, “wait for,” as is the case in many religious and traditional American messages. Instead they opt for “hookups,” or sexual encounters that hold

neither party responsible for communicative or emotional follow-through. There is a fine line between happiness and hedonism in youth sexual culture, as the meaning of *pleasure* is explored through open sadomasochism (S/M) and sexual swinging at younger ages. *Entitlement* is another theme of youth culture, where inconvenience is in many cases resisted, and there is a genuine belief that others must make opportunities available without grave obstacles. Therefore, sex is not something that one should have to “work for,” or engage in emotionally. It is understood that being “sex buddies,” is an easy arrangement that benefits all (though there is usually some form of inequity).

Media icons such as Paris Hilton, Beyonce, Kim Kardashian, and Lil’ Kim demonstrate the use of sexuality as a tool in the *maintenance and pursuit of power and privilege*. Mid-twenty to early thirty-something year old women are recognized as trendsetters who have used their sexual prowess (accompanied by some other musical talent in some cases) as a means of acquiring wealth and privilege. *Gender difference* is another theme that has specific meaning when applied to youth culture and correlates to sex culture. While sex sells across gender, the price of viewing female genitalia is more marketable, considering the fact that even the most explicit college co-ed pornography, *Girls Gone Wild*, uses “discretion,” in the way in which male genitalia is viewed on camera as opposed to female counterparts (Levy, 2005). Different rules for the exploitation of masculine versus feminine sexuality are perpetuated by youth culture.

Many youth embrace *multiple and competing realities* in every area of development and identity, including sexual identity. Social websites such as Facebook and MySpace offer various selections for sexual orientation to include *straight, gay, undecided, exploring, bi, lesbian*, etc. Terms such as “boi” (boy) and “gyrl” (girl) provide alternatives to traditional notions of sex/gender correlations (Levy 2005). *Religion* is another theme of grave significance to youth sex culture. The Evangelical Christian wave, teen pregnancy and STD prevention initiatives, channeled by technological advances, are synthesized to make virginity “cool” among youth with websites such as *Virginity Rocks* (Virginity Rocks, 2008) and *Cool Virginity* (Cool Virginity, 2008). Finally, *sexual learning* is a critical part of youth culture that is directly influenced by pop/youth cultural trends. Previous examples of themes suggest that youth define their meaning, but in the case of sexual learning, other systemic influences including schools, churches, families, and communities communicate messages that are embraced at an early age and set the platform for how youth, in turn, understand and communicate their sexuality.

After exploring themes that influence sex culture for young people in general, the question raised is whether or not there are cultural differences, specifically between whites and blacks, in the ongoing themes in youth sex culture. Does culture impact immediate gratification, pleasure and meaning, entitlement, power and privilege, gender differences, postmodern realities, religion, or sexual learning in youth sex culture? The simple answer is no. black youth culture contains nearly all of the same

themes as it relates to sexuality. However, the *motivation* and *expression* of the aforementioned themes in sexuality is different from that of white youth (Johnson & Staples, 2005; Hymowitz, 2006).

Historical, familial, socio-economic, media, and religious factors impact the way in which the black youth culture expresses sexuality. Historical factors include the original existence of Africans in America and the way in which the interpretation of black beauty, by black men and women, has been influenced by white standards and in turn, has influenced sexual attraction and affirmation between blacks (West, 1999; Byrd & Solomon, 2005). Familial or social patterns affect the motivation and expression of black sexuality in that the development of coital relationships may be reduced to social utility to produce children as a “rite of passage.” Also, the weight of romantic relationships in black youth culture may be expressed differently because of the different kind of “void” that sexual relationships may fill. The economic influence (Hymowitz, 2006) is best recognized at or below the poverty line.

The *difference in value* systems significantly impacts the way in which sexual relationships and love are viewed. The media’s depiction of sex in movies, and especially in music videos is different from that of whites, emphasizing sexual prowess in a way that dismisses the power of emotional connection. Finally, religious structures (specifically Christianity for the sake of the research) take a different approach to teaching about abstinence and sexuality. Messages are influenced by social norms, and emphasize issues that are not the same in the teaching of abstinence to youth and

singles in white congregations. The following is an examination of the way in which the aforementioned themes of youth culture impact sexual culture in the United States, followed by an examination of factors that vary for black youth sex culture.

Themes

Immediate Gratification

Inventions ranging from microwave ovens to iPhones are designed with the highly active lifestyle of America's youth in mind. Immediate gratification is literally at their fingertips. The amount of space and time between the thought and manifestation of the heart's desire is rapidly decreasing. Young people desire more, faster, as is the case with sexual desires. For many in youth culture (ranging from children to adults under 30), media and technological developments such as interactive cybersex, soft pornography in phone texts, and purchase of online pornography fuel the public market of the sex industry as tools of instant gratification. In addition, sex toys, another lucrative market, make sexual arousal and satisfaction an "on demand" experience, whereby sexual orgasm can be achieved with little or no need for another living being, producing the exact same results every time. Men and women invest in the male enhancement drug industry and other means of body modification in order to enhance sexual experiences. All of the aforementioned influence a shift in sexual gratification values.

Technology fuels immediate sexual gratification. Currently, cybersex is one of the most popular forms of "expedient sex." A person can log on to the internet, find a

chatroom or social website of people who are also interested in sexual engagement. Through a computer-generated dialogue, one can describe his/her sexual fantasy to a “virtual partner,” a computer-generated figure that will perform sexual acts on command. In some cases, two participants create a fantasy. For those most technologically savvy, webcams may very well bring to life those fantasies in an actual visual of another human being. Many pornographic sites have “online subscriptions,” whereby patrons can make monthly payments to have “live sex” online with a man/woman employed by the site—a sort of cyber prostitution ring.

Social phone lines have reemerged. *Live Chat* is a paid social phone network agency in Greensboro, NC advertised during late night television. Their marketing plan emphasizes that young singles do not have to “wait around” to meet the right person, but can call the number displayed on the screen for “hot local singles.” An even more recent trend is the use of phone text messaging. Text sites have codes set up whereby the patron can text a certain key word and an image/photo of a scantily clad or naked figure will appear on the screen.

The sex toy industry for young singles is another way of promoting immediate sexual gratification. “Pleasure parties” are as popular as Mary Kay parties and are similar in structure. A “host” will meet with a consultant to set up a retail party. The host will create a list of people to invite to the gathering, and the consultant prepares a showcase. At the party, the consultant promotes various products that can be used to increase sexual pleasure, with a mate or individually. Attendants then convert to

patrons by placing purchase orders for the products, and perhaps negotiating with the consultant to host a party of their own in order to receive discounts.

Body modification is another form of instant gratification in popular culture that is made more popular in youth culture, especially with singles. No longer does one have to wait for puberty to end, *and then* determine whether or not one wants to increase the size of breasts or genitalia. Young women as early as 16 years of age receive parental consent to have breast augmentation. Male enhancement drugs, designed to increase the length and width of the penis, are taken by men as young as 18 years of age in an effort to more efficiently reach an orgasm. A modifying female procedure involves vaginal tightening in order to return the vagina to a “virginal” state whereby the opening to the vagina is surgically decreased in size, which is said to provide more pleasure during intercourse. Another procedure, vaginoplasty, involves enhancing the “beauty” of the vagina, as described by Ariel Levy (2005) , author of *Female Chauvinist*

Pigs:

Local newspapers like LA Weekly carry page after page of ads for surgeons who specialize in vaginoplasty or vaginal rejuvenation. That is: cosmetic operations to alter the labia and vulva so they look more like the genitals one sees in Playboy or porn . . . They are designed exclusively to render a vagina “attractive” (p. 23)

A reflection of youth’s appreciation for immediate sexual gratification is the shift in sexual relationship values. Hooking up is a popular choice of sexual encounter in youth culture. The idea is to connect sexually with someone in the absence of emotional

attachment or relational expectation. The normal delay in sexual encounter, precluded by dating/courtship, and defining the relationship, is no longer a necessity. Therefore, reaching the sexually gratifying place in an encounter happens at a much faster rate.

Pleasure and Meaning

Pleasure is a critical component to youth sex culture. Youth culture, in general, conveys that the definition of pleasure is the reaping of high reward with minimal costs, according to Giroux and Simon (1989), authors of *Popular Culture Schooling and Everyday Life*. Youth invest in sexual encounters in a similar fashion. The physical purpose of sex and foreplay is to “get turned on” and/or “have an orgasm.” The social purpose of sex and foreplay is to obtain ego-driven self- gratification (while “bragging rights” are most common for males, females also seek the same rights). The degree to which youth invest in sexual relationships is based upon the reaping of these personal benefits of sex.

In an interview with a performer for *Girls Gone Wild*, Levy (2005) inquired about the meaning of and desire for romantic solidarity and sensuality as opposed to the raciness of pleasure and physical gratification the performer received in her work. The performer communicated a sense of uncertainty about which set of values was more essential. Levy notes:

Meg said that she badly wanted to ‘find a husband. I definitely want to get married, but I worry about how I am going to be in a many-year marriage and still get turned on—I’m not turned on after six months’ . . . Why weren’t the experiences sensual for her?

This ideology reflects a value shift that places the priority of pleasure over the security of commitment to the point that it influences the way in which a mate is selected.

Entitlement

Entitlement in this context will refer to unmerited expectation of sexual gratification. Referring back to the notion of the hookup there is an expectation that sex is not a goal to actually *work toward*. Instead, sex is understood to be the natural order of operations for initial encounters, somewhat of a given *emotional* expectation; any other motivation to abstain runs the risk of ostracism. Paula Rineheart (2000), a popular Christian author speaks to the way in which college students implement the entitlement of casual sex:

When my daughter entered the same sorority 25 years later, as a committed Christian, she discovered that only five members of her entering class of 49 had not been sent to school already on birth control. The reality of being sexually active was a given, one that was planned for. (Her sorority sisters call her “Mary,” as in the mother of Jesus, her virginity being so distinctive.) (p. 32)

Not only is Rineheart’s daughter a minority, but the fact that sex was not a “given” in her life makes her a target for playful banter. *Hooking Up* by Kathleen A. Bogle (2008) does a thorough analysis of the way that college students engage in sex without obligations as a general expectation among the culture:

Hooking up is the first step; going to dinner or a movie or any other typical one-on-one date happens much later or not at all for the majority, who never reach the point of a full-fledged dating relationship. Therefore, hooking up reverses the

tradition, 'date first, sex later,' formula that governed intimate relationships on college campuses from the 1920s through the mid-60s. (p. 39)

Again, attraction alone entitles one to the expectation of sexual activities.

Another form of entitlement involves convenience. Sex among youth resists inconvenience. The act of "going raw" is a term that refers to having a sexual encounter without the use of a condom. Men claim that a condom diminishes the sensation during sexual intercourse, and is therefore considered a hindrance in sexual pleasure. Many youth report that it is "understood" that requiring a man to wear a condom is taboo.

Entitlement not only refers to coital sexual encounters, but there is also a sense of entitlement to the *kind* of sexual acts anticipated during initial encounters. Oral sex is another casual expectation. There are younger reports that oral sex is a "required" part of the sexual regime, according to Levy (2005):

What all these adolescent incidents have in common are, of course, exhibitionism and oral sex—oral sex for the boys, that is. . . . 'A lot of guys expect oral sex,' Talia said. 'Not girls . . . people would think they were weird if they did. (p. 144)

The author also interviewed middle school children and reported that sex was not only casual, but a trendy form of social networking:

There's a rumor going around that 'rainbow parties' are the latest teen rage. Rainbow parties are good old-fashioned slumber parties, with a distinctly contemporary twist: All the girls in attendance put on a different color of lipstick, invite over one lucky boy, and then one by one they treat him to oral sex until viola! His penis is a spectral color chart. (p. 139)

When sexual engagement (varying in kind) is a part of social networking, young people feel entitled to the benefits of that social network as if it is as simple as shaking hands.

A final influence on entitlement is the performance of maturity that resembles adulthood for teens. Many youth have lives that resemble that of adults. Popular television reality shows such as MTV's *The Real Orange County* or *Sweet Sixteen* depict young people who drive expensive cars and live in houses that have separate quarters resembling an apartment. They travel and, if employed, have posh internships doing work that resembles the upper middle class workforce, with an earned income that at least affords their luxuries. Another reality is that of the lower middle class young person who works, cares for younger siblings, and manages the household duties in the absence of a parent, who may be working most of the waking hours of the day. Either scenario can lend a sense of entitlement to the benefits of adulthood to include sexual activity. Sex is seen as something they are mature enough to embrace and should have access to, considering their assumption of other "adult" responsibilities or experiences.

Maintenance and Pursuit of Power and Privilege

Paris Hilton, Kim Kardashian, Justin Timberlake, Beyonce Knowles, Chris Brown, and Brittany Spears have one primary characteristic in common: they are (or have been) recognized as America's *sex symbols*. American youth idolize Paris Hilton for her high-fashion wardrobe, usually scantily clad, which accentuates her elongated frame, transported by limousine to the swankiest upscale venues from coast to coast. However, Paris is an heiress to the Hilton Hotel fortune, not an "average working girl." Paris's

namesake opened doors to reality shows such as *The Simple Life* (also starring Nicole Richie), but she is most known for a scandalous private sex tape that became public in 2002. Kim Kardashian, another fashion trendsetter and sex symbol, is an heiress of sorts to the fortune of her late father Robert Kardashian, most famous for serving on the legal team for OJ Simpson. Recognized by youth as an object of beauty, she too is known for the release of a sex tape with singer/songwriter Rayjay Norwood and posing for *Playboy*.

The initial assumption would be that youth would not idolize women who were caught on tape engaged in sexually explicit acts. On the contrary, these women are idolized by young men and women. The fact that they had to engage in little or no work ethic in order to obtain notoriety is of little concern. Young ladies replicate the idols by dressing in a scantily clad fashion, and quoting phrases such as, "That's hot," (a phrase made most famous by Paris Hilton, which she attempted to have patented to no avail). They convey pompous dispositions (that they believe replicate sex icons), with haughty expressions, that they believe will "mesmerize," young males, just as it is depicted in the lives of public figures such as Hilton and Kardashian. Levy addresses youth's emphasis on appearance and purchase power to achieve a "hot" look:

As we spoke, she touched her thin, exposed stomach constantly. 'My mom had to say, 'If you weigh less than a certain amount you're grounded . . . Ann seemed to have only one engrossing passion her looks.' (p. 152)

David said generally his classmates were not promiscuous, but that looking loose was the defining characteristic of his female friends' style. (p. 148)

Young women like Ann and David's classmates have chosen to capitalize on the influence of appearance, but not just any appearance: one that communicates sex. The selling of sex to even younger populations is evidenced by the success of retailers who profit from clothing that speaks to the allure of sexiness. Levy (2005) shares an account of thong retail:

I saw Hello Kitty thongs for sale at the mall; Abercrombie & Fitch—which markets to seven-to-fourteen-year-olds—makes a thong that says WINK WINK and another that declares EYE CANDY; the teen chain store Hot Topic sells a Cat in the Hat thong . . . (p. 143).

The aforementioned accounts speak volumes to youths' desire to *look* sexy, irrespective of their actual sexual activity, which is influenced by pop media images of the power and privilege associated with a sexual appearance.

Youth buy into the sexuality of the music industry due to the power and privilege communicated on stage from performers such as Knowles, Spears, and Brown. Performers step on stage in nude, jewel encrusted body suits that cover breasts and genitalia, or an act is concluded by a male performer ripping his shirt in half revealing sweaty abdominal and pectoral muscles. Dance routines filled with sexual innuendoes inspire youth to find an open space in the home to rehearse the moves to showcase at the next school dance or club. The better one replicates these moves, the more he/she earns clout as a sex symbol among his/her peers. Other singers and rappers state in lyrics how *powerful* their sexual abilities are, to the point that one has hypnotic or

magical powers, as alluded to in Christina Aguilera's *Genie in a Bottle* written by Steve

Kipner, David Frank, and Pam Sheyne (2000):

I feel like I've been locked up tight
 For a century of lonely nights
 Waiting for someone, to release me
 You're licking your lips and blowing kisses my way
 But that don't mean I'm gonna give it away
 Baby, baby, baby (baby, baby, baby)

Oh oh oh oh oh (my body's saying let's go)
 Oh oh oh oh oh (but my heart is saying no)

If you wanna be with me
 Baby there's a price to pay
 I'm a genie in a bottle
 You gotta rub me the right way
 If you wanna be with me
 I can make your wish come true
 You gotta make a big impression
 Gotta like what you do

I'm a genie in a bottle baby
 Gotta rub me the right way honey
 I'm a genie in a bottle baby
 Come, come, come on and let me out

The lyrics suggest that sex is a powerful tool of manipulation. You do this, and I will do that.

For women in particular, the sexual messages of songs and other media are applauded by their supporters as a means of expressing sexual liberation. Pornographic videos such as *Girls Gone Wild* and magazines such as *Playboy* and *Hustler* are referred to as movements toward liberation and a financial means for women to independently

create comfortable lifestyles for themselves. While not considered a “respectable” career, exotic dancing is another industry whereby men and women obtain power and privilege. Males and females as young as 16 work as exotic dancers, earning as much as \$350 nightly (earnings vary according to the standards of a given establishment). Conclusively, sex is a measurable tool that secures financial power and/or social privilege. Levy challenges the notion, and instead considers it to be a form of covert exploitation:

Women’s liberation and empowerment are terms feminist started using to talk about casting off the limitations imposed upon women and demanding equality. We have perverted these words. The freedom to be sexually provocative or promiscuous is not enough freedom; it is not the only ‘women’s issue’ worth paying attention to. And we are not even free in the sexual arena. We have simply adopted a new norm, a new role to play; lusty, busty exhibitionist.

There are other choices. If we are really going to be sexually liberated we need to make room for a range of options as wide as the variety of human desire. We need to allow ourselves the freedom to figure out what we internally want from sex instead of mimicking whatever popular culture holds up to us as sexy. That would be sexual liberation. (Levy, 2005, p. 200)

Gender and Multiple Competing Realities

Sex, gender, sexual orientation, and sexual Intercourse all have multiple and competing meanings in youth culture. The transsexual revolution has made it possible for youth to undergo hormonal therapy and genital modification in order to be biologically recognized as male or female, irrespective of sex pronounced at birth. With parental consent, the transformation can begin before the client is an adult. For some,

the preference is to begin the process in high school. Aside from genital modification (the most expensive part of the procedure), the client is visibly the preferred sexual identity by college.

The transgender wave allows one to identify oneself as masculine or feminine at his/her own discretion as communicated by style of hair and dress, as well as communicative mannerisms. Labeling is another way in which those who are transgender identify their preference for masculinity and femininity. Men who wish to identify with a more feminine identity are known as gyrls, while women who choose to identify as masculine are referred to as bois.

Being a boi means different things to different people—it's a fluid identity, and that's the whole point. Some of the people who identify as bois simply think it means that they are young and cool and probably promiscuous. Some like, Doty, date other bois and think of themselves as 'fags,' whereas others date only femmes. Others are female to male transsexuals—also referred to as trans of FTMs or trannies. (Levy, 2005, p. 126)

As illustrated in Doty's case, the traditional notion of homosexuality, like many other sexual identities, is challenged.

Sexual orientation is another identity of multiplicity. Many social websites recognize that there are multiple identities and give numerous options for the way in which a subscriber can describe his or her sexual preference. In addition to traditional options such as straight, gay, or lesbian, sites offer descriptions such as, *bi*, *not sure*, *curious or experimenting*, and *swinger* (MySpace, 2009). Bi, an abbreviation for bisexual,

suggests that the subscriber is interested in both males and females. *Not sure*, is a way for a subscriber who has either had experiences with both sexes or none, but is unsure as to which one he/she actually prefers. *Curious or experimenting* refers to those who may have had experiences with one sex, but is intrigued by the thought of engaging with the other sex. Finally, *swinger* may be similar to bi, but also indicates a sexual lifestyle preference. For both homosexuals and heterosexuals, to be a swinger means to have multiple partners, or even in a committed relationship, to have more than one sexual partner at the consent of all parties involved.

While older generations may mandate that one choose an orientation and “stick with it,” youth see the labels as fluid, able to be changed or rearranged based upon personal experiences as previously stated by Levy. For example, a 14-year-old high school freshman may identify herself as bisexual and by her sophomore year, decide that she prefers the identity of heterosexual. Similarly, a 27-year-old man may communicate a homosexual orientation, and then state that he is not gay, but undecided. According to the rules and norms of youth sex culture, with the exception of certain religious subcultures, neither of the previously mentioned cases would be asked to make a finite decision.

Sexual intercourse has many meanings for youth. Sex education curriculum may suggest that the following are now considered sexual intercourse: Coital, oral, and anal. For youth, the definition is broader or narrower depending upon values and norms. For example, if it is unpopular or taboo to have sex in a given youth subculture (i.e. church

youth or singles group), a person may identify as being a virgin or abstinent even if he/she engages in oral sex. For them, sexual intercourse is defined as a coital relationship (Freitas, 2008). However, in another group, where sex is understood to be a rite of passage to popularity, kissing and heavy petting may be what youth call “having sex.”

Youth, like any other culture, create a set of sexual rules and norms related to masculinity and femininity. Very often the rules may be borrowed from previous generations, but manifest themselves within the culture. One example is the shift in young masculinity. Yesteryear’s, “man’s man” was a rugged outdoorsmen, athlete, or shrewd intellectual. Today’s youth culture has added the identity of *metro-sexual* to broaden the understanding of masculinity. Metro-sexuals are heterosexual men who are meticulous in appearance and demonstrate feminine qualities traditionally associated with gay men. Metro-sexuality, in the absence of the title, was first suggested by Hugh Hefner:

Beyond creating a successful brand, Hefner had a vision for a new kind of masculinity, a new kind of man, one who no longer needed to be the duck-hunting outdoorsman, the virtuous patriarch of the forties and fifties. Instead, he was remained as a suave gent in a V-neck cashmere sweater, mixing drinks, listening to records, and appreciating the ‘finer things in life’ like jazz and beautiful women. (Levy, 2005, p. 57)

Feminine identity, however, does not have the same fluidity or room to shift. Instead, a display of behaviors that are contrary to traditional notions of femininity is

considered a complete gender-sex transformation. Any traces of behaviors that resemble masculinity or at least contradict femininity (i.e. having multiple dating partners or deciding not to have children, etc.) incur the description of *being like a male*. An example of the phenomenon is in HBO television's *Sex in the City*, which is very popular among youth culture:

Like *Female Chauvinist Pigs*, *Sex in the City* divided human behavior into *like a man's* or *like a woman's*. Instead of being a confident woman, Samantha had the 'ego of a man.' When Charlotte decided to make two dates in one night she was, 'turning into a man,' but when she worried whether she would be able to eat two meals in a row, 'just like that she was a woman again.' . . . the fantasy . . . was a sphere in which sex was just another commodity something to be acquired rather than shared, so sexual encounters often ended with someone feeling like a conqueror and someone feeling compromised. (Levy, 2005, p. 174) [Emphasis added]

One rule maintained is the double standard in male versus female sexuality. Even in youth culture, girls and young women are viewed as temptresses who have a hidden agenda to victimize boys and young men. Primarily, older women perpetuate this concept. While older men may uphold that their daughters are in need of protection from the hunter mentality of young men, by and large, if there is no familial or emotional connection to that young woman. They too communicate that females are victimizers of young males, as reported by the actions of teachers in *Female Chauvinist Pigs*:

It was interesting that teachers were concerned about boys getting distracted. Teenage boys tend to find teenage girls distracting no matter what they were

wearing. The people who are really distracted by the competition to look and seem sexy are the girls themselves. (Levy, 2005, p. 152)

Another double standard maintained is in regard to pornographic exploitation of women more so than men. Images of female genitalia are made more available for view in magazines, videos, and websites than that of males. While female genitalia can be made visible in some R-rated programming, male genitalia are only available on X-rated film. Levy (2005) suggests that the double standard is fostered by male insecurity:

You can't put male nudity in an ad the way you can put female nudity in an ad and have it be perfectly acceptable. I mean, we still have a disconnect because of the attitude that men have about being uncomfortable with being the objects of women's fantasies and gaze. (pp. 39-40)

The aforementioned examples illustrate a gender bias that still dictates power dynamics that oppress women.

Religion

A very different youth subculture is that of religion. Most specific to the research in question is the Christian religious subculture. A portion of the youth culture has committed to the Christian faith and to an abstinent lifestyle. A very popular ceremony is the "vow of purity ceremony," whereby young people verbalize a commitment to resist sexual activity until marriage. Typically, the ceremony is commemorated by the presentation of purity rings, bands similar to wedding rings worn on the ring finger (sometimes on the left hand) symbolizing that one is in a lifelong commitment to God

first. At the national level, a ministry called True Love Waits (TLW) has a website, truelovewaits.com, which provides curriculum packets whereby churches can implement TLW workshops and teach lessons from TLW texts to their youth and young singles ministries.

Youth are making commitments to be born again virgins and premarital sexual activity is not only a Christian taboo, but an actual way to denounce popularity. Even on college campuses, the hub for sexual hook-up culture, modesty has made a comeback, according to Bogle (2008):

Another student I spoke to . . . abstained from hooking up due to her religious beliefs. Hannah believed her Christian faith was a central part of who she is and what she does; religion was not just another demographic category . . . Rather, she possessed a very active faith, it was a central part of her identity and her daily activities. Hanna rejected the dominant hookup culture because she believed hooking up was immoral. (pp. 65-66)

Shalit (1999), who is also situated in the youth culture about which she writes, supports the return to modesty, and sees it as a remedy to the relationship turmoil common in youth culture:

But I have strong feelings that one of the reasons relations between the sexes have come to such a painful point is precisely that the embarrassed, secretive women usually do not come forward, only the exhibitionists do. And so I think many young women now have a vastly inaccurate picture of what is normal for them to think or feel. They have been trained to accept that to be equal to men, they must be the same in every respect; and they, and the men, are worse off for it. It is for the next generation of young women that I am writing this book. (p. 11)

Female modesty is one of those ideas we are not supposed to entertain seriously anymore . . . Perhaps it seems threatening because . . . it provides a very specific answer. And maybe, just maybe, modesty is the answer which could, with all due modesty, flip everything around. (p. 80)

However, the pressures of sexual exploration and experimentation, combined with the church's encouragement (and social pressure) to abstain, create a fault line for Christian youth, according to Rineheart (2000):

This absence of social support for sexual purity means Christian teenagers and singles sometimes feel as though they are living in parallel universes with hardly a bridge between. They are strung somewhere between Dawson's Creek, so to speak, and Christian author Joshua Harris's bestselling advice to "kiss dating goodbye." The church has to create a culture that incubates purity, because the dominant one offers anything but.

Teenagers and singles trying to be sexually pure can feel terribly isolated. One of the more poignant scenes in the documentary on teens in Rockdale County shows three girls, virgins by Christian conviction, who spend their weekends together shopping for clothes for dates and parties that don't exist. In a culture that lacks the social support for sexual purity, those who choose that lifestyle pay a higher price than previous generations. (p. 32)

Other research has indicated that the ostracism of not maintaining a pure lifestyle serves as peer pressure that marginalizes those who are not as successful (Freitas, 2008).

Sexual Learning

The sources of learning about sex in youth culture are numerous. Many national sex education initiatives focus on encouraging parents to talk with their children about sex as a means of preventing teen pregnancy and the spread of STDs. However, in

addition to the parent-as-teacher model in sexual learning, schools and churches have also addressed the topic. Whether it is an abstinence-based or prevention-based approach, schools have become a hub of sexual learning since the mid-twentieth century. Church youth and singles leaders have also joined the ranks of sex educators. Finally, and most popular, is the informal education that youth receive from siblings and peers in social settings. The social context is the place where rules and norms are constructive and serve as the “code” by which youth, which includes young adult singles, live.

The content of what youth culture learns about sex is equal in importance to the sources. Formal learning environments such as churches and schools are typically polarized in their curriculum with abstinence and prevention as the extremes. Abstinence curriculum, most common in churches and Christian schools, communicates the importance of waiting to have sex until in a mature, committed relationship or marriage (in the case of Christian contexts). Prevention curriculum involves teaching the various methods of birth control and protection from STDs. While polarized, formal education of either kind is more consistent in their messages than those from parents about sex. The value systems of individual households greatly affect the way in which youth are taught. While author Kay Hymowitz, author of *The Marriage and Caste in America*, suggests that values that oppose casual premarital sex are returning to youth culture, there is even greater variance in messages among youth social contexts,

whereby values and norms that are not borrowed from any of the previously mentioned sources may very well prevail.

The themes of youth sex culture are numerous. While this research uncovers prevailing themes, it is important to remember that within any culture, subcultures exist that present new, yet common, themes for consideration. Ranging from immediate gratification to religion, our youth sex culture is inundated with rules and norms that influence and are influenced by value systems in a cyclic fashion. The value system may be birthed from experiences within other subcultures. I now examine how black sexuality, as a sub-cultural factor, influences the overarching youth sex culture.

Issues Pertinent to Black Sexuality

Black youth culture is inundated with all of the aforementioned themes as they relate to sexuality. While some of the behaviors attached to the themes may be the same in appearance, a significant difference lies in the sexual motivation and expression for black youth (Ingoldsby, Smith, & Miller, 2003). Several pertinent factors influence the motivation and expression of sexual themes in the youth culture of blacks to include history, familial patterns, socio-economics, media, and religion. The following is an assessment of the influencing factors and how they manifest themselves in the standard themes of youth sex culture.

History

Standard themes of youth sex culture impacted by the history of blacks in the United States are entitlement, immediate gratification, and religion. One implication is

that the inequitable distribution of sexual dignity and respect on behalf of whites has historically permeated the minds of generations of blacks. The sole purpose of the arrival of Africans into the United States was for labor and utility. The building of community and connection in our country between whites and blacks was a byproduct of the agenda. As a result, there was very little, if any, affirmation of blacks by whites in any area, including beauty and sexuality. Therefore, young blacks respect and affirm each other based upon white standards, which determines the treatment rendered to one another in sexual encounters and whether or not they feel entitled to certain experiences. According to Cornel West (1999):

Needless to say many white Americans still view black sexuality with disgust and some continue to view their own sexuality with disgust. Victorian morality and racist perceptions die hard. But more and more white Americans are willing to interact sexually with black Americans *on an equal basis*—even if myths persist. I view this as neither cause for celebration nor reason to lament. . . . Yet, as long as that pleasure, joy and love is still predicated on myths of black sexuality the more fundamental challenge of human interaction remains unmet. (p. 516)

The implication is that blacks assess beauty, and in turn attraction, such that they are more inclined to judge blacks who are fair in complexion, with softer textured hair and less curvaceous frames as more attractive because they resemble whites. Those who do not fit the description are seen as substandard and less worthy of positive treatment or affirmation. West continues:

How does one come to accept and affirm a body so despised by one's fellow citizens . . . What are the ways in which one can rejoice in the intimate moments

of black sexuality in a culture that questions the aesthetic beauty of one's body? Can genuine human relationships flourish for black people in a society that assaults black intelligence, black moral character and black possibility. (p. 516)

There are so many variable criteria that must be met in order for young black men and women to affirm one another. Yet sex is reduced in many instances to a form of experimental utility. A prime example is the notion of "going raw," or having sex without a condom for black males. When interviewed in research conducted by Melva Thompson-Robinson et al. (2007), black males stated that there were criteria based upon attraction that determined the level of risk in sexual behaviors:

Several of the participants discussed the sensation of having sex without a condom as rationale for having unprotected sex. Some prefer raw (without a condom) and some prefer condoms [stating], 'I like to go up in 'em raw to be honest with you.' Respondents explained that many men do not think about using a condom during sex. The men focus on personal satisfaction and concern for getting theirs. 'Guys will have unprotected sex. You don't think about that she's at high risk to get AIDS and become pregnant. Guys think like, I'm about to get mine.' (p. 161)

A second implication is history's role in sexual relationship maintenance and development as modeled by white slave owners. Black slaves were not recognized in legal marital dyads, a circumstance of which slave owners took advantage. Slave owners modeled immediate gratification in sexual relationships, as evidenced by multiple sexual encounters outside the confines of marriage as the norm (Johnson & Staples, 2005). They objectified African men and women for sexual desire and pleasure. The interactions were typically one-dimensional in that there were few cases where

romantic attachment was present in sexual relationships between the races. West (1999) argues that black men and women are reduced to sexual objects by one another in the same way that whites did during the antebellum period:

The dominant myth of black female sexual prowess constitutes black women as desirable sexual partners yet the central role of the ideology of white female beauty attenuates the expected conclusion. Instead of black women being the most sought after “objects of sexual pleasure” . . . white women tend to occupy this upgraded position primarily because white beauty plays a weightier role in sexual desirability for women. (p. 519)

The devaluing of sexually exclusive encounters with one partner communicated a message that black men and women were not worthy of monogamous sexual relationships. The impact on subsequent generations is that in some black communities, monogamy is not only minimal, but actually frowned upon. Hymowitz (2006) makes reference to a young man’s negative attitude regarding monogamy:

Outsiders may find these facts troubling; young men like Tyrell do not. Having grown up in the crack-era inner city, few have ever seen a long-term partnership between a man and a woman raising children together. And without such a model, they are unlikely to see it as a goal worth pursuing . . . one sixteen-year-old told Deparle, ‘I just can’t see myself being with one woman. That’d be too plain—like you have to see the same woman every day.’ A young man with this attitude does not spend time ‘looking for Ms. Right’ or ‘working on a relationship’ or any of the other rituals of middle-class courtship. . . . first he is with one woman, then he is with another; in all likelihood there will be more in the future. (pp. 96-97)

Finally, slave owners’ interpretation of black sexuality has impacted the way black churches recognize black sexuality within the race. Historically, blacks were viewed

as highly sexualized and capable of “beast-like” sexual behaviors that, while gratifying to whites, were deemed impure (Douglas, 1999; Ducille, 1990). Therefore, one could not build a genuine relationship with evil.

Michael Eric Dyson (2004) speaks to the concern that black churches have created minimal discourse around the topic of sex as a result of embodying white slave owners’ and subsequent white generations’ interpretation of sexual encounters for blacks:

During slavery and after emancipation, blacks both resisted and drank in sick white beliefs about black sexuality. Some blacks sought to fulfill the myth of unquenchable black lust. The logic isn’t hard to figure out; if white folk think I’m a sexual outlaw, some blacks perhaps thought, I’ll prove it. Other blacks behaved in exactly the opposite fashion. They rigidly disciplined their sexual urges to erase stereotypes of excessive black sexuality. During slavery, many black women resisted sexual domination through abortion, abstinence, and infanticide. (p. 224)

West and Dyson suggest that history has impacted the lack of affirmation, which is the primary reason for diminished relationships between black men and women.

Familial Patterns

Familial patterns impact several sexual themes of black youth sex culture. First is power and privilege. In some black communities, procreation is a rite of passage. While our country creates several initiatives to combat teenage pregnancy, for some black communities, the ability to bring life into the world at an early age is a privilege. Parents within the communities interpret the same benefit and, while they may not promote

premarital sex, they do not shun children born out of wedlock. Kay Hymowitz (2006), author of *Marriage and Caste in America*, also interviewed several black youth ranging from early teens to twenties, who stated that to produce children at an early age was a positive norm. The author reported a conversation with a young black girl, which supported this pattern:

‘I love babies,’ the braided, long-legged youngster said sweetly, ‘They’re so cute. My mother already told me, ‘If you get pregnant, you won’t have an abortion. You’ll have the baby, and your grandmother and I will help out . . .’ I want to be a lawyer . . . or maybe a teacher. Why do I need to worry about a father? My mother raised me and my sister just fine without one. (p. 109)

Sex serves as a tool to complete a rite of passage, more so than an opportunity to consummate a relationship on a permanent level.

Sexual learning is also affected by familial patterns. Ruby Payne (1996) describes the genogram of a family in a poor black community:

Ideal family structure, first marriage, then children, may influence middle class church families to purchase texts on abstinence, but the culture of poverty involves a different kind of family developmental pattern. “In generational poverty . . . many marital arrangements are common-law . . . Jolyn has been legally married three times. Jolyn and Husband #1 had no children. Jolyn and Husband #2 had one child, Willy. They divorced. Husband #2 eventually married the woman he lived with for several years, and they had a child together. She also had a son from a previous marriage. Willy has a common-law wife, Shea. Shea and Willy have a daughter. Jolyn and Husband #3 lived together several years before they were married, and they have a son named M.J. When M.J. was 13 he had a child with a 13-year-old girl, but that child lives with the girl’s mother. Husband #3 and Jolyn divorced; Jolyn is now living with a woman in a lesbian relationship. Husband #3 is living with a younger woman who is pregnant with his child. (p. 54)

The patterns of relationship development may leave the impression with youth that sexual encounters are fluid, and that commitments in those sexual relationships are temporal. However, it must be noted that there are similar familial patterns across class in black communities, which leaves this impression on more than poor populations.

The multiple relationships built in the previous example may also communicate that one is entitled to multiple partners in order to fill social or emotional voids. Very often, young black males are characterized as promiscuous, because at the first sign of dissatisfaction in a relationship, whether it is physical or emotional, sexual relationships end in pursuit of another interest. However, this sense of entitlement to “move on” to the next partner is reflected in the relationship patterns of other, perhaps slightly older, black men in the community (Benjamin, 1983).

Socio-economics

The socio-economic conditions of a community directly impact relationship building and subsequently, sexual behaviors. Most impacted are the themes of entitlement and power and privilege. Previously mentioned was the idea that adult responsibilities lent a sense of entitlement to adult sexual privileges. Specific to communities at or below the poverty line is the frequent delegation of duties to older siblings to prepare meals and care for younger siblings, while parents work later shifts (because of the hourly wage increase). In those situations, youth create the complete adult experience by allowing sexual/dating partners to come into the home to share

meals, care for siblings, and engage in sexual activity in a similar fashion to an adult relationship dyad.

Ruby Payne (1996) suggests that in communities at or below the poverty line relationships are considered a more valuable commodity than material goods. As a result, to build relationship ties is critical. It may appear that sex and romance flourish in youth culture of the poor and working class more than other socio-economic brackets due to the fact that greater emphasis is placed on one's power and privilege associated with having a sexual/dating partner. In a short story excerpt, Sharon G. Flake, author of *Who Am I without Him* (2005), conveys the experience of a high-school aged romance below the poverty line and how it impacts the intensity of relationships while serving as a sense of validity in place of the other resources that are lacking.

Media

Motion pictures and music created by and about blacks impacts the pleasure, immediate gratification, and power and privilege. First, let us recall that pleasure, according to Giroux, involves high rewards at minimal costs. Certain sectors of the black entertainment industry communicate via movies, song, or videos the luxurious life of long days of relaxation after reaping royalties from their artistry, whereby their status affords them casual sexual relationships. Another example is Karrine Steffans (2005), author of *Confessions of a Video Vixen*, who has reaped the financial benefits of producing a top-selling, tell-all account of her sexual excursions with powerful men in the sports and music industry. The aforementioned communicate the message that

sexual encounters are pleasurable if one can reap high benefits (financially) in the absence of any effort to maintain relationships.

Immediate gratification is realized in the storylines of many motion pictures and song lyrics. The “love ‘em and leave ‘em” message permeates many storylines, conveying the message that sexual encounters need not be predicated by dating or courtship. An example is in the film *The Brothers* (2001) starring Morris Chestnut and Gabrielle Union. The opening scene of the film presents Chestnut’s character, a physician, spotting Union’s character, a photographer in the park. They make eye contact, smile, exchange a few words, and the scene immediately cuts to them in a sex scene. Afterwards, they negotiate the parameters of the relationship and decide to commit. Another example is the lyrics to *OPP* (1990), a song written by the rap group Naughty by Nature. The song references OPP to mean Other Peoples’ [Sexual] Property which states, “There’s no room for relationships, there’s just room to hit it!” According to Patricia Hill Collins (2004), author of *Black Sexual Politics*, the possessive nature of black sexuality depicted in music has many implications:

When combined, these meanings of the term *booty* form a backdrop for contemporary mass media—generated gender ideology, with special meaning for Black masculinity. In the context of the new racism in which mis-education and unemployment have marginalized and impoverished increasing numbers of young Black men, aggression and claiming the prizes of urban warfare gain in importance. Being tough and having street smarts is an important component for Black masculinity. When joined to understandings of booty as sexuality, especially raw, uncivilized sexuality women’s sexuality, becomes the actual spoils of war. In this context, sexual prowess grows in importance as a marker of Black masculinity. For far too many Black men, all that seems to be left to them is

access to the booty, and they can become depressed or dangerous if that access is denied. In this scenario, Black women become reduced to sexual spoils of war, with Black men defining masculinity in terms of their prowess in conquering the booty. Mass media's tendency to blur the lines between fact and fiction has important consequences for perceptions of Black culture and Black people. (p. 151)

Religion

Religion impacts sexual learning and gender norms. As previously stated, black churches often struggle with exactly how to address sexuality. Many of the youth and singles programs grapple with whether to teach abstinence or prevention along with abstinence (Block, 2001). Another issue is the cultural relevance of supplemental texts on the subject of abstinence from a Christian perspective. The texts often speak of abstinence as a way to obtain goals and dreams associated with material wealth, which for some black youth of the working class or at or below the poverty line, yield cultural irrelevance (Smith, 2005).

Dyson (2004) insists that the communication about sexuality in black churches is lacking. He suggests that notions about sexuality from previous generations have challenged blacks' ability to engage in an open dialogue that will educate and affirm, while providing moral fiber. His argument is that the ownership of desire is being trumped by a "holier than thou" persona designed to deflect white interpretations of black sexuality. He recalls his own experience as a young minister attempting to negotiate the space between righteousness and desire:

I hadn't yet figured out that it's all right to enjoy erotic desire—to own up to the fact that you can be horny and holy—as long as you don't live at the mercy of your hormones. But if we can't talk about sex at home, and we can't talk about it at church, black Christians end up lying to ourselves and to the people to whom we're sexually attracted. And too often, we end up being much more destructive because of our erotic dishonesty. (p. 232)

His ultimate challenge directed at black communities and churches was to increase the willingness to engage in an affirming dialogue that will promote a positive sexual identity.

Currently, the themes of youth sex culture vary by subculture, but overall common themes include immediate gratification, pleasure and meaning, entitlement, power and privilege, gender differences, postmodern realities, religion, and sexual learning. In order to better understand sexual culture among black youth, it is necessary to examine motivation and expression of sexuality and how it varies from the majority culture. Implications for this research include, but are not limited to, augmenting a re-examination of abstinence curriculum in churches so that issues that are most pertinent to black youth and singles may be addressed. In the next chapter I explore the way in which the history of church development has impacted power and sexual identity of black church settings.

CHAPTER III

THE HISTORY OF BLACK CHURCHES AND MORAL CURRICULUM

In this chapter, I examine the historical development of black churches and its impact on the existence of abstinence curriculum within the black church community. This component of the literature gives an overview of how the evolution of decision-making power in the antebellum and postbellum periods has impacted the teaching of abstinence. After reviewing the history of church development, I explore how the purpose of the moral curriculum on abstinence is impacted by two contemporary church pedagogies; mega-church and small-independent church pedagogy.

A common misinterpretation is that there is monolithic “black church” with rules and norms that transcend all predominantly black congregations of Christian worship. While there may be sameness in certain traditions, the norms and meaning vary across and within denominations, which yield a rich variation of black church experiences. Factors that influence the variation include church emancipation, geographic location, socio-economic status, and the variation of philosophies on community development and outreach. These factors serve as both historical and contemporary issues in assessing the differences in black churches. This factor is important to note for the research in question. The exploration of the historical influences on church curriculum impacts the uncovering avenues for change in a present day curriculum; however, we

must be careful not assume that solutions can be applied in collective fashion today any more than they could centuries ago. William Sernett's *African American Religious*

History states:

It is important to perceive clearly that there is no 'black church' in the conventional understanding of that term. There are denominations, composed of congregations of black persons and under their control, and there are countless free-standing congregations, but there is no one entity that can be called the black church. There are also numerous black congregations in predominantly white denominations . . . It is virtually impossible to make generalizations to which significant exceptions cannot be cited. Yet there is a sense in which all black congregations and denominations respond to identical external circumstances and share common internal strengths, pressures, and tensions. (Jones, as cited in Sernett, 1999, p. 582)

Predominantly black congregations exist in both denominations founded by whites and those that were founded by blacks. The most prominent denominations of historically white origin are Baptist, Catholic, Methodist, United Methodist, Lutheran, Episcopalian, Church of God, United Church of Christ, and Assembly of God (Rhodes, 2005). While there are black congregations situated within these white denominations, there are other black denominations that actually derived from them to include: African Methodist Episcopal, African Methodist Episcopal Zion, and National Baptist Convention (black Baptist Body). There are many denominations that are derived from larger historically black congregations including but not limited to Church of God in Christ, Church of Christ, and the Apostolic Faith Church. Finally, black churches that claim no ties to historic denominations are *independent churches*, which vary tremendously in

mission, doctrine, and creed. These may also be known as *non-denominational* churches.

Certain trends and themes are consistent across history for the majority of black congregations and denominations, as it relates to moral curriculum development. First, *race relations* of the ante and post-bellum periods molded and shaped the ideologies of black churches. The transition from racially merged to segregated congregations and a need to prove that blacks could run churches independent of white supervision generated a need for modified rhetoric in the pulpit. In addition, race relations added another role of preachers behind the sacred desk. They were now responsible for igniting a sense of agency in black communities to fight for civil rights (Sernett, 1999).

Power and leadership is another theme present in the history of black churches. Like predominately white churches and denominations, they too, were affected by struggles for power and authority. The denominational breakdown in black churches is based upon differences in what some leaders believed to be the most essential components of the doctrine. For example, the Azusa street revival of 1912 influenced a massive move towards charismatic worship to include spiritual dance and speaking in tongues under the utterance of the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ. For leader Charles H. Mason, originally a member of the Baptist denomination, an urgency to have a worship experience on a regular basis that resembled the revival at Azusa Street prompted him to start the Church of God in Christ church, which later became a denomination (Rhodes, 2005). Later, socio-economic class would become a part of the denominational

distribution of membership in that, certain creeds and doctrine were more associated with charismatic worshipers as opposed to those who worshiped in a more conservative manner.

Church structure also influenced the moral curriculum. As another building block, subsequent to race relations and power, the decision-making bodies of black churches affected what was taught to the membership. Larger denominations such as the black Baptists grew into elaborate decision-making chains of command. A national headquarters was established which today serves as the hub of leadership for the highest volume of churches across the country. Rather than making decisions about Christian curriculum and teaching materials at the local level, very often the national body gives approval, which passes down through various chains of leadership, and then implemented at the local level.

The *educational values* of black churches also impacted moral curriculum. The concept of church-as-school rests at the heart of educational history for blacks. Postbellum, many parishes were schools by day and churches by night. There was often an inequitable distribution of resources due to the varying educational levels of teachers and revenue produced from the schools. These schools were often the site of not only academic subjects, but also the site where Christian values, morals, and ethics were planted into the minds of black children.

Economic development in the black church is a critical historical piece as it relates to moral curriculum development. As is the case today, the financial security of

the church was based on investment from membership in the form of tithes and offering. As time progressed, certain churches (often affiliated with certain denominations) evolved into what is currently known as *outreach* ministries. Historically, outreach churches made investments in the public market in order to build larger schools and homeless shelters and eventually subsidized housing for the elderly. The revenue accrued from these investments allowed for the accumulation of more resources, i.e. more advanced teaching materials, full-time ministers, and church facility upgrades.

Teachings about sexuality are a significant component of the moral curriculum of any church, to include black churches. Reviewing the historical themes across black churches is essential to the assessment of the moral curriculum as it relates to the subject of abstinence. First, determining race relations alludes to the attitudes within the church about black sexuality. There is also need to examine the power relations and structure to determine the church's role in decision-making about abstinence curriculum for blacks. Tracing the history of educational values reveals how much of a priority sex education has been in black churches across time. Finally, the evolution of economic development directly relates to whether or not the resources necessary to educate black membership on abstinence are available. The following is a historical assessment of race relationship, power, structure, educational values, and economic development of black churches, which will subsequently lead to a critical examination of

how the aforementioned impact the moral curriculum, specifically as it relates to abstinence.

Race Relations

Civility in the relationship between black and white Americans was a primary goal in the shared worship experiences in Christianity upon arrival to America. This seems, at first glance to be a contradiction to the historical accounts of treatment imposed upon black slaves by whites. However, the demographic construct of slave plantations (slaves significantly outnumbering owners), made it necessary that those captive embrace a certain “civility” in order to prevent revolt. Therefore, Christianity was not only a faith experience, but a tool used by owners to create a more “peaceful” coexistence between slaves and their masters (Mitchell, 2004).

Antebellum Period

Worship services were held collectively, with whites and blacks as a part of the same congregations. Slaves were required to take seating in the rear sections of the church or stand to provide seats for white members. Initially language barriers prevented slaves from assuming any form of leadership, but beyond that factor was the common interpretation that slaves were not astute enough to lead a church or serve in any role other than lay member.

A common belief is that there was a complete overhaul of African traditions for the sake of converting slaves to Christianity. The interpretation is that blacks brought into captivity by slavery were then forced into a religious co-optation that was a

complete opposite experience from that of their ancestors. However, that was not the case. Research reveals that there were many commonalities between the traditional African religion and that of Christianity. Henry Mitchell (2004), author of *Black Church Beginnings*, states:

More than an imposition by the whites, it was the similarity between the Christian religion and their traditional religion that fostered the passage of the faith . . . Of course, this is contrary to the widely circulated assumption that Africans were largely stripped of their native culture and religion during or after their voyage to these shores. (p. xv)

Similar to the structure of Christianity was an African religion practiced by the Ibo of West Africa. Like Christianity, there was belief in deity and the spirits, both of good and evil. Mitchell writes:

.ut important aspects of Ibo religion, such as its diffused monotheism, intricate ritual beliefs about ancestors, or the “living dead” and the influence of diviners and sorcerers, can be gleaned from the narrative. (p. 13)

Christian conversion became bi-directional between whites and blacks during the antebellum period. The overall doctrine was communicated by pastors and preachers on plantations to the slaves, but the African worship traditions influenced the way in which people communed or connected with God during services. The First Great Awakening was a religious movement that began in 1730 that encouraged emotional expression, conviction of sin, and a need for open expression of salvation (Mitchell, 2004). To emote was common practice in African religious tradition, and a welcomed change to the original structure of worship whereby church attendees sat quietly and

absorbed the information preached from the Biblical text in a more academic fashion. The style easily embraced by blacks, remained more of a struggle for some whites, who in a sense were “converted” to a more outward expression of gratitude for the conviction-then-redemption style of worship as communicated by Mitchell (2004):

Conversion became a heavily African-influenced merger/adaptation of the new, white conversion, behaviors, and beliefs. The influence flowed both ways and enriched the faith . . . (p. 13)

Mitchell further suggests that to “feel” the presence of God during the worship experience became the standard for African slaves and has transcended time as a standard for black worship experiences at large:

The Africans themselves saw faith and religious commitment as a natural part of their cultures, and based on *experience*, accompanied by some aspect of spiritual possession . . . Seventy-five years ago it was common to hear an African American elderly saint declare, ‘If you ain’t felt nothin’, you ain’t got nothin’.’ (p. 11)

Irrespective of slaves being more satisfied with the overall worship experience, there was still dissatisfaction with the institution of slavery looming. Slavery, as communicated by white parishioners, was the will of God for Africans so that they would come to know the salvation of Jesus Christ. Some of the most horrendous acts of white owners toward slaves, to include the severe beatings in response to attempted escapes, were communicated as the divine order of God to help them remain captive. For slaves to attempt escape was considered sin. As Peter Randolph (1999), author of

Plantation Churches: Visible and Invisible describes, the doctrine was more an oppression theology:

Many say the Negroes receive religious education—that Sabbath worship is instituted for them as for others, and were it not for slavery, they would die in their sins—that really, the institution of slavery is a benevolent missionary enterprise. (p. 63)

The use of religious teachings for the sake of mental manipulation was only the beginning of distrust between black and white Christians.

The Second and Third Great Awakenings were reflected in the religious attitudes and lives of slaves. The unrest with conditions of slavery grew toward the early 1800s during the Second Great Awakening, which was characterized by more frequent mass revivals and camp meetings. The concept of being reborn, renewed, and *free* in Christ ignited a desire for a different kind of liberty in slaves. There was a paradox between being free in Christ, yet held captive under horrifying conditions. To engage in open relief from the frustrations, secret Church meetings were held aside from those organized on the plantation by masters:

Despite the fact that some slaves were allowed to attend slave masters' churches, and some were even required to attend, practically all plantations of any size had their own secret and unmonitored services of worship . . . They were so secret that only certain of the Africans themselves, the ones that could be trusted, were invited. One's own children might not be told that time and place and character of what was going on. (Mitchell, 2004, p. 33)

Organized slave escapes were common. In an effort to dismantle the planning, masters did not allow slaves to congregate without a slave master or overseer's supervision. Slaves held secret services to talk about a different kind of freedom. The Christian faith ensured that if one was a believer, he or she would die in the natural, but the soul would live on for an eternity in heaven. Everlasting life, free of the rule of a slave master, was an alternative to freedom on Earth. Randolph (1999) explains:

Not being allowed to hold meetings on the plantation, the slaves assemble in the swamps, out of reach of the patrols . . . The slave forgets all his sufferings, except to remind others of the trials during the past week, exclaiming: 'Thank God, I shall not live here always!' (p. 67)

Most noted is the extent to which slaves would preserve the sacred worship experience. Many methods include the turned-over pot, described by ex-slave Sister Kelly, as recorded by Ophelia Settle Egypt between 1929 and 1930 were common practice in order to have a time of worship apart from white leadership on the plantation:

Well, we used to have little singing and praying like good ole time revival; and we would take pots and put them right in the middle of the floor to keep the sound in the room; yeah, keep the white folks from meddling. Yes'm, the sound will stay right in the room after you do that. Well, we all us used these old wash pots like you boil clothes in, you know. Just turn one down in the middle of the floor. That was sufficient. (Kelly, 1999 as cited in, p. 70)

These varied accounts of slaves' lives during the antebellum period was a time of transition in black Christianity, which was influenced by a desire for liberation in daily

living and worship. Their lives reflected the emergence of leadership and a willingness to go against the grain in order to achieve freedom.

Postbellum Period

The emancipation of slaves during the early 1800s was not only a time of political, social, and racial turmoil, but also religious unrest. Organized churches continued to worship together in racially integrated congregations. However, the Third Awakening, which incorporated social activism, also known as the *Social Gospel Movement*, created a dichotomy in the overall approach to Christianity and inspired further unrest over inequities between blacks and whites. In addition, the charismatic, emotive style of worship of the first two awakenings, continued to increase in popularity and further separate white and black worshipers as explained by Mitchell (2004):

At first the trickle of only a few slave converts had simply been absorbed into the established white congregations. But the Great Awakenings brought an authentic religious experience to thousands. This was bound to generate additional desire among whites and blacks for separate worship in separate congregations. White church members were not nearly as happy as their black colleagues were with spontaneity and free expressiveness of Great Awakening-style worship. (p. 46)

According to Mitchell, the style of worship was perceived as uncivilized, lacking dignity in the eyes of whites. The “uncivilized” worship was further evidence, to whites, that Africans were incapable of exercising the civilities necessary to lead in a worship experience.

Black churches organized officially during the 1870s, but many problems were on the horizon during the transition to churches independent of white supervision. Emancipation was slow, though the Civil War and Emancipation Proclamation had mandated a release. There was still a need to use Christian doctrine in order to keep unrest at bay. The previously mentioned Great Awakenings had inspired a teaching style that involved a different interpretation of the Bible and promoted freedom. Blacks were distrusted to convey a doctrine consistent with the antebellum teachings.

It must be understood that prior to 1800 no church, North or South, evolved without some form of white denominational recognition, trusteeship of land title, and/or certification to the government by respected whites that the blacks involved would cause the slavery system no trouble. (Mitchell, 2004, p. 48)

Believing that blacks would rely on personal testimony as opposed to the Biblical text, many white church leaders still served as the pastor to black congregations. Even when it was discovered that a black preacher was well qualified, supervision continued.

This early supervision included appointment of white preachers in almost all cases, if only for the monthly service of Holy Communion . . . Black exhorters were considered incapable of serving as full pastors, and were denied full ordination. This arbitrarily low appraisal of black preachers prevailed despite the impressive effectiveness of some black preachers. It gave white churches an excuse for trying to maintain tight control over Black churches...When a black preacher was more gifted than available whites, and was badly enough needed, he might serve, at least for a few years, as the founder and functioning full pastor of a mixed congregation. (Mitchell, 2004, p. 50)

The transition of power influenced the freedom (or lack thereof) of *suitable* content across the pulpit.

One of the challenges of emancipated churches was that there was no formal education for the leaders of the churches. The excitement over the ability to independently organize usurped attention to details such as consistency in the doctrine preached. This was most common in rural areas of the country, where there was minimal literacy or theological education of any kind. Rosa Young, founder of Rosebud School in Rosebud, Alabama (Sernett, 1999) shares her account of the rural church experience in the late 1800s:

The preachers would read a text and then branch off and preach all kinds of man-made doctrines, telling the people that these things are in the Bible. Many a time the name of Jesus was not mentioned during a whole sermon. The preachers would whoop, hollo, pat, and stamp, snort, and blow until the people were in an uproar shouting and holloing , too. Then the preacher would just say anything. I once heard a preacher laughing and telling how he curses when he gets 'niggers' to shouting and holloing . . . We did not know what Jesus, the Savior, meant to us. We did not know that we were sinners. We wanted to go to heaven; but we did not know the way, and the preachers did not know it. We were trying to work our way to heaven, and the preachers were doing the same. We were not following our Bibles, neither were the preachers. (Young, as cited in Sernett, pp. 355-356)

There was a fine line between the swindler and uneducated preacher. However, a vast majority simply were not well trained. The very concern that white leaders had from the beginning about black leaders had come to fruition. Their assessment was that leaders

relied heavily upon the testimony of emotional experiences and performed miracles that came with the eras of Great Awakenings.

The vast majority of its pastors are poorly trained academically, and more poorly trained theologically; that more than half of the sermons analyzed are abstract, other-worldly, and imbued with a magical conception of religion. (Mays & Nicholson, 1999, p. 424)

At present day, certain race relation issues still remain in congregations that are a part of historically white denominations. Some of the historic concerns about doctrine remain, especially for small-independent churches where there is no overarching structure to hold preachers accountable for the messages conveyed. The constant challenge for black preachers to “prove themselves” as well-learned in the ranks with white ministers is based on the post-bellum transition.

Power

Black leaders struggled for control of their churches well into the early 1900s. Especially in the case of leaders of congregations embedded within white denominations, the role of the preacher was primarily for the purpose of maintaining good public relations and increasing persuasion in the area of giving. Predominantly black congregations felt a certain dissonance about being led by white leaders. Moreover, white leaders were not visible on a regular basis. The effort seemed futile while a faithful, able-bodied black preacher conveyed sermons regularly and counseled the body.

Sensing the unrest, white leaders at the district level held installation services for black pastors, but only in namesake. Black pastors still did not have the decision-making power, possessed by their white counterparts. Both the pastor and his members were without a vote on any of the decisions affecting the church. *Circuit Riders* were white ministers responsible for a certain number of churches over a measure of land. The minister would visit each church, delegate responsibilities, and report decisions made by an all white council separate from the church. Resisting this chain of command, resulted in a white minister assuming the role as pastor and then de-fellowshipping members who failed to comply. Mitchell gives an account of the experience of a church in Virginia:

Still more important was the refusal of whites to share organizational power or control with African Americans, whether slave or free. This power issue is illustrated by the white Baptists at Portsmouth mentioned above. Pastor Bishop's pulpit gifts transcended white culture, under the uniting influence of the new worship of the first Great Awakening. Yet their 'union' dissolved as soon as black 'members' sought the right to vote in true Baptist equality. The African Americans of this strong congregation later withdrew their request when they saw that simply asking to vote was causing their outright exclusion from membership. They grew faint of heart and asked to be received back into the "fellowship" on the old, voteless basis. (Mitchell, 2004, p. 52)

A very positive outcome of the circuit rider model was that most black churches were supervised infrequently (as often as the minister could ride the circuit of churches), which meant that a certain amount of liberty from the pulpit was available in his absence. Black pulpits served as the hub for communicating messages about civil rights and education, which were opposite some of the oppressive messages of

yesteryear. Overtime, certain churches disconnected from the historically white denominations to form independent churches and eventually denominations.

Just as black preachers gained power over time, so did members. They earned the right to vote. Eventually church councils were elected and deacons were appointed. The standard system of checks and balances reflected in white churches was equally enforced in black churches. The increase in size made it possible for churches to create auxiliaries (i.e. Women's fellowship, Men's fellowship, Sunday School or Christian Education department, etc.). The head of these committees were lay members.

One common auxiliary, typically the first in many churches, was the Outreach ministry, or *Missions*. While, historically and currently Missions may very well refer to aid for third world country, originally, outreach ministry was local. The key was a merger of moral and practical teachings that would help the less fortunate to achieve in whatever areas necessary to be a productive citizen. An example of outreach during 1918 was the social work mission of Mattie Fisher and Jessie Mapp of Olivet Baptist church, who took a local survey of the needs in the community in which the church rested. Over time, Fisher and Mapp (1999, as cited in Sernett) developed various programs to meet the needs of the surrounding community in the areas of social, educational, economic, and spiritual development.

The children for the kindergarten are secured from the homes visited and the mother's meeting was started from the enrollment of parents of the kindergarten children. This is one for the most prosperous of the activities. The girls with an average attendance of thirty-five. The girls are especially interested

in home making, and much for our study work is intended to help them in making the best Christian homes. (p. 369)

Most significant during the middle of the twentieth century was the role that membership played in the U.S. Civil Rights movement. Numerous organizations were birthed from the church to include the National Coalition for Negro Churchman, NAACP, SCLC, and other civil rights organizations at the grassroots level under what was coined in 1966 as *Liberation Theology*. Any opportunities of the kind, whereby moral and practical needs were merged in the form of outreach projects, became the focus of black churches across the country, and continue to present day.

The relationship between social class, membership, and power is critical to the history of black churches. Before self-selecting out to varying denominations, black members of different socio-economic classes worshipped in the same parishes and served the same auxiliaries. The virtue of those congregations was the restoration of dignity that took place as a member of the body. Benjamin E. Mays and Joseph W. Nicholson, authors of *Genius of the Negro Church* (1933) explain how churches served blacks by granting encouraging agency and a positive identity contrary to the negativity projected onto them by whites on a daily basis:

The opportunity found in the Negro church to be recognized, and be "somebody," has stimulated the pride and preserved the self-respect of many Negroes who would have been entirely beaten by life, and possibly completely submerged. Everyone wants to receive recognition and feel that he is appreciated. The Negro church has supplied this need. A truck driver of average on more than ordinary qualities becomes the chairman of the Deacon Board. A

hotel man of some ability is the superintendent of the Sunday church school of a rather important church. (Mays & Nicholson, 1999, as cited in Sernett, p. 426)

Mays and Nicholson (1999) predicted a shift that is present across denominations. They suggested that the socio-economic advancement of black households would create churches that were more homogeneous in socio-economic classification.

The Negro church still furnishes the best opportunity for Negroes of different social strata and various cultural groups to associate together in a thoroughgoing democratic way . . . As the race gets older in freedom, the number of college-trained business and professional people will inevitably increase. There will be more grouping and mingling among people of similar interests, and the tendency will be in the direction of a more rigid separation between Negroes of different interests and achievements. (pp. 430-431)

Ranging from shifts in governing power to that within the membership, black churches evolved in the way in which decisions were made.

Structure

Black church denominations were, and continue to be headed by national organizations for the purpose of maintaining consistency across the various churches within the denomination. A prime example is the organizational structure of the Church of God in Christ denomination. There is a national body headed by a presiding Bishop, followed by a board of 10 members, all of no less than Elder status (label of those ordained to pastor), five of which are the council of officers (first vice president, second vice president, secretary, and assistant secretary), the other five of which are general board members. Other leaders head the 8 national auxiliaries included but not limited to the International Women's Department, Youth

Department, Church Growth and Development, and the C.H. Mason Theological Seminary.

There are Presiding Bishops over every state and international districts, known as jurisdictions.

At the national level, recommendations are made for auxiliary structure and materials, and then translated to the state and local level (www.cogic.org, 2009).

To serve in leadership within varying denominations there was typically three types of ordination training. Originally, when black churches first separated from white churches there was simply a calling. The calling was the belief that God's specific assignment in life was to minister the Gospel, head an auxiliary, or serve the church in any other capacity. In addition to the calling, experience and longevity granted credibility, and others became understudies, who then received licenses from the church of the leader. There was a sort of organic intellectualism.

As time progressed and national leadership was established in the denominations, seminaries derived from the denominations were instated, and formal training became a requirement in order to leader as a pastor. The evolution of the church brought with it numerous other trainings for different levels of service in auxiliaries from the national to the state, and local levels. An example is the Church of God MIP Program, a series of course credits earned for ordination, typically completed in a one-year program, and required to serve in the role as pastor.

Educational Values

Educational values and black Christian values are interrelated. Limited financial resources made church the educational hub for many early blacks. Black Christians

would establish schools for those in need. The curriculum was not limited to the standards of math, reading, and arithmetic, but also social and moral development. Young captures the merger of moral and practical needs as she reflects on a list of reasons that inspired her to develop a church school in a rural district.

Morals and manners were at a low ebb. It was a rare thing to see a man who did not have two or more wives or see a woman who had only one husband. It was common to see a young girl in her teens, approaching the age of twenty, who was a mother and was drifting about with no husband. . . . both young and old had lost all regard for the holy estate of matrimony . . . The homes people lived in were poor and horrible . . . In many cases the whole family, half grown young men and women, smaller children and a father had to sleep and cook in the same room. (Young, 1999, pp. 348-350)

The school was successful until a boll weevil infestation in 1915, at which time the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference came to the aid of the school as an outreach project. However, Young's account serves as an illustration of the close knit between the academic and moral curriculum of that era.

In spite of the limited social and educational experiences of church leadership, lay members were encouraged to invest in education for their children. The thought was that the subsequent generation would be able to reap greater economic wealth, but also gain the respect of white counterparts. While some whites shunned the ignorance of blacks, others served as allies in cultural politics whereby they encouraged and made provisions for educational development of blacks. Yet, ministers were the liaisons

between progressive whites and black Christians. Mays and Nicholson give an account to the triangular relationship between white allies, black leadership, and laity:

Many a country boy or girl would never have had the chance to attend college if the pastor of his or her church had not urged it. Even in cases where Negro education was graciously supported by white people who were kindly and justly disposed toward the Negro, the Negro minister was often needed, and relied upon to give sanction to and boost education. (p. 430)

A historical emphasis on education in black churches speaks to why abstinence curriculum in some churches places emphasis on the numerous educational opportunities afforded if pregnancy is avoided.

Economic Development

The financial stability of black churches proved challenging at inception. Part of the reason is that wage earners in black churches did not have the lucrative resources to give. Moreover, wage earning was inconsistent. During the days of sharecropping, white landowners often divided resources unfairly, or increased the payment to farm a portion of land. Therefore, what was rendered to the church was not the same amount on a regular basis. Additionally, the *forms* of offerings varied in black churches. For example in urban areas where wages were exchanged for labor in the form of currency, currency was rendered in offerings. However, for churches that were located in rural areas, members' wage-earnings may have been in the form of crops for certain seasons of the year and wages others. The inconsistency challenged churches' abilities to grow and provide outreach ministry resources.

The financial inconsistency postbellum was due to the usury of white leaders when segregating. As previously stated, churches were mostly integrated during the antebellum period; however, upon emancipation, white leaders gave the appearance that a “parting gift” of freedom was to inherit the older edifice when white members built a new structure. However, very often, the new structure was built with the finances of both white *and* black members. As a result, when white churches entered new sanctuaries, they also took with them the financial footing of the sanctuary left to blacks. Another challenge was the actual business etiquette of churches. For many there was no financial record keeping, and books at headquarters (of those churches that belonged to denominations) were often manipulated in order to supplement the financial challenges at white establishments. Communicating financial stability per household from the pulpit was essential to maintaining the financial stability of the church (Mitchell, 2004).

History’s Influence on Moral Curriculum as it Relates to Sexuality

The aforementioned historical factors; race relations, power and structure, educational values, and economics impact the moral curriculum of sexuality in black churches. Racially motivated interpretations of black sexuality have encouraged some churches to embrace white standards of sexual purity when developing a curriculum. Cornel West (1999) and Michael Eric Dyson (2004) speak to the way in which the attitudes of antebellum whites regarding black sexuality has impacted the way in which churches address the issue.

For example, most black churches shunned the streets, clubs, and dance halls in part because these black spaces seemed to confirm the very racist myths of black sexuality to be rejected. Only by being ‘respectable’ black folk, they reasoned, would white America see their good works and shed its racist skin. For many black church folk, black agency and white passivity in sexual affairs was neither desirable nor tolerable. It simply permitted black people to play the role of the exotic “other”—closer to nature (removed from intelligence and control) and more prone to be guided by base pleasures and biological impulses. (West, 1999, p. 518)

The desire to identify with a culture that was acceptable to whites made sexual discourse an unaffordable obstacle, and therefore an untouched topic by black church leadership and laity. However, Dyson (2004) suggests that there is a necessary ownership of sexual body and identity that cannot be sacrificed in the name of acceptance by whites.

It’s much more difficult to figure out how we can have a healthy sense of black Christian sexual identity in a world where being black has been a sin, where black sexuality has been viewed as a pathology, and where the inability to own—and to own up to—our black bodies has led us to devalue our own flesh . . . Christianity gave theological legitimacy, and racial justification, to widely held beliefs about black inferiority. It also sanctified the brutal methods deemed necessary to tame the beastly urges of black Africans . . . If black bodies were demeaned, black sexuality was demonized. (Dyson, 2004, p. 223)

The result of the indoctrination of the ideologies to which Dyson referred is that, some black congregations have neglected the subject of sexuality altogether. For those church communities that do discuss sex, the monolithic message is to avoid pregnancy and disease. There is still a failure to validate desires (maintaining a civilized image), or systemic challenges to fulfilling those desires in God’s way (i.e. those at or below the

poverty line who run the risk of losing needed health care benefits or WIC vouchers due to the change in income associated with marriage, though the income increase is insignificant, causing legal marriage to be perceived as less desirable).

Power and structural issues continue to impact the ability to develop a sound, all-inclusive abstinence curriculum that meets the needs of blacks. Very often, churches take curricular recommendations in a top-down leadership fashion. The review of Christian educational materials begins at the national headquarters level. Typically, a single recommendation is passed down to state, district, and local levels. However, all memberships are not representative of the decision making body, and in some cases, materials contain no cultural relevance for certain populations of the membership. The other end of the leadership spectrum, whereby there is no governing body, proves problematic for the same reasons. There are no checks and balances to account for the varying factors within a congregation (i.e. literacy rates, marital status, etc), which could influence the perceived relevance and absorption of the information.

Whereas white ministries *could* be a good resource for collaboration, the poor power relations of yesteryear prevent leaders from seeking out opportunities to communicate and learn new approaches to abstinence curriculum from one another. The national initiatives that are highly successful in conveying abstinence to white youth and singles, could be modified (when necessary, not in all cases) to meet the needs of black churches. However, there is little dialogue between the two households of the same faith, based on a fear that to collaborate is to encourage white domination in the

process of curricular development. However, just as collaboration with progressive whites was beneficial in the early post-bellum period for educational development, so it is the case now that *both* blacks and whites could benefit from merging concepts and ideas.

An heir of progress for black churches' abstinence curriculum development is the evolved educational and economic development within the church community. Many curricula in black churches emphasizes the practical nature of God's mandate for abstinence to include that children born into marriages have greater financial resources and because their parents have more education. Therefore, the merging of the moral and practical curriculum remains. A concern, however, is that there is disconnection in the teaching to youth and singles whose households do not value education and future planning in the same way. Therefore, church youth and singles leaders must take agency to design a curriculum that will present goals such as educational achievement and the accumulation of wealth, but also emphasize spiritual relationship, and a desire for purity, and family development, so that those who have not yet grasped educational and academic goal-setting will yet have a sense of connection to the material.

Another concern is that middle class church curriculum relies so heavily on practical ramifications of abstinence that the message of, "God wants you to abstain from premarital sex so that you can go to college and afford the children you will bear," does not address the fact that some still engage in sex, but have abortions in order to fulfill the practical agenda. Ultimately, we must be careful to assess the factors that

influence the way in which curriculum is developed in the church. The rich history of black experiences are both beneficial and challenging to expanding the way in which we communicate to youth and singles about the importance of abstinence. Being mindful of the influences, and broadening our sense of resourcefulness, will hopefully create an all-encompassing curriculum that welcomes multi-faceted experiences, and provides equitable variance in solutions.

Pedagogical Values and the Moral Curriculum

The previous sections of this chapter have addressed the way in which history has impacted the existence of abstinence curriculum in black churches. However, history has a relationship to the contemporary design of educational philosophies, or pedagogies in the black churches as well. The pedagogic values of a church institution impact the way in which members are educated about the facets of Christianity. While, pedagogy varies in black churches, it rests on a continuum influenced by many cultural factors to include class and perceptions of wealth, ethnicity, and exposure to other cultures. *Understanding the Cultural Framework of Poverty* and its successor *What Every Church Should Know about Poverty* addresses value systems that influence poverty. Authors Ruby Payne and Bill Ehlig (1999) provide a list of resources that exist in any community and conclude that:

Spiritual resources are the belief that help can be obtained from a higher power, that there is a purpose for living, and that work and love are gifts from God. This is a powerful resource because the individual does not see him/herself as hopeless and useless, but rather as capable and having worth and value. (p. 8)

The pedagogy of a black church (or any church) ideally serves as a resource based upon the values of love, hope, and worth. In that way, all would be similar. However, for the sake of this research, black church pedagogy will be divided into two categories, *mega-church* pedagogy that values and perhaps emphasizes access to the public market, and *small-independent* church pedagogy that rests its values in the oral tradition. Public market will refer to the basic buying and selling of goods through vendors. Oral tradition will refer to the way in which values, ideologies, and histories are communicated in the absence of formal literature (with the exception of the Holy Bible).

Mega-church Pedagogy

The appeal of the public market is primarily to the middle class mega-church. These churches typically serve populations of 2,000 plus membership. The mega-church typically consists of middle to upper middle class members who have administrative or professional positions. Most of the members have completed at least an undergraduate degree in a given area and many pursue graduate and other professional degrees. The authors of the *African American Church Handbook* (Flake et al., 2005) describe their parish as a successful mega-church:

The church has grown from 1,200 members in 1976 to more than 20,000 members today with an asset base of \$106 million. Its more than 300 employees make Greater Allen A.M.E. and its subsidiaries one of the largest employers in the borough of Queens . . . more than 120 categories of service. (pp. xiii-xiv)

The church congregation is most attracted to the mega-church environment that offers resources that resemble practical needs. *Religion and Popular Culture in America* by Bruce Forbes and Jeffrey Mahan (2005) describe:

Mega churches make certain that their parking lots are large and convenient. They provide childcare and other things which make attendance more accessible . . . the core of the mega church's "services" of these customer needs is a panoply of "ministries"—typically support groups, fellowship opportunities . . . Most of the credit for the success of the megachurch is given to its facility in making itself intellectually as well as physically accessible. (p. 147)

An example of the aforementioned church design is a popular mega-church in North Carolina, which serves a population of approximately 3,500 members (closer to 5,000 before outsourcing to seed churches). The church is outfitted with a two-tier sanctuary, bookstore, audio-visual production room, several classrooms and conference rooms, and a fellowship hall, an approximately 20,000 square foot facility complete with basketball court, bowling alley, movie theatre, arcade, snack bar, daycare facility, and indoor playground equipment. Many churches that resemble this one serve an "all-in-one" purpose to include secondary education facilities. In addition to recreational resources, childcare, and bookstores, some churches have ventured into having private medical facilities on the church ground. An example of this trend is at University Park Missionary Baptist Church of Charlotte, North Carolina. "The Park," as it is referred, has a medical facility typical in structure and operation to that of an Urgent Care clinic establishment. The facility is owned by the church; however, it is available to the larger community. The church becomes a "one stop" experience to obtain all of the resources

that exist in secular society with a moral underpinning of Christianity. Flake et al. (2005) offer, “Churches exist in part to meet the spiritual needs of member. However, a church that does only this might well be considered too self-absorbed and internally directed. The kingdom of God must embrace a much wider, broader, mission” (p. 87).

The clear message of the mega church is that church is a business. Embracing practices of public market is a distinct part of the culture. Some church leaders are eager to convey the message that in order for churches to meet the practical needs of its members, there is a need to utilize strategies of the marketplace. Flake et al. (2005) report that “Churches must move beyond any shyness they have about acknowledging that it takes financial resources . . . that accomplish the churches mission” (p. 11). For a mega-church:

Economic development is successful to the extent that a market need is identified and addressed in such a way that people are willing to pay for whatever goods or services the business is providing. With the successful creation of business ventures, communities have access to a greater tax base, which in turn is likely to lead more economic growth and better public services. (Flake et al., 2005, p. 102)

There is a clear relationship between the public market and the moral education curriculum of the mega-church. Signature to the curriculum in the mega-church is the use of literary references and resources beyond that of the Bible. This includes books, video/audio recordings, workshops, and retreats. The topics covered by the aforementioned range from ways to maximize prayer life, guidelines for Christian

childrearing, special topics in Christianity for specific sexes, and marriage and family to stewardship and financial management, Christian Entrepreneurship (also known as Marketplace ministries), auxiliary development, ministry development, and church organization. While the Bible is used as a basis in the teachings on any of the topics, the additional resources supplement the teaching and generally provide ways to apply Biblical concepts practically. The public market makes these resources available via local Christian bookstores, church bookstores, and even secular bookstores. An example would be the immense popularity of using Rick Warren's *Purpose Driven Life* as a teaching supplement in 2002, which was used in churches across the country. The accessing of the goods is an ongoing practice by most mega-church members, seen as an "investment," in one's Christian development.

Preaching in mega-churches supports the pursuit of goods in the public market.

Clark (2007) suggests:

. . . how religious leaders in the United States have interacted with the marketplace, paying particular attention to those religious leaders and organizations that sought out the commercial realm more actively. Such leaders have looked upon commercial goods, as well as publicity through the press (or later) visual media, as useful means by which to promote their viewpoint and garner support of their claims to authoritative power. (p. 4)

Very often, the previously mentioned resources are recommended during sermons and Bible Study teachings as well. Many times, pastors and ministers will suggest to the congregation a book, CD/DVD, or promote an upcoming workshop that will serve as a

supplement to Biblical teachings. Many of the workshops are held on Saturday mornings or an alternative evening (to Bible study). Other, more extensive workshops, or retreats, are presented as “getaways” or resort areas where the workshops will be held by day and opportunities for leisure in the evening.

A popular example of this resource is that of the marriage retreat, which includes a weekend stay at a given resort, typically high-end, that includes workshops during the day to address several Biblical ideologies followed by evening socials, balls, and galas to encourage fellowship and social development as a couple. While many churches offer workshops and retreats at the district and state level, characteristic of the mega-church is the financial ability to serve their population exclusively without having to branch out even to the district level should they have no desire to do so. In addition, the pastor promotes a guest speaker, typically someone of relative fame (a writer of one of the recommended books or popular minister/pastor) who will lead the workshop. The registration fees, purchase of materials, and even lodging fees are all contributors to the utility of the public market in the mega-church.

Consistent with the typical mega-church teachings is the encouragement of the members to pursue education, wealth/prosperity, and multi-cultural exposure (Flake et al., 2005). Most mega-church populations have pastors who have achieved terminal degrees in divinity or theology. A number of mega-church pastors and ministers have professional background in some sort of secular work (i.e. counseling, education, real estate, or banking/finance). For example Edwin Reed, chief financial officer and co-

author of *AACMH* (2005), holds a Master of Divinity degree from Virginia Union *and* a Master of Business Degree from Harvard University. There is consistent acknowledgement of educational pursuits, where members are praised for continuing to elevate in their education. The link to Christianity is that God desires for us to be “well learned,” not only in the Bible or Christian based material, but in secular realms as well that Christians might become the “upright” resource in a downtrodden world. For example, a mega-church Pastor may insist that Christians pursue doctoral degrees so that there will be Christ-like representation in the institution of higher learning. Or the Pastor may encourage MBAs to take their rightful place as Christian bankers, loan officers, and managers.

Financial success is also taught to be the will of the Father in the mega-church curriculum. Pastors very often encourage becoming well-versed in credit/debt management, and investments. The biblical link is that God would have us to be “lenders not borrowers,” which is achieved by good credit, income exceeding outgoing expenses, residual income, and most important is work and stewardship. Wuthnow’s (1995) *Rethinking Materialism* suggested:

Many of the books in my sample explicitly set out to legitimate work as properly Christian activity. Work is presented as the fulfillment of God’s plan for the world and, more immediately and concretely, for the individual worker. Since God made the universe and called Adam to tend it, work is a necessary element in God’s design for human beings and is thus mandated as a central obligation of human life . . . read the Genesis accounts as establishing ones’ God given ‘right’ to accumulate the products of labor, an interpretation that undergirds arguments for a biblical defense of capitalism. (p. 119)

As a product of work, stewardship is the overarching way in which finances are managed with first priority being given to financial obligations and pledges made to the church. Payne and Ehlig (1999) describe giving in the middle class form as, “. . . often tithes. To give 10% is to be a good steward. Money [can be] given by pledge through check. Special donations made for particular causes are often huge” (p. 29). Success in Christ is measured by wealth as best described in a quote from a leader in the church of God:

Our ministers today wear good clothes, live in good and well-furnished homes, drive fine automobiles, and hold the general respect of the public, and their sermons are surpassed by no other group of gospel preachers. The radio stations are open to them, and they are possibly the best liked group of ministers by the owners of the stations of any group that has ever gone on the air . . . We are not a weak, back-alley church. We worship on the front streets and the whole world welcomes us. The Church of God has spread over the world to the extent that the sun never sets on it. She has taken her place with other great religious organizations of the world, and is recognized in our Nation’s Capital, in the courts of the land, and by business and professional men, and they are made to realize that we are a fast-growing church and have great possibilities of becoming the world’s leading church. (Payne & Ehlig, 1999, p. 58)

Multi-Cultural exposure is a key component to pastoral teachings in the mega-church. With the increase in technology, churches of the same denomination across the globe are able to interact and fellowship. Trips all over the world, known as Missions, are only one example of how the members are taught to connect with other cultures, which further feeds the public market. Domestic missions (i.e. Hurricane Katrina) are very popular as well. Ethnic exposure also plays a role in influencing the use of the

public market in black mega-churches. The history of black presence in the United States suggests a distinction in the ability to obtain goods and resources accessed by blacks versus whites. Just as there is an increasingly greater resemblance of black social and economic development to that of whites in the secular world, such is the case in the Christian Church. Pastors invite guest speakers to the church of other ethnic backgrounds for bible studies, revivals, and Sunday Morning worship. Very often, the socioeconomic status of the home churches represented by the non-black speakers resembles that of black mega-church. Therefore, there is a “fresh face” promoting wealth and prosperity that symbolizes to black members that they are “moving up.” Pursuing the same economic stability as white speakers gives the black church an increased sense of accomplishment, and therefore influences further activity in the public market. The mass media example of the concept is the collaboration of popular televangelists, TD Jakes, Rod Parsley, Paula White, Joyce Meyer, and Juanita Bynum. The congregations are typically of mixed ethnicity and there are many occasions where the speaker does not represent the majority of the ethnic population of the church. Yet, the common thread is practical teaching to include the pursuit of prosperity.

The role of community in the black mega-church affects the way its members access the Christian public market. Traditional notions of church community are most faithful to membership being derived from local residents. The churches sat in the heart of black neighborhoods and typically, the members were residents from those communities (walking distance before vehicles were in the economic grasp for blacks).

However, the mega-church's notion of community is altogether different. First, for churches that began smaller, a common practice is the purchase of real estate that touches the borders of the church grounds in order to expand. Flake et al. (2005) share their view on the mega-church and community:

Most healthy, growing churches develop outreach ministries that address the needs of their surrounding communities. In fact, the current political and social climate recognizes the power and leverage of local churches that are intimately involved in communities, churches whose missions and activities are inextricably intertwined with the lives of the people who are most in need of help. (pp. 87-88)

The philosophy of Flake et al. is that the church should foster economic and social progression. There is also a blatant effort to encourage a value shift of the community that they serve, along with spiritual conversion of mentality from survival mode to that of financial savvy.

Community development in many ways constitutes the essence of an extended and successful ministry. After all, ministry results from people who, in following God, change first themselves and their surroundings. This process entails changing how people think about themselves, their lives, and their relationships. (p. 88)

Any church, regardless of location or size, has the opportunity to engage in community development. And if just one church takes on the challenge of transforming the people in the neighborhood, there will most likely be a shift in the attitude with which people view the neighborhood and the relationship they have with its residents. (p. 89)

This is a perfect opportunity for a church to provide ministry to the community by setting up community development corporations (CDCs). Churches—and individuals for that matter—would be much better off investing in land than in,

for example, the stock market. As with homes real estate is almost invariably and appreciating asset. (p. 91)

Churches are established on campuses, some as large as small universities. In other cases, land is purchased and developed on the outskirts of cities and towns. For example, Newbirth Church in Atlanta, Georgia has a half-mile drive that leads into what is described as a “wonderland” of freshly manicured landscaping, as described by a visitor. The church is set apart from metropolitan life of Atlanta. The attraction to the ministry of mega-churches is so strong that members willingly drive anywhere from 1 to 3 hours one way to participate in services. Another popular resource of the Christian public market used to encourage community is the internet. *Streaming Faith* is a website that allows various ministers to broadcast their weekly services live over the internet, so that members who live out of town can tap into and become a part of the worship experience (www.streamingfaith.com, 2009). Additionally, members are encouraged to mail their tithes and offerings or use on-line payment options to continue financial support to the church.

Ultimately, the structure of the Moral Education curriculum in the mega-church is characterized by the use of a number of resources to include books, workshops, and popular speakers, teachers, evangelists, and preachers made possible by strong financial backing and networking and a discourse that promotes education, wealth, and prosperity (Wuthnow, 1995; Flake et.al., 2005). Middle to upper-middle class

churchgoers have a tendency to not only appreciate but seek out ministries of this magnitude.

Small-independent Church Pedagogy

Markedly different from the utility of the public market in the mega-church, the oral traditions are most consistently the foundation of the curriculum of the small-independent black church, which best correlates with the organizational structure. The independent church typically consists of congregations relatively small in number (as few as 10). The population most represented in the independent church is that of the lower middle to working class—in many cases the working poor and those below the poverty line. Many of the members work in the blue-collar industry or doing public service work such as housekeeping, facility maintenance (Payne & Elhig, 1999).

The place of worship is generally small with very few amenities compared to that of the mega-church. There are no bookstores, rarely any daycares, no family life centers with multiple audiovisual rooms. There may be a sanctuary, but with only a few classrooms and a pastoral and/or administrative office. However, there are many cases where the independent church's place of worship is a school cafeteria, hotel conference room, and even a living room or garage at the pastor's home. One reason for the variance in worship structures is the budgetary vacillation common to independent churches. There is no financial backing from a larger denomination, therefore the ability to accumulate enough resources to maintain a house of worship is completely dependent upon the financial success of the members (An exception to this rule is the

“seed church” whereby larger denominations or seminaries will begin a church with very few members, usually directed by the pastor of one of the larger churches).

The use of oral traditions influences a different curriculum for moral education in the small-independent black church. The moral education curriculum of the independent church is typically Bible oriented with very little reference to any other supplemental resources aside from Sunday School materials (in only some cases). Under the sound of the voice of the independent pastor, there will be few suggestions to read supplemental books, listen to CDs, or attend workshops. Payne and Ehlig (1999) describe sermonic styles as having a “causal register. Story based. Often emotional [with] frequent references to the devil. Scriptures [are] used for emphasis. Often fear-based (Do this or you will go to hell)” (p. 27). Flake et al. (2005) support the sermonic style of small-independent church (even embraces it as similar to that of the mega-church), but with critique:

Indeed, especially in the African American church, the pastor finds a great sense of joy and fulfillment in stepping into the pulpit—providing words of comfort and hope, and words of challenge, to individuals, as well as prophetic messages to the powerbrokers of society. Many of these same preachers are less excited about creating a budget, managing a staff, and attending a seemingly endless array of meetings. As a result, African American pastors by and large are better preachers than administrators. (p. ix)

In many cases, the use of supplemental resources is seen as contradictory to the understanding that the word of God “stands alone.” Supplemental materials are seen as a “watering down” of the gospel as Forbes describes to be the critique of mega-

churches by many small, independent church members; “It is brought nearer to the grasp of the seeker or believer. It is made easy—too easy—and thus is ‘cheap grace’” (Flake et al., 2005, p. 147). Man’s interpretation of the word in the form of books, periodicals, or workshop materials may be seen as a way to *manipulate* the fundamental word of God. In addition, there is a purely literal interpretation of the Bible. The relentless pursuit of practical application most characteristic of the mega-church is not always necessary in the independent church. Again, there is an understanding that the miraculous works of the Bible need not be over-modernized or manipulated to apply to current circumstances.

In my observation, through the use of oral traditions, the small-independent church encourages members to rely upon the miracles of God as referenced in the Bible, and past life experiences, in order to approach the challenges of life. For example, it is not uncommon that a pastor or minister may speak against members making frequent visits to the doctor’s office to treat ailments, refer to the miraculous power of healing through prayer. While many churches (both large and small) share this same philosophy in reference to God’s healing power, unique to the aforementioned church is the devotion to the philosophy even in reference to most severe illnesses, such as cancer, heart disease. Some members never attend doctor’s appointments while waiting for the divine healing of God. In addition to the Biblical references, the passing down of stories through oral history regarding the miraculous nature of healings sustains the notion of avoiding doctors in exchange for a “direct move of God.” The same practice is true in a

number of areas to include marriage and rearing children. One waits upon the Lord single handedly, with no help from books, CDs, and DVDs, to repair broken relationships and break bad habits.

Testimony is the primary form of sharing stories which further enforce the use of oral tradition. Pastors, ministers, and lay members take the opportunity, in casual register, to share with the congregation various stories about miracles that God has performed in their lives. Pastors may build an entire sermon around a specific event or occurrence in their life in comparison to an experience cited in the Bible. Another option is testimony service whereby members are encouraged to share stories or songs about their ability to prevail through trial and tribulation with the help of God. Many times the power of prayer and knowledge of the word of God will be conveyed as “key tools” to success in any trial. Rarely will a minister or layperson credit attending a workshop or reading a book with change in the way that God was choosing to move in their lives. The principles are basic; engage in prayer, read the bible, and testify about the good things that God has done.

While not altogether replaced by them, revivals and prayer conferences are more common than retreats and workshops most familiar to the mega-church. Revivals consist of three to five day spans (some lasting as long as a month) of consistent worship services. The services most resemble the Sunday morning structure. However, there is more time allotted for charismatic praise and singing (and in many cases testimony). The Biblical teachings combined with the opportunity for praise and worship

are considered a cleansing period whereby any strongholds or problems that manifest in daily life are thought to be purged or washed away bringing about a renewal of the soul. It is suggested that if anything, Christians need to focus on the power and purpose of prayer as a solution to their problems. If prayer can be mastered, then spiritual growth can happen. Therefore, independent churches have prayer conferences where they examine the mysterious power of communicating with God. This is in contrast to having practical topics such as marriage, youth, and stewardship of the mega-church. Rarely are there any high-end registration fees, no lodging to pay for, and no supplemental materials to purchase.

Payne and Elhig (1999) suggest themes of humility and martyrdom are consistent in the stories or testimonies of the small-independent church and influence the value of education and wealth. There is not the same intense emphasis of education or prosperity that can be found in the mega-church. While a welcomed opportunity, Christians of the independent church suggest that “degrees can’t get you into heaven,” and therefore should not be so actively pursued that they take away from time with God, family, and the church. Ministry is seen as a basic service one to another, which does not have to coincide with career. Employment is a job, while ministry is one’s life. Therefore the use and value of money varies as described by Payne (1996):

One of the hidden rules of poverty is that extra money is shared. Middle class puts a great deal of emphasis on being self-sufficient. In poverty, the clear understanding is that one will never get ahead, so when extra money is available, it is either shared or immediately spent . . . Oprah will share the

money; she has no choice. If she does not, the next time she is in need, she will be left in the cold. It is the hidden rule of the support system. In poverty, people are possessions, and people can rely on each other. It is imperative that the needs of an individual come first. After all, that is all you have—people. (p. 22)

The notion is contrary to that of the mega-church where playing an active role in the marketplace and stewardship is a form of ministry. Very often Biblical references are made to the poor or disadvantaged. Lack is seen as being “nothing compared to the trials that Jesus suffered,” and is therefore not a severe peril. *Rethinking Materialism* best captures this concept in an excerpt from a Christian reader:

We are not called to imitate Jesus’ poverty, but to follow him in his example of love and self-giving, not caring whether we be poor or rich so long as we follow him and do his will. Should God heap material riches upon us, well and good. But if our lot should be one of pain and penury, we are to laugh at our difficulties, counting them as nothing. (Wuthnow, 1995, p. 132)

Traditional notions of wealth are not essential to the culture. While classical political economy defines wealth and money according to the following:

. . . acquires an exchange value in all places where the natural supply is insufficient to meet the wants of the inhabitants. (Milward, 2000, p. xix)

What then is money? It is a measure of value, and a medium of exchange. When it is said that money is a measure of value, it is virtually affirmed that any substance is money, which is selected by universal consent to serve as a standard by which the value of all other commodities may be estimated. (Milward, 2000, p. xix)

The middle class notions of wealth and money do not apply. Wealth is in human relationship according to Payne, which is very different than those values of Fawcett, and later Marx.

Themes of community and sacrifice are prevalent in the financial component of the moral curriculum for smaller churches. According to authors Ruby Payne and Bill Ehlig in *What Every Church Member Should Know About Poverty* (1999), it is suggested that churches at or below the poverty line have

no written budget . . . recordkeeping of offerings kept. . . . In generational poverty, decision-making centers around relationships, entertainment, and survival. People are possessions. And the rule about money and things is this: If you ask me for money and I have it, I need to share it with you. (p. 26)

This philosophy does not offer consistent investment into the public market, as is the case with mega-churches. Needs in the congregation may vary and are hardly every episodic, but sporadic. Therefore, suggesting that a member set aside money for the latest inspirational publication may not only become a non-priority individually, but collectively to the particular church culture.

The relationship between economic status and ethnicity is a primary factor that influences the appreciation of the oral tradition in the small-independent black church. Small-independent congregations may be leery of wealthy ministers and preachers. Some suspect that pastors and ministers of high socio-economic status are motivated by financial gain, not an opportunity to preach God's word. While it is not incredibly

popular to have varying ethnicities assume position in the pulpit in the black mega-church, it is even less likely in the small-independent black church. There is coherence between the sound, experience, and ethnic history of the black independent preacher. Ethnic identity, in many cases, validates the story or testimony. Economic struggle is a part of their story that has a face, a black face, which members expect to see in order to adjust their ears to hear.

The difference in the small-independent church's understanding of community also influences the minimal access to the Christian public market and the reliance upon the fundamentals of the oral tradition. The sense of community shares a marked resemblance to that of the traditional church. Payne and Ehlig (1999) suggest,

Many church buildings in the Southern U.S. were just simple wood construction before World War II. . . . Before the war anyone in the neighborhood could know a great deal about what was going on inside without ever crossing the threshold. The windows were open. From the street you could hear preaching and singing. (p. 67)

Communities with minimal resources have the similar weak structures and adjacent positioning to the community as the aforementioned, unlike the mega-church in many cases.

Because of minimal economic resources of some members, many of the church populations are still from the local neighborhoods that are within walking distance, or within distance that allows for them to be reached by church van or bus. Many of the churches have no web community of any kind because there are no websites, and some

of the members do not own or have access to a personal computer. If at all, broadcasts are on the public access television network. Also, popularity is not essential in the oral tradition of the independent church. There is no intense pursuit of the masses' attention. The belief is that God called them to serve whatever size population is made available to them from week to week. Stringent critics of the small, independent church would argue that churches should not be independent because denominational membership would serve as a financial backing, and afford more opportunities for outreach. Flake et al. (2005) express the philosophy that "Churches must go beyond being content being in community to seeing themselves as being part of the community . . . people who are served by the church will be drawn to the church" (p. 15). Growth is seen as a sign of progression for the community according to *24 Reasons Why African Americans Suffer*:

Liberation churches are defined as those with a liberation theology of feeding the hungry, clothing the naked and preaching the gospel to the poor. Liberation churches attract a greater percentage of men and youth. They are open seven days a week and women are also in leadership positions. I commend these churches and our community would not be in shambles if all our 85,000 churches were liberation churches. Our problem is that the majority of our churches are not liberation churches. Unfortunately, they are entertainment and containment churches. (Dumas, 1999, p. 59)

Moreover, outreach and community development is done with the agenda of helping the less-fortunate as opposed to building revenue. Flake et al. (2005) find this to be problematic:

Too many organizations with the purest of motive focus on building housing for those at the lowest income levels. While churches ought not to ignore the needs of low-income families, to build housing that puts all low-income persons in one place is in essence to build a future ghetto. It is important to have balance of mixed incomes—many of whom are taxpayers—in the neighborhood. (p. 91)

Some small, independent, churches cannot afford to be the type of church that described by Dumas (1999) or Flake et al. (2005). There is not enough revenue yielded from the offerings or membership volume to serve as the manpower for the mega-church initiatives in the small, independent, church. While there may be talk of tremendous growth in some small churches, others see it as a compromise to intimacy and community identity. The idea of growth is met with significant resistance because it diminishes the “cheers” perspective of churchgoing, “where everybody knows your name.” The large congregations may have an impersonal feel. Some church attendees take issue with having a pastor who does not know them by name. Membership is kept at whatever the congregation deems to be a reasonable volume. Outreach is not a major priority. Revenue increases from membership increases is not a pertinent goal. Conclusively, the design of the independent church community does not warrant participation in the Christian public market for resources such as the internet and real estate.

A point of clarity is that there are numerous progressive small churches that have some of the features of mega-churches; however, they are typically small churches that belong to a larger denomination but simply have not experienced the amount of

growth in population as in the mega-church. There are also smaller churches that are progressive but do not belong to a large denomination and therefore do not have the denominational “namesake” to attract or sustain members. Simply stated, there are numerous small and mega-churches that do not fit the description to which I referred previously. Also, mega-churches are not a part of denominations (referred to as nondenominational churches).

Many mega-churches operate off of fundamental principles and oral traditions just as the small-independent church. Access to the public market is an *addition* to the host of traditions signature to any black church. The progressive nature of some mega-churches is simply a noteworthy trademark. For the sake of this research however, I remain faithful to the phrase small-independent church to refer to those described earlier.

Black church and pedagogical development is critical to understanding the existence and purpose of abstinence curriculum. The ante and post-bellum periods of slavery imposed shame upon blacks’ sexual identity. A desire to be perceived as civil, muted the conversation about human sexuality altogether in black churches for a significant duration of time. However, in the wake of pregnancy and disease, many leaders have cracked the door of dialogue. However, the pedagogy (be it mega or small-independent) still influence a distinction in the purpose of the abstinence message. Building from these notions of pedagogic style, I examine the relationship between

production, consumption, and content of Christian inspirational abstinence texts, and cultural relevance.

CHAPTER IV

POLITICAL ECONOMY AND THE CONTENT OF CHRISTIAN ABSTINENCE TEXTS

In this chapter, I examine the way in which abstinence texts are created for distribution, and their content via political economy theory. The political economy of publication and distribution of texts on the topic of abstinence is key to analyzing the culture and curriculum development of abstinence in black Churches. Christian inspirational genre (most related to the self-help literature), workshop materials, devotionals, and other mediums on the topic of abstinence are mass produced in an effort to reach larger audiences of youth and singles. Karl Marx's rendition of political economy suggests that we examine the entire system that influences the public market to include values that influence consumption. The core values associated with a community influence the perceived importance of any resource. Therefore, what is made available as a resource to a particular population is based upon whether or not the value system merits the resource.

Church is the hub of moral curriculum for Christians. The teachings and values, if applied, set a standard of right and wrong on both collective and individual terms. While some components of the curriculum are a hidden "given," many churches also work diligently to create a literal moral curriculum birthed from Christian Education Departments, and boards. Whatever the nature of the organized body (or for some

churches, only the pastor), decisions are made about how and what to communicate as a value system to the membership. The decision to use texts is also related to the cultural relevance of the material for other marginalized populations beyond class to include race and gender relevance. Marginalized populations such as blacks, poor/working class, and men, may not connect to the content in the many of the Christian inspiration texts on the topic currently in circulation. This portion of the research is dedicated to exploring how the distribution, consumption, and content of Christian inspirational abstinence texts impact abstinence curriculum via political economy theory.

The way in which a church community embraces the art of teaching the values or, church pedagogy, dictates the make-up of the curriculum. Lynn Scofield Clark, author of *Religion, Media, and the Marketplace* (2007) suggests that:

Religion . . . is about much more than what happens during services or prayer times and is much more than a set of beliefs or ideological commitments. Religion is lived out in everyday life, and as such, there are objects and practices that have become a part of religious practices both formally and informally conceived. Faith practices have arisen in the context of a marketplace in which goods are for sale, and thus enterprising individuals and industries have arisen to satisfy the needs for these goods. The consumerist marketplace of capitalism has been an important context that has made religious material culture possible and profitable. (p. 5)

The Christian marketplace holds great significance in the United States. As the overwhelmingly popular religion of choice in the country, a portion of its followers

invest in a number of materials that support various aspects of the Christian lifestyle. In

Clark's assessment of the market she concludes:

Christian books and products currently comprise a 4.2 billion dollar industry. Protestant Christian stores carry a variety of merchandise such as music, apparel, jewelry, videos, and toys . . . Figures from CBA indicate that stores distributed as follows: 11 percent of total Christian store sales are for Bibles, 25 percent for books, 16 percent for music, 3 percent for church supplies, and the remaining 45 percent for gifts, merchandise, cards, videos, and other items such as jewelry. (p. 68)

According to the *Christian Writers' Market Guide 2007*, there are 1,094 Christian publishers (354 book publishers—740 periodical publications) who distribute, in many cases, multiple publications per company. Of the previously mentioned are those committed to *lifestyle* topics to include abstinence. Christian publication companies communicate specific criteria to suit their individual markets, including target audiences. Zondervan, a popular Christian publication company specifies for writers interested in submission, "Absolutely stellar prose that meets demonstrated needs of our market always receives a fair and sympathetic hearing. Great writing, great content always catch[es] our attention," (p. 216). The target audience influences the distribution of materials.

Materials may be available for distribution in more formal institutions (i.e., seminaries or churches) or the open market retailers (i.e., secular retail chains or Christian Bookstores). Selling products through bookstores has afforded retailers and patrons the advantages of capitalism in that, ". . . booksellers are able to follow the lead

of 'lifestyle branding' that now characterizes the media marketplace and also extends beyond it to related products and services. Lifestyle branding refers to products and services that allow consumers to purchase and emotional attachment to an identity. Products with identical uses may be branded with various lifestyles," (Clark, 2007, p. 69). Jewelry, bags, t-shirts, and book covers are covered with the fish symbol, or some other representation of Christianity, yet has no greater function than any other bag or t-shirt. Products of lifestyle branding are a middle class concept, as is the Christian bookstore (or any bookstore). Bookstore serves as a medium to provide goods which represent middle class morals, values, and lifestyles. Clark (2007) traces the history of the history and value system of the Christian bookstore:

The Christian bookstore boom started . . . after World War II. Due to social and cultural factors such as a growing middle class, population shifts, and increased transportation and technology, "mom and pop" Christian bookstores emerged as one of the primary ways of distributing Christian reading materials. (p. 71)

Rather than dealing with the inconvenience of mailing distribution from publication companies, patrons could get Christian materials practically in their own backyards.

Christianity also helps to perpetuate middle class ideology by providing trend to its consumers. Many books lend a Christian perspective to current topics such as sex, dating and relationships, fashion, etc. An example of this is *Resolve* magazine, which Clark describes as having been,

. . . designed to look more like a fashion magazine than the small-print, leather-bound, gilt-edged book that is familiar to most people. The magazine layout came about as a result of market research aimed at reaching the burgeoning Christian teen female market . . . Hayley Dimarco, who had worked in teen marketing for Nike before coming to Thomas Nelson Bibles, and the company created a complete New Testament for teen girls that freely drew its look from Cosmo Girl, Seventeen, and Teen People.

Subsequent forms of the “biblezine,” were adapted to other audiences to include boys, teens, and young women in their twenties. The middle class population is served in every facet by Christian trend.

Analyzing the way in which communities of young, single, church-goers and the leaders of their church auxiliaries, acquire the written text and other forms of media reveals an inequity in the quantity and type of resources varying communities have to learn about approaches to maintaining an abstinent lifestyle. Hence, there is a varying degree to which communities are educated on the topic from a Christian perspective and choices are made about commitment or a lack thereof to an abstinent lifestyle with either abundance or scarcity of resources at hand. The scarcity is reflected in statements such as the one in Jawanza Kunjufu’s, *Restoring the Village: Solutions for the Black Family*, which reads:

Is it surprising that the United States leads the world in teen pregnancy? African American females are first and White American girls are third among all teenagers worldwide. A recent study indicates that 70 percent of Americans think it’s okay to have sex outside of marriage. Teen pregnancy in the African American community has reached epidemic proportion with almost 70 percent of our children born out of wedlock . . . literally, if I had one request for the African American family, it would be abstinence outside of marriage. (p. 39)

In addition, a sector of the Christian population, while possibly considered a “target audience,” is underserved due to the fact that the content of the writing on the topic of abstinence has little or no cultural relevance, which further influences purchasing decisions.

Two types of church pedagogy, mentioned in chapter three, significantly impact the Christian public market as it relates to texts and other artifacts: The mega-church pedagogy, which frequently utilizes supplemental texts, and the small-independent church pedagogy. The mega-church is typically an avid supporter of the Christian market, while the small-independent church relies on oral tradition, which does not necessarily encourage activity in the marketplace. Bruce Forbes, in *Religion and Popular Culture* and Clark shed light on the different perspectives toward both churches. Forbes articulates the criticism of the mega-church, which very often reflects the opinion of those more in favor of small-independent church pedagogy:

The most common criticism of mega churches relates to their religious authenticity. The market-driven approach so typical of the media and popular culture seems to some observers necessarily to devalue the core activities of these institutions. Using market logic to create programs, services, and even products to respond to religious “seeking” turns religion into a commodity. Worse still, religion becomes just one commodity in a culture of commodities, and therefore necessarily less ‘authentic,’ ‘meaningful,’ and ‘truly religious.’ (Forbes & Mahan, 2005, p. 141)

Whatever the position of the church as it relates to the marketplace, the pedagogy is impacted.

Attention must then be given to the way in which the literature is distributed by publishing companies for purchase. How do value systems impact intended audience and consumption? Critical attention must also be paid to the process by which authors produce literature on abstinence for black church communities. Is the literature culturally relevant, and does it support multiple pedagogic styles or value systems? The aforementioned factors are best explained by the theory of political economy. Political economy is the study of production and the act of buying and selling as it relates to laws, customs, and or government. The following will examine the laws, customs, and governing bodies that affect the production, distribution, and accessing of literature on the topic of abstinence within the black Christian community.

Foundations of Political Economy

Political economy is a revolving economic ideology originating in the 1500s. The economic theory bridges the notion of morality to economic principals. Varying economic theorists have contributed to the development of political economy, however for the purpose of this analysis, I will consider the ideologies of John Locke, Adam Smith, Millicent Fawcett, and Karl Marx, four of the most influential in the theories development.

Millicent Fawcett (1870) simplified the definition of political economy to mean “The science which investigates the nature of wealth, and the laws which govern its production, exchange, and distribution” (p. ix). The basic tenets of political economy, according to Locke, are as follows: First, there are laws about the way in which the

economy functions. Second, human beings act according to the economic laws. Finally, to act according to the laws of the economy makes political economy the “science of self-sufficiency.” Among numerous secondary tenets, Locke suggests that there are two powers that man possesses. The first power is preservation of the self and others within reason. The second is the individual power to punish those who do not adhere to the law. However, Locke suggests that there must be a relinquishing of individual powers for the sake of the “Greater Natural Community.” The Greater Natural Community consists of sectors, or groups, that have their own laws which superseded the individual laws by which we are governed. To become a part of the community is to have the communal laws usurp those of individual gain. John Locke addressed the basic principles of supply and demand suggesting that, “The price of any commodity rises or falls by the proportion of the number of buyers and sellers.”

Locke’s ideology would suggest that because the value system of underprivileged churches does not yield an emphasis on abstinence as a topic of urgency, there is little demand for the materials in that sector, and therefore no need for publishers to make a readily available supply. A suitable price cannot be set for something where the value is questionable to the consumer. The question becomes, who wants books on abstinence? Clark highlights the varying value systems:

For the distributors of these goods reckon their utility (their use to the consumer) to be valuable beyond price. That utility is nothing less than salvation and eternal life. Yet the consumer may not recognize that value at all. He or she may even scorn it. Such a striking difference in the valuation of utility means that

the consumer will surely buy far less of the product than someone else thinks is good for him. This is the prescription for subsidy. And subsidy, in this sense, is what religious evangelism—including religious publishing—is all about. (p. 41)

Can a value be placed on something that is deemed invaluable by some? Like Locke, Fawcett (1870) suggested that “The price of commodities must be such as to equalize the demand with the supply. As a general rule the demand increases with a diminution of the price, and as the price increases the demand diminishes” (p. 52). If the number of buyers is insignificant in a community, then the price of books increases in order to accommodate the low profit earned, or there is simply no supply of books.

In an effort to meet the needs of the less fortunate, Christian publications have adopted the free rider concept, whereby books are distributed to some communities for free.

In most ordinary commercial businesses, the free rider is excluded automatically. If he doesn't pay, he doesn't get. But in a business based on differential pricing the free-rider problem is endemic, because no one ordinarily wants to pay a high price for something that someone else is getting for less or even for free.

Furthermore, in religious publishing, free ridership is not necessarily a problem at all, for the free rider may be the chief target of the publishing mission. The person who does not value the message enough to buy it because he has never heard it is just the sort of free rider the evangelical publisher would like to reach, with a free book if necessary. (Clark, 2007, p. 49)

At the heart of the free-rider concept is ministry, which means that even if the demand was low, the supply would be high with no cost, a very unconventional way of conducting business. Yet, churches and communities who are in need reap benefit of

this practice. Even still, the free-rider concept is not a popular one beyond the publication of Bibles. There is a certain reverence for the Bible, even in the absence of interests. Clark articulates a different kind of free rider (which may allude to resistance to the free rider concept with other publications), which still supports distributing varying kinds of Christian text to include that on the topic of abstinence:

But what about the other kinds of free riders that I have discussed, the free riders in the realms of religious evangelism and religious media? These are not savvy consumers seeking religious utility. They are not seekers at all. They won't buy because they do not value the product. These are the free riders *sought* by evangelism. They are lost sheep, whom the things of this world have led astray; 'rational choice' will not bring them into the fold. (p. 59)

The value system of a given church or surrounding community may not place a heavy emphasis on the message, "Flee from fornication," but it does not and should not decrease the availability of texts on the topic of abstinence. Other scholars may debate whether or not values should be imposed upon a community by being a Christian "book-pusher" in a community that may not see its value. I would suggest not entirely. However, if texts, (i.e., Bibles) are going to be made available, we must question what other texts could be made available and why they are not. Moreover, we cannot assume that all members of a church or surrounding community see no value in the topic of abstinence. Later in the chapter, I discuss how the value systems of different church communities impacts consumption.

Adam Smith, who highlighted the disparity and selfishness of production states,

It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or baker that we expect our dinner but from regard to their own interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity, but to their self love, and never talk to them of our own necessities but of their advantage.

Smith is shedding light on the production of goods as meeting the needs of the supplier, not because of foreseen need of the public. Smith coined the term *civil society* as the “pursuing of self-interests, indirectly and inadvertently promoting the collective interests.” He suggested that the civil society would be self-regulated. The idea is that order is restored to community by pursuing personal passion. The private pursuit of wealth, from Smith’s perspective, created chaos. Labor and production were synonymous keys to wealth since “wealth consisted of vendible, reproducible commodities,” and those who contributed to a “labor of love” would provide resources that were of benefit to others; a wealth for the consumer and the vendor. The civil society is self-governed, independent of state regulation and control.

There is a paradox in the way that contemporary Christian publication supports Smith’s idea. Robert Wuthnow (1995), author of *Rethinking Materialism*, explains the transcendence of labor as communicated by Christian authors:

But work is not mere dry obligation or dutiful character formation; according to these authors, it should also offer a sense of personal fulfillment, excitement, and passion. They view work as a calling from a God that is different for each unique human being. They hold work to be centrally important to human life because it provides the psychological fulfillment of pleasant activity and

meaningfulness. Through their jobs, men and women not only participate in God's design for the universe but also develop their own capabilities, reach the height of their potential. (p. 120)

The labor is love, but not as benevolent. Unlike Locke's notion of labor and production, whereby the goods were produced with a focus on the benefit to a community, the concept communicated by Wuthnow is more focused on the self-actualization and gratification of the individual.

Applying Smith's notion of the political economy, publication companies are more inclined to distribute materials based upon how much wealth can be accumulated for the company more so than what populations actually *need or desire* access to the literature. While statistically, the greatest evidence of premarital sex lies within the underprivileged communities, those are not the locations of bookstores or churches with access to materials on the topic of abstinence. According to Smith, if production were not a self-serving process, underprivileged populations would be of greatest priority among those to access resources on the topic. The need of the underprivileged population would be the focus of production, and the fact that those goods produced would yield a profit to meet the needs of the supplier would be secondary.

The capitalist-driven economy of the United States both supports and conflicts with some of the practices and virtues presented by Smith and Locke (and Fawcett, which is explored later). Specifically, the issues that affect the creation, distribution, and consumption of Christian texts in the marketplace, are multi-faceted. *Marxian Political*

Economy, by Bob Milward (2000) explains the importance of using Marxism to further examine inequity in the marketplace:

Full comprehension of any system requires that the systematic whole is the focus of attention, which then allows one to understand the contradictions that exist which give the whole its capacity for change, its dynamic. In this respect, those who employ individualism, falsification and even econometric techniques to study the economy cannot have the basis of their method grounded in reality and hence their conclusions must be without foundation, and be devoid of relevance to economic or social analysis. (p. 27)

Why then, is it necessary to look again at the writings of Marx and to suggest that he is as relevant today as he was in the second half of the nineteenth century? . . . This capitalism that has supposedly triumphed, produces unemployment, poverty, inequality, free markets in drugs and sexual services, all in the most advanced of the capitalist nations. (p. 1)

Specific to this research, is the multisystemic examination of culture that supports the use of Marx's rendition of political economy, further elaborate upon by Milward:

With an understanding of Marxian Political Economy, one has available a system of thought that can be employed to evaluate all aspects of society, to contextualize historical circumstances . . . Marx represents a tradition of social scientists that recognized the need to encompass more than just a narrow focus upon what we now recognize as separate disciplines within social science, and therefore his work represents a synthesis of economics, sociology, philosophy, politics, and history. (p. 3)

Karl Marx's contribution to the theory of political economy rests in his consideration of capitalism. He suggests that capitalism is the "alienation of human work" because of the process of exchange between those who sell their labor (in this case, Christian authors) and those who purchase the labor (i.e. publication and

distribution companies) creates an interception of the original intent. Those who produce the labor are vendors while those who purchase labor are capitalists, specifically merchant capitalists. The “alienation” rests in the fact that once the capitalists gain access to the labor, it translates that labor solely as a means of obtaining revenue or wealth, which is disconnected from the service that the labor was to provide in the eyes of the producer. Marx’s ideology suggests that the production of goods is actually more about relationship “between individuals, and individuals and community” (p. 74). Clark (2007) echoes Marx’s concept of alienation, as it relates to Christian laborers (i.e. Christian authors) in the marketplace:

Thus in some cases the commercial realm may facilitate, rather than undermine, authentic practices of faith. But such items also may be marshaled for political ends in ways that the original producers never intended, thus making them less a distraction from faith than an accomplice in a larger political project . . . The market place—both where people consume and where people labor—is the meeting point between religion, the nation-state, and popular culture and is supported by its relation with the media industries. (p. 7)

Marx’s approach to capitalism calls into question the agenda of abstinence texts and whether or not there are political ramifications for their availability and distribution. If the purpose of the producer is to reach all, how does economy intersect that agenda? There is concern that the need and desire for authors and publishers to flourish in the market, compromises the responsibility to produce work that is relevant to those both at the center and margin. When an author produces a work on the topic of abstinence as a means of supplementing the teachings of the Bible so that Christians can be

encouraged to refrain from premarital sex, the publication company typically translates the purpose into currency. That translation of purpose into currency yields an unequal distribution of the books on the topic because the books will only be distributed based upon supply and demand, with little consideration of why it is not demanded (or even afforded) in the underprivileged or marginalized population.

Currently, the formula of production, distribution, and consumption resembles that of classical political economy as articulated by Millicent Fawcett (1870):

In the case of the first class . . . those whose supply is absolutely limited, the supply is made equal to the demand by raising the price to such a point that the demand exceeding the supply is withdrawn. In the case of the second class of commodities, whose supply cannot be increased without increasing cost of production, the demand . . . cannot be greatly reduced: when therefore the demand is in excess of the supply, the supply must be increased. This cannot be done without increasing the cost of production, and in order to recompense this increased exertion of labor and capita, prices rise. In the case of the third class of commodities, whose supply can be indefinitely increased without increasing their cost of production . . . prices rise, and a portion of the demand is withdrawn. (pp. 67-68)

The formula is complex, but based primarily on factors of supply and demand, and facilitates the alienation of work. Marx's suggestion is that, "if proletariats were to seize production for capitalist increase there would be an increase in social relations."

Ultimately, the needs of relationship would usurp those of consumption. What would happen if Christian writers who addressed the topic of abstinence would self-publish and then place the cost on a sliding fee scale, and then engage in self-distribution to ensure that the books reached all populations who needed access to resources on the

topic? There would be a newfound equity in the distribution of knowledge, and perhaps a transformation in value systems.

Classical political economy recognizes the aforementioned as a move toward socialism. The concept of socialism is not so far removed from the free rider approach to Christian publication. However, Fawcett's *Political Economy for Beginners* (1870) makes a general critique of the practices of this kind of benevolence:

If property were possessed by the whole community in the same way as that described in "the Acts of the Apostles" as the custom of early Christians, there could be no such thing as exchange of wealth. 'Neither said of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things in common.' 'Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostle's feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.

If the state of things described in these verses were general, the dream of socialist would be realized. Property would not be destroyed, but "the exchange of wealth" would be a meaningless expression, for no one could exchange that which belonged as much to everyone else as to himself. (p. 32)

There are many economic objections to be urged against socialistic schemes. In the first place self-interest, one of the most powerful of all the incentives to exertion, is only partially operative; a man will not work with the same energy and zeal if the results of his labor are to be shared by the whole community of which he is a member, as he will if he is able to secure the whole fruit of his toil for himself and his family. (p. 31)

If the socialist approach to the creation and distribution of text is not a practical option, we must examine ways to reduce (and still in appropriate cases eliminate) costs and

increase the distribution of texts on the subject of abstinence irrespective of interpreted value by the consumer.

Political Economy and Content of Abstinence Texts

Marx suggests that the gain from the capital earned from the production of a product compromises the original intent of production. My reading of Christian inspirational abstinence texts merits an examination the depiction of race, class, and gender messages, which compromise the intent to communicate the importance of abstinence to *all populations Christians*. Aside from class distinctions in distribution, there is cause for concern that the actual content of the texts on abstinence communicate a message that does not resonate with marginalized cultures to include those who are black, a part of the working class/poverty line, or men.

I am not suggesting that is impossible for the content to in *no way* resonate with any of the aforementioned populations. However, I am suggesting that the information is significantly *less* relevant to populations who are black, at or below the poverty line, and of the male persuasion because of the way that authors culturally situate the messages in their texts. The visual illustrations of most texts yield an overwhelming message that abstinence is for whites. Depending upon the value system of an black church to include its cultural traditions, the targeted audience of the text may contradict what an black church deems necessary for a sound curriculum on the subject matter.

Christian inspirational abstinence texts are filled with narrative excerpts designed to create mental imagery for the reader. Some of the imagery implies middle

class and upper middle class values that are not reflected in the everyday experiences of those in other socio-economic brackets. Other monolithic imagery speaks to physical descriptions of people who in no way resemble blacks (or any other culture). Finally, there are very few gender neutral texts on the topic of abstinence. While I do not agree with abstinence texts targeting specific audiences based upon sex or gender, I recognize the traditional notion of discussing sexual topics in gender specific groups, which would be reflected in the text market. However, there are books that claim to be designed for *anyone*, which fail to speak to the experiences of men.

Marginalized populations of Christians are forced to make one of two choices. Either they must adapt the material to accommodate experiences that may be more specific to their subculture, or they neglect to use the materials altogether. Another option would be to seek out texts by black authors (or authors of other cultural ethnicities) who may at least convey messages that are culturally neutral. However, there are very few black authors who write within the Christian genre about the topic of abstinence. Ultimately, it is important to examine how any of the previously mentioned factors affect consumption of the texts.

Political Economy Revisited—

Pedagogic Values, Economic Activity, and Resource Distribution

The pedagogical distinction between mega and independent black churches is critical to understand as it relates to the political economy of Christian literary, visual, and interactive resources about abstinence and other subjects. The mega-church's

active participation in the Christian public market affects the way in which goods are made available to their parsonages. On the contrary, the independent church's reliance upon fundamental principles of the Bible communicated via oral tradition decreases the membership's perceived need to contribute to the public market via the consumption of supplemental resources. According to the principles of political economy, specifically in relation to value, supply, and demand/consumption, mere access to the goods so readily utilized by the mega-church is limited for the small, independent church.

The Christian publication market is well served by church communities that value supplemental teaching materials as a part of their Christian Education curriculum. On the contrary, the market is underserved by church communities that do not value the use of supplemental materials. Milward (2000) suggests that "the use-value of a commodity corresponds to the natural proprieties of the commodity in terms of its capacity to satisfy human wants" (p. 30). Does Christian-based literature on abstinence satisfy a human want in the small, independent church community typically situated in poverty? The message of abstinence is that one should wait until married to engage sexually. However, marriage, in the Christian sense, is not the norm in cultures of poverty according to Ruby Payne (1995) as previously cited.

The values communicated in Christian-based texts suggest that sexual intercourse has pure intentions; procreation and pleasure (although many Christian are only recently beginning to highlight pleasure). However, Payne further elaborates that there may be another interpretation of the utility of sex in cultures of poverty:

And one of the rules in generational poverty for women is this: you may need to use your body for survival . . . Sex will bring money and favors. Values are important, but they don't put food on the table—or bring relief from intense pressure . . . What may seem to be very workable suggestions from a middle-class point of view may be virtually impossible given the resources available to those in poverty. (pp. 24-25)

If the populations of most small, independent churches consist of single women in common law marriages, what is the likelihood that text with this message will be popular? While I am not suggesting that Christianity bend its rules to accommodate varying lifestyles, the fact remains that literature with this message dismantles the social construction of relationship in cultures of poverty, and therefore, demand may not be high.

For small, independent churches that do reinforce fundamental principles about abstinence and sexuality, another reason for the lack of value in Christian literature is that there is a formal language register communicated in the reading that may not resonate with readers in the culture of poverty. I am by no means suggesting that there is no cultural relevance to the formal language register (i.e., the use of the King James translation of the Bible and those who engage in academic reading through school), but formal language register is uncommon among certain black populations

Finally, it is important to highlight the way in which what *is* valuable in cultures of poverty conflicts with the middle class values in texts that promote abstinence. Lower-middle class and members of poverty value relationships according to many researchers, supporting previous references to the sharing of money, which yields

inconsistent household funds, and the inability to save and invest. Members of the middle class may very well examine the value system of those in poverty, and suggest that what they value is inappropriate, but according to Milward (2000), we must be careful to recognize that value and human necessity vary:

The commodity is, first of all, an external object, a thing which through its qualities satisfies human needs of whatever kind. The nature of these needs, whether they arise, for example from stomach, or the imagination, makes no difference. Nor does it matter here how the things satisfies man's need, whether directly as a means of subsistence, i.e. an object of consumption, or indirectly as a means of production. (Marx, 1976, as cited in Milward, 2000, p. 125)

Fawcett (1870) suggests that "When there is a rise in the value of any commodity there is a corresponding fall in the value of some other commodity" (p. 38). In order for there to be a shift in poverty cultures about the value of Christian-based abstinence texts, there would have to be a shift in other value systems. For example, if single men and women, in common law marriages, who need the income and emotional support of their common law spouses in order to live a comfortable life, there would have to be a financial and emotional value system transformation in order to value the message of the aforementioned literature. Ultimately, they would have to make the decision to value legal marriage, which would shift their financial situation (considering that many public assistance programs only aid single mothers). Or they could chose to live separately, engaging in no sexual contact, which would in many cases (regardless of class) change the relationship dynamic and increase the likelihood of separation due to

sexual frustration or engagement in extra-committal relationships (if both parties are not willing to abstain). Payne would describe this dilemma as one of the necessary requirements in order to shift classes.

Milward (2000) example of delayed gratification would be necessary, one could argue, if the cultures of poverty were to increase the degree of value placed on Christian-based abstinence literature:

The return to mass unemployment during the past twenty years has greatly contributed to the rise in inequality, but the repercussions for the economy are now evident in terms of the paradox that has appeared: the existence of the welfare state requires full employment and economic growth, but the capitalist relations of production cannot provide economic growth without the existence of a large reserve army labour. Hence, either the economy must return to the strong version of the immediate postwar years, which is an unrealistic prospect given the different conditions of the national and international economy, or the expectations of the working class must be much reduced through a “moral re-education,” –delaying self-gratification . . . continues on . . .

This latter scenario is the process that was set in train by the successive Conservative governments since 1979, and is continuing under the present Labour government. In terms of welfare state, this requires that individuals make much more provision for themselves in terms of private pension plans, private health insurance, redundancy protection insurance and the payment of tuition fees in higher education. The argument is that individuals should be responsible for their own welfare by postponing consumption in the present to make provision for the uncertainties of the future, reducing the burden on the state. (p. 179)

While Milward (2000) is speaking to the agenda of the government, one cannot separate the message of middle class Christianity from the civilities that government attempts to reinforce. The Christian-based abstinence literature suggests a message

that, if supported by cultures of poverty, would involve delayed gratification on several levels. First, there would be a delay in the development of committed coital relationships because it would be contingent upon financial stability and the “ideal” time to wed (since marriage means a decrease in public assistance). Second, one may have to save in order to afford the text (if the free-rider form of distribution was not available, and in many cases it is not). Finally, churches would have to run the risk of suggesting the purchase of texts that would indirectly decrease the amount of funding that went towards tithes and offerings, delaying their acquirement of revenue to maintain the church.

Referring back to the Locke’s idea that the foundation of political economy is supply and demand, provision of certain goods is directly related to the degree to which those goods would be consumed. A step before that is whether or not the market deems a certain labor essential for production. So the question becomes, “Who are the laborers and is their labor valued enough for production?” The laborers are the authors and the short answer is yes, their labor is valued to the point of production. When I examine the volume of Christian-based abstinence literature gracing the shelves of bookstores, I am certain that the author’s labor is valued, but according to classical political economy the fact that these authors are teachers and preachers calls into question whether or not their labor is productive into question. Fawcett (1870) states:

Productive labor is that which produces utilities fixed and embodied in material objects. Is the labor of a teacher unproductive? . . . Let us suppose, for example,

that a schoolmaster educates fifty boys taken from lives of idleness and vice in the streets of London: if he trains them in habits of intelligent industry, a very great number of them will probably become productive laborers . . .

Unproductive labor is that which neither directly nor indirectly helps to increase the material wealth of the community. The labor of an opera singer, and actor, a public reader or preacher is unproductive. (p. 9)

Considering that pastors, ministers, and Christian educators in black mega-churches encourage investment in the public market, Fawcett may suggest that their labor is productive because it increases the wealth of the community. Their messages promote (among other things) the acquisition of post-secondary education, the accumulation of wealth, and financial investment, the same principles highlighted as motivation to remain abstinent until married. Therefore, authors who are a part of mega congregations (black or any other race/ethnicity) yield productive labor in their literature.

A basic assessment is that a church community will not utilize what has not been made available. I have already considered that value systems influence demand for a product. I have also addressed that the creation of Christian-based literature is a productive labor. Another component key to whether or not a product is made available, according to Classical Political Economists, is whether or not consumption is productive:

All the consumption of the productive laborer is not productive consumption, but only that part of it which is employed in sustaining him whilst he is engaged in production. All luxuries must be consumed unproductively, because the consumption of them does not assist future production. All waste is

unproductive consumption; and instead, as some suppose, of being beneficial to society, is in reality injurious to it. (Fawcett, 1870, p. 16)

The evidence stated for what makes the creation of Christian-based abstinence literature productive labor, is the same for the purchase of the literature being productive consumption. The delay of sex until marriage supports the likelihood of college-aged adults in poverty actually entering into higher learning, which furthers the possibility of attaining gainful employment. They then become laborers and consumers contributing to the economic system.

A general understanding of the culture of poverty still does not suggest that all in poverty have no ambition or desire to become producers and consumers of the economic system. Most important to recognize is that many Christians at the poverty line have no desire to overlook any fundamental component of the doctrine to include abstaining from sex until married. That being said, many Christians at the poverty line may desire to obtain supplemental materials to educate youth and singles from a Christian perspective, about the importance of abstinence as a spiritual creed and practical decision depending upon their life goals. According to classical political economy, an increased sense of morality and desire to be educated, that facilitates comfort of financial stability, should be a motivator:

No circumstance would prevent over-population so effectually as a general raising of the customary standard of comfort among the poorer classes. If they had accustomed themselves to a more comfortable style of living, they would use every effort not again to sink below it.

Ricardo says on this subject: 'The friends of humanity cannot but wish that in all countries the laboring classes should have taste for comforts and enjoyments, and that they should be stimulated by all legal means in their exertions to procure them. There cannot be a better security against a superabundant population,'

It is because there has recently been such a distinct advance in the standard of comfort . . . that there is every reason to hope that the improvement they have effected in their condition will be permanent. The younger generation is prepared to enter other employments, to move to other localities and emigrate to their countries rather than endure the life which their forefathers led. (Fawcett, p. 101)

Yet the median of production and consumption of Christian based literature on abstinence, *bookstores*, are not available in most any community at the poverty line, which facilitates an inequitable accessibility to literature of any kind to include that on the subject of abstinence.

The mega-church, the church of the public market , will seek out materials in the church bookstore, Christian bookstore, or Christian section in a secular chain because the teachings from leadership refer to the resources and incorporate them as a way of understanding basic as well as complex principles of Christianity. Leaders present the opportunity to purchase the resources as an investment. Middle to upper middle-class churchgoers have access to resources through denominational vendors or retailers. Mega-church members, as a part of a more affluent social class, will patron secular chains such as Barnes and Noble, Borders, and Books-A-Million, as well as Christian chains such as Lifeway or Family Christian (which are actually more expensive due to the inability to purchase the quantities of the larger chains). The church of the oral tradition

may underutilize resources that have little or no accessibility. Their communities are not situated such that bookstores of any kind are made available, or if made available, do not thrive. A common example is the local “gospel shop,” a type of store that vends Christian music primarily of black influence. Over time, many of these shops have added inspirational literature to their inventory. However, because literature is not a specialty, and is not ordered in wholesale increments that would decrease the shelf price, it is usually more expensive.

More often than not, the establishment is a free-standing converted building or a storefront in predominantly black communities. The virtue of the gospel shop is that it provides a store, within walking distance to a residential community (and usually local church), where items can be purchased, and thereby exposing groups to resources that would otherwise be inaccessible. The vice of Gospel shops, like any independent bookstore, is that they are privately owned. Revenue fluctuates due to a fluctuation in consumption of inventory, related to inconsistency of the local patrons’ financial situations (recall the financial value system of some who belong to impoverished communities), which at times, causes prices to increase dramatically, or for prices to be decreased to the point that no profit is yielded, and stores go out of business.

I conclude that there is cyclic influence on the way in which Christian-based literature about abstinence is valued, produced, and consumed, specifically by members of predominately black churches. Moreover, there is a distinct difference in the use and consumption of Christian abstinence texts between the Christians of the middle-class at

mega-churches and those at or below the poverty line in small, independent churches. While an initial solution may appear limited to shifting the mindset/value system of Christians at the poverty line in order to increase consumption of the product, it must be noted that many of the Christians of the socioeconomic class in question, do possess fundamental values about abstinence. It is either the case that the material is simply not culturally relevant, or congregations lack funding to invest in the literature. Though the free rider distribution is helpful, it usually pertains to the dissemination of Bibles and tracts, not supplemental texts. Many Christian authors desire to reach the hearts of many as a form of ministry. But as rules of capitalism intercept this agenda, literature is translated into a good that will yield revenue. Therefore, at multiple levels, we must examine the way in which materials are produced, distributed, and consumed (which means examining value systems) in an effort to restore moral equity along socio-economic and cultural lines. Additionally, the content of abstinence texts may be irrelevant to certain populations. Therefore, content influences consumption. Form marginalized populations to include black leaders and laity, working class/poor, and men, there is a limited amount of texts that can be used without having to do cultural adaptations of the text, or resolve not to use them.

In the next chapter, I explore marginalization in communicative dynamics at black churches. Specifically, I will address the way in which power and position influences the recognition of certain church members' voices over others in the abstinence education process.

CHAPTER V

**COMMUNICATION DYNAMICS AND ABSTINENCE CURRICULUM IN
BLACK CHURCHES**

In this chapter, I examine the various communication dynamics that impact that process of abstinence curriculum development and implementation. A need for a certain body of knowledge, or an educational deficiency is recognized based upon dialogue. A goal, whether formally or informally articulated, is established to meet the educational need, followed by the compilation of a series of messages (verbal or written) and artifacts, relevant to a given subject matter. The compilation is then communicated to a particular population for the sake of filling the educational void.

Curriculum development is a communicative process that involves the negotiation of power in order to determine exactly who will contribute to the process of creating a way to teach abstinence. However, like any culture, black church culture contains a host of communicative power dynamics. The goal is to examine how these power dynamics influence the voices that contribute to the development and implementation of abstinence curriculum.

An intermittent step in the process is the critique of the messages and artifacts in order to determine whether or not the messages and artifacts are relevant to the purpose in presenting the knowledge. Another critique may be whether or not the messages and artifacts are able to be *translated* into a language suitable for the

audience. Finally, I assess implications for improvement, depending upon communicative outcomes, may be assessed.

The overall process of curriculum development varies depending upon the body creating the curriculum. For example, US schools have committees at the national, state, and local levels, that engage in curriculum development and review across all subject matters and levels of education. The way in which decisions are made to approve or reject the messages and artifacts of the curriculum, are related to the roles of power and position in the process.

Specific to this research is curriculum development on the subject of abstinence in black churches. Churches have generated varying compilations of materials designed to encourage abstinence. Much like the aforementioned example involving US schools, there are governing bodies within denominations that develop and review messages and artifacts that pertain to teaching youth and singles to abstain from sexual activity until marriage. At the national, state, and local levels information is reviewed and recommended as the “most appropriate” resources to educate on the subject.

While the aforementioned process may be implemented in some instances for black churches, it is only the case for a percentage of churches. Independent or non-denominational churches, who have no larger governing bodies, typically make the abstinence curriculum assessments at the local level only, however, there may or may not be a committee or body who engages in the decision making process depending

upon the size and structure of the church. In some instances the church leader or pastor is the sole decision-maker (because some congregations are as small as 5 members).

Black churches, like all organizations, have communicative cultures. Because of the levels of leadership and Biblically influenced doctrine regarding social order, the church culture has rules and norms influenced by embedded power structures. As a result, not all voices are equal, and therefore some go unheard. As it relates to decision making, depending upon one's position, ideas and opinions may be overlooked, even when the decision affects the underrepresented group. Factors which influence whether or not a voice is recognized in a black church setting are age, sex, race, socio-economic status, achieved level of education and assigned leadership roles.

A black church culture is positioned within a larger communicative culture, whose rules and norms are influenced by societal standards. Therefore, the communicative process for decision-making in reference to abstinence curriculum is not only influenced by the power dynamics situated within the context of the church but also the notions of power and privilege established by American culture. When creating a curriculum on the topic of abstinence, certain populations (depending upon where they are situated in the power dynamic), even when in a decision-making group where in-put is essential, may choose to or not to embrace communication practices that promote necessary change. How the more or less dominant structures interact when confronted with the challenge to develop an abstinence curriculum, ultimately determines the effectiveness of the end product.

A means of assessing the communicative process of curriculum development on the topic of abstinence is the use of Mark Orbe's Co-Cultural theory (1998). Orbe's theory suggests that communication is impacted by power and culture, and that certain communicative practices are implemented by co-cultures when confronting those who represent dominant cultures, which ultimately promotes, or hinders social change. The goal of the research is to assess the multiple systems that influence communication dynamics in curriculum development on the subject of abstinence in black churches via Co-Cultural theory.

Co-cultural Theory

Co-cultural theory, established by communication scholar Mark Orbe in 1998 is one of the premier interpretive theories used to assess cross-cultural communication. Orbe (1998) in his book, *Constructing Co-cultural Theory*, defines co-cultural communication as "interactions between 'dominant' and 'nondominant' groups." The basic concept is that communication is impacted by power and culture, and that there are certain communicative decisions that those who represent minority cultures make when interacting with those of the dominant culture, yielding particular outcomes.

Co-cultural theory is derived from both *muted group* and *standpoint* theories, which address the communicative phenomena of underrepresented populations. Muted group, a feminist communication theory developed by Cheris Kramarae, renders three basic assumptions, according to Orbe, which serve as building blocks for co-cultural theory.

The first is that women perceive the world differently than men on the basis of different experiences and activities root in the division of labor. Second, because of the political dominance, men's systems of perception are dominant impeding the free expression of women's alternate models. Last, to participate in society women must transform their own models in terms of the perceived male system of expression. (Orbe, 1998, p. 22)

Orbe also references the three basic tenets of standpoint theory, another ideology situated in feminist thought. First, standpoint is based on lived experiences of those who are in subordinate positions. Second, a position in the world, other than that which is dominant, will yield a different life perspective. Finally, the study of perspectives outside the dominant culture is deemed valuable to complete spaces of academic study (pp. 27-29).

A critical component to understanding Orbe's (1998) theory is distinguishing the difference between dominant and sub-cultures. A critical notation is that Orbe uses the term, co-culture, as opposed to sub-culture, under the basic premise that cultures that are not seated in the dominant position, are not inferior or superior, but *co-existing* (p. 1). According to Co-Cultural Theory, dominant cultures are those whose communicative voice usurps that of other cultures. Typical dominant cultures include white, male, and upper middle-class. Co-cultures are any cultures that in any way, shape, or form do not share in the dominant identity, which includes, but is not limited to, black (or any other ethnic minority), female, or the working poor.

Orbe (1998) suggests that there are certain stereotypes that influence the interaction between dominant and co-cultures. He references *A Tale of O* by Fant,

Cohen, and Kanter (1979, as cited in Orbe, 1998). According to *Tale of O*, dominant cultures view co-cultural group members as helpers, sex objects, mascots, or militants. Helpers are those who support those in dominant positions, but have roles that are recognized as insignificant. Sex objects refer to those who are admired for their physical attributes and are available for flirtation or being coveted to the point of being willing to fight. Those who operate as “entertainers, cheerleaders, comedians, or song-and-dance persons,” are mascots (as cited in Orbe, 1998, p. 5). Finally, the militant stereotype refers to members of co-cultures who are perceived as aggressive, independent, and in some cases dangerous. The stereotypes ignite a certain communicative style and tone from dominant members, which elicits certain responses from co-cultural members.

According to Orbe, there are five major premises of co-cultural theory. The first is that hierarchy promotes privilege. Second, dominant culture uses communication to reflect, reinforce, and promote field of experience. Third, dominant communication structures impede progress of those who do not share the same field of lived experiences. Fourth, diverse experiences of co-cultures share common position of being marginalized and underrepresented in dominant communication culture. Finally, co-cultures adopt communicative practices in order to confront or be successful in any dominant communication structure (Orbe, 1998, p. 11). Orbe suggests that that there are 26 practices from which those who find themselves in co-cultural positioning choose (p. 55). The selection of the practices depends heavily upon the desired communicative outcomes, which formulate orientations (see Appendix B).

Co-cultures in Black Churches

In an effort to incorporate examples into the explication of the orientations and practices associated with co-cultural theory, my intent is to apply the various possibilities of co-cultural dynamics as I proceed. First the identity of each co-culture is presented in relationship to the dominant culture within the church setting, which is followed by the orientations commonly witnessed in the dynamic, and then practices implemented when communicating about sexuality and abstinence (see Appendix C).

Adults and Youth

Adults of parenting age are in a co-cultural position to the youth of the church in settings designed to address the topic of sexuality and abstinence. As mirrored in larger society, the topic of sexuality is difficult to approach on terms other than that of youth. Sex is affiliated with youth and pop-culture in the United States, and drives a significant percentage of the public market. For example, companies like Abercrombie and Fitch, Hello Kitty, and other “kid labels,” make thongs for young girls as young as nine years of age (Levy, 2005, p. 143). National Campaign ads stressing the importance of, “talking to your children about sex,” typically demonstrate the storyline whereby the youth is actually mimicking the role of the parent, more ready and willing to discuss the topic than the actual parent. Church cultures, to include those of blacks, are no different. Michael Eric Dyson, prolific author and critical social theorist, suggests:

Sure, it must preach abstinence first. It should also preach and teach safe sex, combining condoms and common sense . . . The bottom line, however, is that

traditional black church methods of curbing teen sex aren't working. We must make a choice. Either we counsel our kids about how to have sex as safely as they can, or we prepare to bury them before their lives begin . . . The black church's theology of eroticism should place a premium on healthy, mature relations where lust is not mistake for affection . . . At the very least, it should make them available in restrooms or the offices of clergy persons or other counselors. The days of let's pretend the problems will go away . . . are not most certainly gone. (p. 229)

Dyson makes the statement as the backdrop to the overarching idea that the conversation of sex is an intimidating communicative territory, a kind of territory rarely experienced by black adults in the church setting, for most often communicative authority is well established. However, Christian Education boards, made up of adults, are grappling with the implementation of curriculum, feeling a sense of loss for what will appeal to youth and singles and convey an effective message. Yet, the conversation is rarely, if ever, directly addressed within youth culture.

Communicative orientations for the Adult co-culture are nonassertive separation and nonassertive simulation. *Nonassertive separation* is viewed as a natural segregation of groups based upon societal standards and norms. black adults anticipate the sex will be an awkward topic that, "no one wants to talk about," (meaning them). While it may be a reflection of their upbringing, they assume it "natural," for parents and mentors to be disengaged from the pop-culturally driven dialogue of youth sex culture. As a result, they embrace the communicative practice of *avoiding*. According to Orbe, social avoidance can be of a person, conversation, topic, or place whereby a co-cultural group would have to engage in dominant culture dialogue.

Those who do not wish to confront difference, and in doing so avoid conversation that reveals difference, are said to implement nonassertive assimilation. *Nonassertive assimilation* is orientation that directly serves the purpose of avoiding conflict (Orbe, 1998, p. 111). As stated previously, many adult figures in the church setting are ill-prepared to address the topic of sex with the youth and therefore embrace the orientation. *Averting controversy* is a communicative practice that refers to purposely neglecting topics that may cause conflict or discomfort. At times, “other co-cultural group members employ the tactic to allow dominant group members to escape a certain degree of discomfort,” which at first glance appears to be more of a dominant cultural decision (Orbe, 1998, p. 57). However, when applying the practice to the setting in question, adults, witnessing a level of discomfort in discussing sex (perhaps due more to approach than the actual topic), rationalize that it is a topic better left unaddressed (which actually alleviates their discomfort).

The primary implications of incorporating the previously mentioned orientations and practices into dialogue between black adults and youth/singles are negative. The status quo of uncertain curriculum development remains, due to the fact that there is no dialogue established by those with decision making power (i.e. Church leaders), who can promote a change not only in the curriculum but in the level of exchange and understanding on the topics of sex and abstinence.

Abstinent and Sexually Active Youth

Another unique co-culture in the church setting is that of abstinent youth in relationship to sexually active youth. At first glance, one may call into question my assessment of youth who uphold Christian teachings in a Christian setting as being the co-culture, for the environment supports the value of waiting until marriage to have sex. However, all too often, the pressure of mainstream sex culture for youth permeates the walls of any church. Paula Rineheart, popular Christian author, describes the phenomenon:

This absence of social support for sexual purity means Christian teenagers and singles sometimes feel as though they are living in parallel universes with hardly a bridge between. They are strung somewhere between Dawson's Creek, so to speak, and Christian author Joshua Harris's bestselling advice to "kiss dating goodbye." The church has to create a culture that incubates purity, because the dominant one offers anything but. Teenagers and singles trying to be sexually pure can feel terribly isolated. One of the more poignant scenes in the documentary on teens in Rockdale County shows three girls, virgins by Christian conviction, who spend their weekends together shopping for clothes for dates and parties that don't exist. In a culture that lacks the social support for sexual purity, those who choose that lifestyle pay a higher price than previous generations. (p. 32)

As a result, among peers, abstinent teens in church are still the marginalized group.

However, the church does provide an overall supportive environment for the youth and singles who make the decision to remain abstinent, who assume the *Assertive Accommodation* orientation. Assertive accommodation is an orientation whereby, co-cultural members recognize and consider their communicative needs to be equally

important to that of the dominant group. Orbe states that a positive outcome for this orientation is that,

Besides promoting intergroup interdependence, co-cultural group members . . . can employ a wide variety of valuable resources in their quest to promote significant change in the structures that attempt to oppress co-cultural group experiences. (p. 114)

A communicative practice associated with assertive accommodation is *communicating self*. Communicating self involves seeking opportunities to communicate one's personality without preoccupation with how their particular cultural affiliation will be interpreted and/or ridiculed. While abstinence in black or other youth cultures may be taboo, the church is a safe environment where youth and singles can own their decisions about sexuality in a positive way, which may serve as a bridge to encourage others to embrace the lifestyle. Another positive implication is that, if adults took advantage of communicative opportunities with youth and singles who were comfortable communicating self, a healthy dialogue about needs for the abstinence curriculum could be the first step in promoting change.

The reverse dynamic of sexually active youth being the co-culture as it relates to abstinent youth has an obviously different outcome. To be open about sexual activity in the church is taboo for many church cultures. Christian Youth have embraced the evangelical movement, and initiatives like *True Love Waits*, a National Christian based abstinence initiative through Lifeway Christian, complete with workshop packets,

emblems (necklaces, rings, and anklets), and ceremonies (vow of purity), virginity and abstinence have become “cool.” Sexually active teens in church settings take on one of two nearly opposite communicative orientations. The first is *Aggressive Separation*, which is very much an “us and them,” stance. In this situation, “separation is sought through ‘whatever means necessary’” (Orbe, 1998, p. 117).

Sexually active youth transition feelings of shame and ostracism into the *sabotaging* communicative practice. Ultimately, the goal of those who are sexually active, becomes doing whatever is necessary to ensure that abstinent youth and singles are not given the opportunity to excel or be in any limelight related to good Christian citizenship. The agenda is to eliminate the appearance of perfection, which is often an unfair accolade given to youth and singles who abstain because, by societal standards, sexual restraint is one of the hardest areas to discipline oneself as a Christian.

An example of sabotage involve a sexually active church member overhearing that an abstinent member had engaged in “heavy petting,” with someone, and reporting it as “concern” to a youth or singles leader. While appearing on the surface to be an “agent” in helping his/her fellow Christian maintain an abstinent lifestyle, the reality is that the agenda is to expose to other members of the dominant culture, behaviors in one of its members that is contrary to the criteria essential to belong. Therefore, the member of the dominant culture, experiences a margin of the ostracism experienced by the co-cultural member. The result is that there is an even greater barrier between the two groups, which thwarts the collective communication necessary

to create an open dialogue about the struggles of sexual restraint in the Christian faith, which could be more encouraging, and serve as a model of communication to incorporate into abstinence curriculum.

Another approach is *aggressive assimilation*, which as previously mentioned, involves eliminating difference in an effort to fit in. The communicative practice for sexually active teens may involve *bargaining*. Bargaining refers to co-cultures forming an agreement with one or more members of the dominant culture not to acknowledge any difference that sets them apart. In exchange for entrance into the co-culture, the sexually active youth or single will reject any behaviors or relationships in the dominant setting that acknowledge that component of their identity.

The reason for use of bargaining is simple. Youth and singles culture in any church can be a strong bond of fellowship, a site for long-lasting relationship due to the intimacy and connection. Specifically for black churches, the environment may serve as a second family, because the church is the hub for the village concept of growing and developing strong citizens. Irrespective of shortcomings, youth and singles desire to belong and bargaining is a communicative tool that allows them to be connected.

The implication, however, is costly as it relates to communication on the topic of sexuality. By bargaining, sexually active youth, reject a very critical part of their identity, such that if a conversion to abstinence were desired (typically, at this point it is), is met with quiet opposition. There is no room for open and honest expression (communicating self for the sake of change) about struggles or a desire for change. Very

often, the practice inhibits curriculum development because no one with the power or authority to promote change ever hears the story of one who struggles in the area of sexual restraint, therefore no new approach to the issue can be taken.

Black Christians and White Christians

Narrowing the focus of the research to the scope of black churches, I must examine black Christians as a co-cultural group in relationship to white Christians. The history of Christian development for blacks in the United States places them in a different context than that of whites. As previously mentioned one can exist in a majority culture, and yet remain a part of a co-culture. While to be Christian is to be a part of a religious dominant, being a black Christian involves the co-cultural positioning associated with race, especially as it relates to discourse on sexuality within the church. Cornel West (1999) suggests:

For example, most black churches shunned the streets, clubs, and dance halls in part because these black spaces seemed to confirm the very racist myths of black sexuality to be rejected. Only by being ‘respectable’ black folk, they reasoned, would white America see their good works and shed its racist skin. For many black church folk, black agency and white passivity in sexual affairs was neither desirable nor tolerable. It simply permitted black people to play the role of the exotic “other”—closer to nature (removed from intelligence and control) and more prone to be guided by base pleasures and biological impulses. (p. 518)

black Christians take on the orientation of *Aggressive Assimilation*. In an effort to decrease differences and thwart both real and perceived stereotypes, they engage in either *mirroring* or *dissociating* as communicative practices.

Mirroring involves taking on behaviors that most resemble the dominant culture, while rejecting behaviors that are instinctive to the co-culture in order to succeed in the dominant social circle. An example would be a black, male, Christian, who attends a young singles gathering, and while other white male Christians admire the beauty of their female counterparts (respectfully), and perhaps express interest, the black male Christian, who shares the same sentiments, never mentions them for fear of appearing over-sexualized, or in attendance with ulterior motives.

Dissociating is similar to *mirroring* in that goal is to consciously thwart any behaviors that resemble the predisposed stereotypes that may exist in the minds of the dominant culture. Continuing the aforementioned example, the same black male Christian, may avoid extensive eye contact or proximity to any women at the function to further dispel the stereotype. Another orientation for black Christians is *nonassertive separation*, and most specifically the practice of *avoiding*. Rather than attempting to bridge gaps and create dialogue across race, there is an understanding that white and black Christianity is simply different

The peril of the communicative practices is that there is no genuine connection or communication of self in the faith across race, which is the primary reason why there is minimum curriculum collaboration across racial boundaries between churches. Some black Christians wish to avoid the risk of being covertly stigmatized as the “charity case” of over-sexualized heathens for white Churches.

Men and Women

A significant issue in black Christian congregations is the co-cultural positioning of females to males as it relates to sex and abstinence. Biblical standards convey in Proverbs 18:22 that “he that findeth a wife, findeth a good thing,” which is often translated that women do not and should not demonstrate more than a marginal degree of interest in men, but allow the man to be the pursuant. Additionally, women who do not follow this script are likened to Biblical figures of women who engaged in sexual prowess to including but not limited to, Delilah, Jezebel, and Podifer’s wife. In order to be seen as “respectable,” by the dominant culture of men (and married women), women typically engage in *nonassertive separation* or *aggressive assimilation*.

Some black women have the tendency to *avoid*, in that they remove themselves from situations or conversations that involve interaction with or the subject of men, thought to communicate greater holiness. Others may very well engage in ridiculing self as a way of earning her way into dominant approval and acceptance. *Ridiculing self* involves “demeaning comments . . . and nonchalant banter that include poking fun at one’s co-culture,” (Orbe, 1998, p. 76). An example would be an “acceptable,” woman positioned in a group of men who are talking about a fellow female church member who is “man hungry,” because she has had a premarital sexual encounter with a man in the congregation in the absence of commitment of any kind. While she has the option to challenge the notion of whether or not a sexual encounter makes one “man hungry,” or highlight the fact that many of them have had premarital sexual encounters with more

than one woman within the congregation, she relishes in the fact that she is one of the accepted (who may presumably get a date because of her modest presentation), and while saying nothing in defense, actually supports their interpretation with more gossip and judgment.

The aforementioned example is one of the greatest problems in developing a sound curriculum for abstinence in some black churches. The co-cultural positioning, orientation, and practices perpetuate a stereotype that mutes the real experiences of Christian black women. Experiences include having a desire for a mate, the social wherewithal to initiate communication with a man, having very real and raw sexual desires, and yielding to the temptation of those desires, even if having done so regretfully. Curriculum is often designed as separate for the sexes, and men and women receive separate messages about sexual expression as Christians.

Black Leaders in White Denominations

Within white denominations, black leaders are in a co-cultural group as it relates to their white pastoral counterparts, especially when developing a curriculum of any kind. Historically, black churches were lead by black leaders only in theory. All decision-making was still the privilege of a white overseer. Henry Mitchell, author of *Black Church beginnings*, provides an account:

This early supervision included appointment of white preachers in almost all cases, if only for the monthly service of Holy Communion . . . Black exhorters were considered incapable of serving as full pastors, and were denied full ordination. This arbitrarily low appraisal of black preachers prevailed despite the

impressive effectiveness of some black preachers. It gave white churches an excuse for trying to maintain tight control over Black churches . . . When a black preacher was more gifted than available whites, and was badly enough needed, he might serve, at least for a few years, as the founder and functioning full pastor of a mixed congregation. (Mitchell, 2004, p. 50)

As a result, some black leaders engage in either nonassertive separation or avoiding, whereby no engagement or interaction with white leaders takes place, or aggressive assimilation and strategic distancing. *Strategic distancing* means that “others adamantly avoid any contact as a means of successfully assimilating in society” (Orbe, 1998, p. 75). An example would be a black pastor of a mixed congregation who makes an adamant point to fellowship more with white leaders and other mixed congregations for fear of being seen as a separatist for fellowshiping more-so with other black leaders and encouraging fellowship with predominately black congregations.

An actual positive outcome in relationship to curriculum is that there is more of a dialogue with leaders of other cultures, with different experiences about practices implemented in abstinence curricula that are currently unknown to black congregations (perhaps due to limited networking resources). However, the challenge lies in the fact that some of the components of a curriculum that serve white middle class Christians, may not be culturally relevant to black Christians, and as a result, leave that portion of the congregation underserved.

Lay Members and Leaders

Lay members and Leadership, within congregations, serve in a bi-directional, co-cultural relationship. Lay members serve in the co-cultural position in the case that personal values and norms do not resonate with that of the leadership. As it relates to sex and abstinence, if a Pastor decides that the topic of sexuality is too risqué, and will cause turmoil, there may not be a sex education or abstinence curriculum at a church. Depending upon the position of the lay-member (i.e. woman, single man, or single parent), he or she may fear the labeling or stereotyping that would accompany the decision to engage in vocal resistance or lobbying for a curriculum. As a result, lay members take on the practice of censoring or, “contain[ing] their immediate reactions and say[ing] nothing,” (Orbe, 1998, p. 68). The overall negative outcome is that their needs are perceived as inequitable and go unmet.

Pastors are in a co-cultural position depending upon the governing body of the church and the voting rights of members. Their position of power trumps the communicative space of the Pastor to vocalize core beliefs at the risk of being “outvoted,” and rejected for ideologies. For example, a Pastor who sees a critical need for a sex/abstinence curriculum in the church may be viewed as too progressive and detached from the values within that church culture. To be overly vocal about an issue that members overlook or reject, may mean risking communicative opposition on future decisions. Therefore, the pastor engages in the practice of averting controversy. Research conducted in 1988 on the Churches of God in rural areas revealed that many

Pastors had progressive attitudes about incorporating a sex education/abstinence curriculum, but did not promote, or even vocalize the idea for fear of rejection by the membership (Clark-Bey, 2005). If communicative power structures operate in this way, the needs of youth and singles are not only unmet, but deemed nonexistent.

Socio-economic Status

A final co-cultural dynamic that presents itself as a challenge to the development of an abstinence curriculum is related to socioeconomic status. While many black churches are segregated by financial status, there is still a membership structure that crosses all socio-economic categories. However, there is not equality in voice and perspective in many cases. Therefore, the sexual values and experiences of members at or below the poverty line are not always taken into consideration when developing a curriculum. Ruby Payne, author of *What Every Church Member Should Know about Poverty* provides an example of the varying relationship and sexual values, in some cases, of those at or below the poverty line:

And one of the rules in generational poverty for women is this: you may need to use your body for survival . . . Sex will bring money and favors. Values are important, but they don't put food on the table—or bring relief from intense pressure . . . What may seem to be very workable suggestions from a middle-class point of view may be virtually impossible given the resources available to those in poverty. (Payne & Ehlig, 1999, pp. 24-25)

She leans on the self-righteous defense of being moral and Christian, but not in the middle-class sense of Christianity. For her it is simply one of unconditional love. Reality is the present—what can be persuaded and convinced in the present. Future ramifications are not considered by anyone. (Payne & Ehlig, 1999, p. 54)

Members of low socio-economic status, sometimes due to a sense of inferiority, will engage in *nonassertive assimilation* and *ensor self* as a means of decreasing the distinction between themselves and the dominant culture of those in high SES brackets. Experiences are not shared, but hidden, in a way that compromises the ability of decision-makers to create an all-inclusive curriculum that speaks to the struggles that Payne mentioned.

Sex is a marginalizing topic in black (or any) church settings. It is essential to open opportunities for discourse for those who are de-centered. I have explored the various communication orientations and practices of co-cultural theory, that pertain to communication dynamics in black churches as it relates to dialogue about sex and abstinence curriculum. A common thread is that there are few assertive accommodating practices, which are most ideal for the level of candor, honesty, and equity necessary to create an open forum for the multiple experiences of blacks who, are adhering to, or desire to adhere to the Christian principles of sexual purity. The inequity resembles that which was discussed in the previous chapter pertaining to the content of teaching tools. In the next chapter, I share the findings from one of the two analyses conducted. I reveal themes of race class and gender in Christian inspirational texts which marginalize readers.

CHAPTER VI

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF CHRISTIAN INSPIRATIONAL ABSTINENCE TEXTS

The purpose of the textual analysis was to explore three themes; race, class, and gender, as a way to assess creation, distribution, and consumption of the texts by black Christian populations. I conducted a qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2000) using deductive categorization (see Appendix D). The theory which guided my deductive categorization was that of political economy. Specifically, I focused on Marx's contribution to the theory, which suggests that multiple elements of the culture of consumers must be assessed in order to determine the likelihood of consumption. The elements that I have chosen, race, class, and gender, provided the broadest examination of the texts. The following is a presentation of the findings from qualitative content analysis of Christian inspirational abstinence texts.

I reviewed 19 texts, in the form of complete books or chapters on the topic of abstinence from a *primarily* Christian inspirational perspective (Christian Inspiration being any text that is not the Bible, or a theological examination of the Bible). The books were available in the "Singles" and "Youth" sections of Christian bookstores, or in the "Christian inspirational" and "African American Interests," sections of secular chains. Another book was a recommended read by a local church, which was made available in their church bookstore. Sixteen of the books were by Christian authors (those who

identify as Christian, and publish through Christian publication companies, or a secular company's faith-based derivative). Three books were by secular authors (those who do not openly identify as Christian, or publish via Christian publication companies), but spoke to certain religious (in the Christian vein) influences, on refraining from sexual activity. Seven of the 19 books were by black authors, and 12 books were by white authors. Of the black authors, three were men, two were women, and one book was written by a couple. Of the white authors, nine were men (one was a collaboration by two men), and five were women (one was a collaboration by two women). The copyrights of the texts range from 1999 to 2008 (see Appendix E).

General Observations

The general observation is that there were very few texts on the topic authored by blacks, which has been a criticism by previous researchers (Johnston & Staples, 2005). The reason that I felt compelled to include texts by blacks that were not identified as Christian inspirational (Harper, 2006a, 2006b; Boyd-Franklin & Franklin, 2001), is because had I not, I only would have had three books to choose from between Christian *and* secular bookstores. Therefore, I broadened my research to include secular authors who shed light on the subject matter of abstinence for blacks through a religious lens (specifically Christian references). Additionally, I noticed that no black Christian authors wrote on the topic of sex solely, but incorporated the topic in books that were about dating. However, many white authors published text that was solely about sexuality for Christians (Bell, 2007; Eagar, 2002; Gresh, 2004; Hughes, 2002;

Ingram, 2003; Payne, 2000; Strack & Strack, 1997), while some white authors followed the same format as black authors. There was also a distinction between books targeted for the youth and those for adult singles. Many of books for youth (for this portion of the research, I refer to youth as 18 and under) were about sex only (Dimarco, 2006; Feldhahn & Rice, 2008; Hughes 2002; Payne, 2000; Strack & Strack, 1997), while sex was seen as a part of a larger picture of dating for those that targeted adult singles audiences. The aforementioned led to the unfortunate observation that there were absolutely no books targeted for black Christian youth culture.

Race, Class, Gender, and the Production of Goods

Marx's version of political economy suggests that the production of goods should be based upon the needs of the consumers, not the needs of the producer. However, in the case of the sample of texts that I used, it is apparent that only certain populations are actually served. The visual imagery in the texts blatantly excluded certain readers. For example, *Technical Virgin* (Dimarco, 2006) has a front cover adorned with the midriff of a young white woman, with blond hair, in a tank top. From cover to cover there are romantic still shots of men and women. Of the 18 photographs, there is only one image of anyone who remotely resembles a minority, and he is multi-ethnic.

Another example of visual imagery is Danna Gresh's (2004) *The Bride Wore White: Seven Secrets to Sexual Purity*. On the cover is a white woman with blond hair, smiling and holding a bouquet. Throughout the text there are photos of married

couples. In all of the 17 chapters, there is only one black couple near the end of the text. The title refers to brides, women. Other texts like Josh Harris's *Sex is Not the Problem Lust is* (2007), there is the image of a man and woman's lower extremities sitting at the table. The limbs are visibly white. So while this text, in presentation, is inclusive of men, it still at first glance, appeals to an audience of white readers. All of the *True Love Waits* text covers (Payne, 2000; Hughes, 2002; Strack & Strack, 2005) have whites on the cover of the texts.

An interesting observation of the texts authored by blacks is that, with the exception of two (Boyd-Franklin & Franklin, 2001; Griffin, 2007; Smith, 2005) the authors had pictures of their faces on the covers of their books, as if to imply not only race but gender. All of the books with images of people on the front are communicating some notion of class distinction. For example, Dimarco's book *Virgins*, while only showing the young woman's midriff, is showing a midriff adorned in the latest clothing fashions most afforded by middle and upper middle class. Such is the case for all of the aforementioned texts to include those by black authors. Each author whose face or body is on the cover is wearing a suit or ensemble that indicates wealth. The books with the "universal" Christian message about God's design for texts are visually appealing to different readers; however, regardless of all of the different intersections of identity communicated in the texts, there are still no visual images that speak to any reader at or below the poverty line.

There are other options such as Rod Bell's (2007) *Sex God*, whereby the cover is simply multi-chromatic shades of pink, blue, and brown (a consistent trademark in his series of work is the use of graphics on the covers of his books). Deborah Griffin's (2007) *Single for a Season, Married for a Reason* text communicates a stereotypical gender bias by having a meadow of sunflowers indicating femininity (and the book is described in the first chapter as being primarily for women).

In addition to race, class, and gender being communicated in visual images, there is a blatant bias in the visual imagery of the texts. A common trend in abstinence text is to give the reader short stories or anecdotes throughout, so that a mental visual can be attached to the message of the reader. However, certain instances of this can actually alienate the reader as opposed to drawing them in, because the imagery communicates no relevance to the readers.

For example, some books were based on an *entire theme* that, were you not a part of the middle class, may have created a mental barrier, as was the case with Cheryl Martin's (2003) *First Class Single*, in which she describes how she got the idea for the book:

A minister and relationship expert, Lous Greenup, often tells the story of sitting in 1st Class during a flight one day and reflecting on the superior level of service in that section . . . Greenup says the Lord spoke to him during one such flight and said, 'I want you to have a 1st Class Marriage . . .' Every time I hear Louis Greenup tell that story, I say to God in my heart, 'Lord . . . I want to be a 1st Class Single! I don't want to be mediocre in any area of my life . . . a life of distinction that would bring You the highest praise. (Martin, 2003, p. xii)

Martin goes on to create middle class metaphors about sex and dating being a financial investment of security:

Many Christian women don't have the right data when we start dating. We make our best decisions when we take the time to gather pertinent information. For instance we typically don't buy a house or car or decide on a college unless we do research . . . (Martin, 2003, p. xiii)

I am not suggesting that the poor or working class is not concerned with or cannot relate to a financial metaphor; however, the luxury communicated in the metaphors is detached from their everyday lived experiences. Martin is a famous for news anchor for Black Entertainment Television's Nightly News. These experiences are a reflection of her lifestyle, and I am not suggesting that she conceal those experiences, however there is concern if there are no other alternatives.

Living Single by Kervin Smith (2005), is a black Christian author, makes a case for why Christians consistently engage in premarital sex, though it is wrong. He uses a computer software metaphor to create a mental illustration of the concept:

The reason why they tolerate very apparent abuse is because they, through sexual intercourse, have become de-sensitized to that kind of behavior. Although they know that conventionally speaking as well as biblically and morally speaking, the behavior is simply wrong, they continue to tolerate it because they have an "installed" acceptance toward it. You can look at this in terms of computer software for an even clearer example. The computer on which I write books cannot function without an operating system such as Microsoft, Windows XP . . . You and I give our permission to another person's permissiveness and improprieties by lending our bodies as the operating system that makes the enemy work and function optimally. (Smith, 2005, p. 79)

He also makes a case for the freedom of being single if one can sexually abstain:

For example, you may desire to go to Australia and your spouse may be adamantly opposed to the idea for whatever reason. Single people don't have to consider those kinds of things. You have a different kind of freedom . . . (p. 103).

Again, the concern is not with imagery as an end to itself. Every author creates imagery that is in some way birthed from personal experiences. Their identity will manifest in their writing. However, if the need of the consumer is called into question, which is one of the tenet of Marx's version of political economy, then we have to call into question whether or not communicating certain class messages are actually meeting the original goal of production to capture the "calling of God to serve all," to which Wuthnow (1995) referred to earlier in Chapter IV.

Some white authors gave references to popular film with white characters, which may have wonderful appeal for young white readers, but leaves a black reader attempting to recall a movie that he or she has never seen. DiMarco's (2006) work *Virgins* is a clear illustration of multiple uses of middle class or white female imagery that may serve as irrelevant to the reader if he or she is black, below middle class, and male:

Your mind can trick you into believing that a sixteen-year-old male who doesn't have a job, still lives with his parents, and plays Xbox all day really is like Matthew McConaughey. (Dimarco, 2006, p. 80)

Being a 'friend with benefits' is like Starbucks deciding to give their coffee away instead of charging and then wondering why they are going broke. (Dimarco, 2006, p. 57)

The goal of *Virgins* is to discuss ways in which one can avoid crossing physical boundaries that may lead to sex. The message that the book conveys in its female dominant imagery is that being a virgin is about being a white woman. Men have no stake in the material presented. Danna Gresh's (2004) *And the Bride Wore White* communicates the same message as Dimarco in her use of examples to push the message of abstinence:

Little Women was written when the fashion was to push a young woman's bust line up to her neckline . . . Meg blushed when she looked at herself in the mirror . . . Later Meg admitted the way she was dressed made her behave badly . . . On your dates do you want to be merely decorative, a trait that will someday wear away? (Gresh, 2004, p. 84)

Some authors communicated more racially, gender, and socio-economically neutral messages. While no message can be devoid of any elements, I perceived these to be images that any minister could relate to and formulate discussion around the examples. First, is an example by Rob Bell who is describing that the beauty of marriage is that you have to take a risk on the person that you love and then make the best of your mental, emotional, and sexual the context of love. He likens this experience to the first time that someone is asked to dance in middle school:

When I was twelve, I went to a dance at my school. It was held in the cafeteria where they folded up the lunch tables and brought in a DJ. The girls stood on the one side of the room, the boys stood on the other. Every once in a while, somebody would bravely venture across this massive chasm to ask someone to dance . . . It takes all that a young man has in him not to buckle under the enormity of the pressure. But I did it. I made it to the other side and asked her if she would like to dance with me . . . She burst into tears and ran into the girl' bathroom . . . I risked that she would say no and I would be left standing there on the girls' side of the cafeteria humiliated. (Bell, 2007, p. 88)

Rob Eagar (2002), author of *Dating with Pure Passion*, shares an excerpt about a woman who was addicted to sex in her younger years, and the perils that she faces later in life. The account can be much more easily used in a discussion because there is no implied race, no blatantly reference to class, only gender, which still does not detach the reader from the experience:

In her early twenties, Serena slept with several different men. She couldn't resist the boost to her self-esteem when a man desired her sexually . . . When she accidentally got pregnant, Serena chose an abortion to solve the problem. She didn't realize that her sexual carelessness was deadening her heart's ability to experience real intimacy and commitment. (Eagar, 2002, p. 130)

Elmore captures the same art of *some* neutrality in his work, *No Nonsense Dating*, whereby he gives an illustration of someone coping with an addiction to pornography. He makes references to several men and women, facing different sexual issues as a result of engaging in premarital sex, but he does not demonize one over the other:

Tony sees me twice a week to talk about his addiction to pornography and how it affects his relationship with his girlfriend, Janet. He talks about his childhood, finding the "innocent" Playboy in his dad's bathroom and giggling over it. . . .

pornography is now leading his son to harder forms of pornography and other types of addictions. (Elmore, 2008, pp. 58-59)

Nancy Boyd-Franklin and A. J. Franklin (2001) are two of the black authors in the secular genre who wrote about the intersection between sexuality and spirituality. They provided a comprehensive examination of the experiences of black males entitled, *Boys into Men: Raising our African American Teenage Sons*. The text is academically-based and could be classified as middle class due to some of the formal language register, a concern that I had with all except for four books (Griffin, 2007; Harper, 2006a, 2006b; Martin, 2003). Two things that distinguish Boyd-Franklin and Franklin (2001) are the relevance of examples and inclusion of parents in the process of educating:

As parents, it is very important that we live out our spiritual beliefs and a commitment to open communication with our sons can these beliefs become an integral part their lives; if these spiritual beliefs are true for us, then they will bear good fruit in our lives. (p. 48)

“I have turned him over to the Lord,” I admired her faith. What I found out in the following conversation, however, was that in giving the situation to God, this mom had stopped being a parent. She had given up on trying to monitor him or have an influence in his life, saying that it was in God’s hands. (p. 61)

Start early by talking to them about the connection between sex and love. Talking to your son about how women should be treated is very important. This is a special role for black fathers to assume. Many black women with close relationships with their sons also do this well. (p. 146)

Similar writing from black author Hill Harper (2006) is dedicated to creating a platform for discussion of sex among other topics for both young men and women. Harper is a

famous Hollywood personality as an actor, but he is also a philanthropist and writer.

While his message appears centralized for blacks, there are indicators that the text is not solely for blacks. For example, on the cover is a picture of himself seated with three young women; two black women, and one white woman. His message is communicated solely to the pop-cultural generation, but he is careful to paint many illustrations and philosophies that can be embraced across the board. In the following, Harper speaks to the intent of sex and the role of parents:

Sex is not a bad thing. That is because the act of having sexual relations is the most natural thing in the world. Sex is a blessing given to us by God for all of us to derive pleasure from and to procreate and keep the human species going. God made it feel good so we would be encouraged to keep doing it more and more. But with that blessing comes huge responsibility. (p. 88)

Like I said above, sex is a big deal, and irresponsible sexual activity has ruined many, many lives because of the consequences of both sexually transmitted diseases and negative choices in choosing partners. (p. 90)

“Can’t you masturbate more?” And I was like, “Mom, I can’t believe you just said that to me.” I was embarrassed at the time, but looking back, I think it was great that my mom was able to talk with me about sex. (p. 91)

Harper validates sexual experiences, and is inclusive of the parental role on a level that is not threatening, but also one that does not marginalize.

Consumption and Distribution

The examples given communicate several centered messages about abstinence that in turn impact consumption. For ministers and laity, messages in the text that marginalize in some way are challenging. While a youth, college, or singles minister of a

white middle class church may have numerous resources to choose from, the number decreases when talking about serving populations that are not at the “center” of examples and illustrations given in the text. While some may possess the skills to adapt the message, the likelihood is that it is a minister whose identity contains both centered and marginalized elements (i.e. a minister in a minority church who is a college graduate). Additionally, for black churches that seek to take a village approach to communicating abstinence, the majority of texts marginalized the adults. The book was targeted for the young reader, which is healthy, but still exclusive depending upon pedagogical values.

Political economy would suggest that the cycle of the challenge is never ending due to the current system of value, supply, and demand. Ministers who do not wish to expose their populations to marginalized messages, may prefer to create their own topical discussions as a way of avoiding the tedium to adapting the lived experiences of the texts to those of the members in the auxiliaries that they lead. Additionally, ministers may simply not feel competent enough to attempt to adapt the material. On the other hand, black authors are working diligently to remain in the market as well, and therefore some are writing to reach a “mainstream audience.” The result of doing so is that there are yet sectors of the population who may relate to the initial image (i.e. a black woman on the cover of the book), but is then disappointed when opening the pages to still find that none of the experiences match his/her own. When there is a lack

of connection to the text, the value goes down significantly for the reader, thereby decreasing or never increasing the demand.

I find it interesting that secular, black authors and certain male authors (Bell, 2007; Elmore, 2008) were able to communicate a message that was most relevant to *more* of the general population than any other writers. I question whether or not the traditional notions of black sexuality and Christianity discussed in chapter three are still impacting the way in which we engage in discourse on the topic of sexuality. The scarcity of authors such as the aforementioned, there is a repeat of supply and demand based on appealing to only a sector of the larger population of youth and singles.

A decrease in demand means that companies will continue to publish what sells. Since the experiences of young white singles are most included in the readings, there is a certainty that they will be the highest consumers of the Christian inspirational abstinence text market (although I would go a step farther to say young white women). Therefore, publishing companies will continue to pay authors that appeal to this market, because they know that it is a guaranteed investment. Marx, however, would suggest that publishers and authors rethink their agendas, and provide a more inclusive reading experience for all.

CHAPTER VII

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF NARRATIVES OF BLACK CHURCH MINISTERS

The goal of the analysis is to assess the narratives of ministers of youth and singles auxiliaries for co-cultural practices in their personal and professional experiences that impacted abstinence curriculum development and implementation (see Appendix D). Finally the results of each set of preliminary results are reviewed in order to determine the relationship between the communicative practices engaged in or avoided in their implementation of abstinence curriculum, and the use or rejection of teaching tools.

Narratives

I interviewed five ministers ranging in age from 23 to 39 years of age. There was one woman and five men. Four of the participants were black, and one white. All of the churches were predominantly black. All participants were college graduates with a minimum of a four-year degree from universities in the UNC system. Three of the five participants were married. The other two have never married. Three of the five participants have children. Three of the five participants were reared in homes with parents who served as pastors. Two of the five participants served in small-independent church environments, while two served in a mega-church environments, and one was transitioning from leadership in a mega-church environment to a small church

environment, but within the same denomination. Three of the five ministers were leaders under the Church of God in Christ denomination. Each participant was asked to, “Please share the story of both your personal and professional experiences with abstinence education in the black church?” during an audio recorded interview to which they had agreed after signing a consent form (see Appendix ?).

The narratives are analyzed using the reduction process (theme extraction) as outlined by co-cultural theory. I code the narratives based upon themes of common personal and professional experiences. I then engage in a second round of coding where I derived co-cultural practices. There are a host of common as well as distinct themes. So as to familiarize the reader with each participant, I first present an overview of information for each participant or co-researcher. I share their narratives, first highlighting distinctions, elements of their stories that I found interesting as it relates to abstinence experience and how it impacted curriculum. Finally, I analyze the thematic components, seeking which communicative power dynamics impacted personal and professional life, hence influencing the way in which abstinence curriculum is implemented in black church settings.

Pastor Eli

The first interview was with Pastor Eli. Pastor Eli is a 39-year-old white male who serves as the full-time youth pastor of a predominately black mega-church of the Church of God in Christ denomination, located in North Carolina. He has been with the ministry of that particular church, for nearly 20 years, and has served as the youth pastor for

over 10 years to young people up to the age of 18. He has a wife, who is black and a five year-old son, who is home-schooled. I became acquainted with Pastor Eli after attending the church over the last six years. I knew individuals who had been influenced by his ministry in their youth, and was interested in his personal and professional experience as a person who ministers to young people who reach the age of sexual curiosity.

Pastor Eli identifies with urban (stereotypically associated with black) youth culture in many ways. His daily uniform consists of baggy sweats and athletic jerseys, complete with the latest footwear and sports team hats. He is only adorned in a suit when he takes the pulpit. Many Sundays, Pastor Eli will be seen in the urban attire, which has always been a strong point with the youth. He is what many in the holiness denomination would refer to as “unashamed of the gospel,” in that he capitalizes on call and response opportunities in the church, as an avid promoter of the notion that, “Real men love Jesus!” He and his wife are recognized as the odd couple, for she is perceived as conservative in her style of dress and speech. Very often, the youth make the observation that, “Pastor Eli is the Black one and his wife is the white one.”

So many elements of Pastor Eli’s identity were interesting to me in relationship to the research. First, I was interested in determining whether or not his identity as a white man impacted the way in which he approached talking about sex to predominately black youth. Secondly, because he is of service to the population that is 18 and under, I was interested in determining how intentional he was about conveying the message of abstinence as an adult. After all, he was one of the most outspoken

members of the congregation on all topics. Finally, I wondered if coming from a white church background, he would implement a curriculum that was more typically used in white congregations. From a personal place, I sought to discover the root of his intentional display of masculinity and how it impacted his personal sexual experiences. Ultimately, my goal was to listen to Pastor Eli's story to determine what, if any, power dynamics impacted his personal and professional decisions regarding the topic of abstinence.

Pastor Eli stated that he remembered little or no teaching about abstinence from church or school in his childhood, but had his first sexual experience in the fourth grade with a female babysitter:

I don't recall ever being educated on abstinence. Well I think I started sexual activity in 4th grade—I was raped by one of my babysitters. Which I say I was raped when I was in 4th grade, but it wasn't a traumatic experience. Actually, I got props from everybody . . . of course she was older, and I'm in fourth grade. So it wasn't traumatic. It just probably opened my mind up to stuff I shouldn't have been doing. I don't know if you should ever do, but anyway, it opened me to sexual activity—sexual issues in fourth grade.

So from there, I'd try to get girls to play doctor or whatever you could do—truth or dare, getting in the closet. We didn't really have sex, but you know touchin' boobies. Can I say boobies? (laughter). Y'know just little experimental type stuff. Show me yours. I'll show you mine type stuff. My first sexual experience was the eighth grade. We didn't have intercourse.

This experience not only demonstrates precocious sexuality, but also sets the stage for social acceptance related to sexuality for Pastor Eli.

Identifying as an athlete, he recalled that most of his sexual learning was at the hand of older siblings and friends in locker rooms bantering back and forth. Leadership was a prevailing theme in the earlier part of the narrative related to his personal experience, which he referred to having a significant impact on his performance of sexual bravado:

I was an out-front person, leader, stuff like but if I felt like I didn't get a good response from those that I had influence over I wouldn't do that anymore. So I really wasn't really a leader, I was just kinda following the response of the crowd if you will. My brother's three years ahead of me so he set the pace: "Smiths are crazy. Smiths are this, Smiths are that." I just walked in to fill in the mold of what people thought that Smiths were. But I don't remember—at that time they didn't distribute condoms in school. They didn't—I don't remember anybody ever teaching me about abstinence. We just did what we did. (Break in the tape) We don't know who's lying, who's telling the truth.

Pastor Eli's interpretation of leadership was based on approval of those that he was influencing. This trend motivated him to project a certain image in his dating life. The assumption that he was sexually active made him popular, so that fact that he was actually satisfied with being abstinent was never revealed.

In high school we moved to get more seriously dating. Freshmen year, I dated a senior, walking in the Smith mantra. So I'm the man. She was fine, and ya'know. But we never had sex. She was a virgin and wanted to be married as a virgin. I ain't never tell nobody that. But I never said that we did either cause I was kinda scared of her and her brother anyway. So I didn't wanna *lie* on her but y'know how you do . . . you're like, "What'chou think?" and all that type stuff. Y'know I never said that we did, but it got me a lot of social headway if you're dating someone, going steady or whatever. Nobody was dating her because she wasn't puttin' out. Everybody seemed to be having sex.

Because he was a popular athlete, more often than not, he recalls that many assumed that he was sexually active even though he was not. However, he said nothing to dispel the myths because he did not want to be marginalized from the group of high school athletes, though he secretly identified himself as a gentleman:

So when we were together, I'd be real nice—real honest, treat her nice. It's what I believed you should do anyway. I didn't always do that in front of people. I really always respected women. I loved my mom and my dad didn't treat my mom too well sometimes, so I really felt—I always had a tender heart. I just never let anybody know about it. I stayed drunk or high. Y'know, "Smiths are crazy and tough, and will fight anybody at a drop of a hat," and all this stuff.

Pastor Eli's story is different from other interviewees in that his life is filled primarily with spiritual pivotal moments about becoming a Christian which indirectly impacted his decisions about sex. The first is the death of his best friend Sam during his sophomore year of high school. Pastor Eli reflects on the night that he died:

My sophomore year, about 2 weeks in, Sam, my best friend passed. We were going to ECU together. We'd played football together. I was a center. He was a guard. I hung out at his house. I didn't have the best home environment most of the time, so I didn't like being at home. There was always drama, fighting and arguing and all that stuff. They were sweet and nice people. They call me their son. I call his dad, "Dad." We both had blond hair, and long, and we hung out. We loved wrestling, and we loved football, of course. We were just—Everybody called us brothers. But anyway, so he got killed in a car accident. And that's really when I lost control of my life, and I didn't handle that too well. I don't remember if I got grief counseling or anything like that now that I think about it.

Pastor Eli described the eeriness of going to the hospital to confirm that Sam had passed away. Immediately after finding out, he went to be with Sam's brother Curt, and

they consumed a significant amount of drugs and alcohol. That night, while talking to Curt, Pastor Eli confirmed the decision that he made about the role that God would play in his life from that point on:

So I'm sitting here, and you know, he starts going, "I hate God." Come to find out, they went to church all the time—Never invited me to church. I never went to church with them as much as I was their son and I called him Dad, and all that stuff, they *never* took me to church. So they went to the church not far from the house. That's where we had the funeral.

So he's in the car going, "I hate God. Why'd he have to take Sam?" And y'know talking all this stuff. And I was just quiet because I was with a bunch of older cats, and I was just glad—kinda glad to be with them. I wanted to be with somebody. So if this real, now I'm with Curt. That was his older brother. His name was Curt.

But he was talking about God took him and all this stuff. So I'm like, in my mind—And that's why I say this a defining moment where I went crazy. I took it to a whole 'nother level is when I said to myself, "If God took my best friend. I don't want nothing to do with him. I mean, I didn't go around saying I didn't believe there was a God but from that point on I hated God.

I don't care. At that point, I just started smoking marijuana, and my parents couldn't do anything with me. I mean, we didn't have a great relationship before that. I mean I love my parents but—SO anyway, I would just stay out, and do stuff. And they just, "Do you know you're failing? Do you know you're. . ." I was just messin' up, y'know, I don't care.

The defining moment about how he perceived God was a personal decision, yet, the moment of that decision was seated in the context of a desire for social acceptance. His decision about God is made in the social setting with other people who are making decisions about God. Another pivotal moment was when his football career ended in

college after he ruptured two disks in his back during his freshmen year, which he stated increased his rebellion:

Ok. I had emergency surgery on my back. My football career was over. They were giving me drugs for pain so I'm getting high off pills. Now that football was over, I'm gonna be a real drug addict. But um . . . I skipped a whole lot in high school. I went through drugs, started cocaine, but I stopped because when I graduated, my Dad got me in college, so it was like—And I'd always worked out. I always told everybody I was going to the NFL. But I wasn't as serious as I could've been, not being in top fitness and smoking all the time. But anyway, I was *decent* though. So when I got there, I was able to play and was . . . good as everybody else. I just thought I could be so much more prepared.

So anyway, I'm like stopping. I'm gonna clean up, and then that happened. So then it was like, forget it. So then I went back home. I dropped out of college and went back home, and my friend while I was gone, my freshmen year, my friend got some serious connects in [hometown] and started selling cocaine big time. I'd just played with it before I left, but now I wanted to sell it. So we were making thousands of dollars, and we were getting high. Then we started shooting up.

Not living up to the standard, failing to stand out or feel special I influenced a spiral.

Based on his feelings about Christianity at the time, Pastor Eli ventured into heavy drug addiction and sales, which made him less conscious of sexual pursuits, and began to engage in them mindlessly. During this time, Pastor Eli recalled a conversation with dear friend that he'd known since second grade, Tristan, a black male. They spent hours with him in a parking lot talking about the love of Christ one evening, but stated that he was not ready to make the commitment at the time.

The final pivotal moment that impacted his decision to become a Christian also marks his defining moment about sexuality. He shared an account about participating in

a longitudinal study conducted by the department of public health in his home town from ages 12 to 19 in the county where he was from. The final interview asked him questions about sex, and the value of women, and he realized that his life did not line up with his core principles:

They always asked stuff like, “How do you get popular? What makes someone popular?” Well this time, they were like, “What do you think about teen drugs, drug addicts, drug addiction, or drug use among teens?” Then they were like, what do you think about teen pregnancy?” So I was just being honest with them. I don’t think it’s good. It changes your life. And they were like, “What about your daughter?” They were asking some serious—Y’know and I’m in the midst of my mess. I’m lying to girls now, just to get with them. Wait until they get married, y’know—All of the drama I’ve got with relationships, close calls. This isn’t good. And I wouldn’t want my children doing what I’m doing. So she left or whatever. It was longer than that I just can’t remember. Anyway, they left, and I was like, it hit me. I’m like, “I’m not living what I believe or what I want. I’m totally doing everything—I just told them I want to be honest and be truthful, and that’s the exact opposite of what I’m doing.”

I just started crying. I felt like a failure. I can’t play football. I barely graduated from high school. I done quit college. I’m selling drugs. So when they left, I remembered the whole conversation I had with Tristan came back to my memory. And I was just sitting in the house crying and I called this preacher who used to pray for us for our football games. I didn’t know what to do. I couldn’t remember what he said to do, but I knew that I just wanted to try this Jesus dude. And I called him, and he said, just repeat after me . . .”

Pastor Eli reflected back on the fact that he reached out to Tristan once he made the decision to convert to Christianity. Immediately, Tristan helped him to and begin college. He shared the experiences of being a part of the college ministry, and how he and Tristan, who was already an enrolled student, “took the campus by storm.” He initially did not attend Tristan’s church (Pastor Eli’s current church of 20 years). He made

the decision to attend a white church, but felt that powerful presence in the space was due to his age and vitality, but felt compelled to leave and join Tristan's church, unsure as to how an all black (he was the only white in the entire church) congregation would receive him. He felt compelled because he enjoyed the practical teaching:

I'd been coming like I said, for six months on Thursdays. Like I said it was just good, practical. What do you do now? How do you live now? My other church was more like, always about when you get to heaven. Everything is going to be alright. It was kinda like justify living any way now because we're forgiven. And then in the bye and bye . . . but it was like when I would go to [church] it was like Pastor would give you: "This is how you deal with your frustration now. This is how you deal with sexual temptation now. This is what God requires of a daily life now, and I'm just like, wow" Then I saw all these young *men* going for God. And it wasn't like my church. It was a bunch of women and old men, and they smoking and drinking and stuff and whatever. So anyway, I joined. I felt like y'know—I always hung out with African American people. I felt like walking up there they [the church] might not want me here. There weren't any white people. This was in 1990.

The result of Pastor Eli's decision was that he was now marginalized across multiple contexts. He was seated as a member of his co-culture as a minority in his new church. Because of his identification with blacks, he was also marginalized by white Christians and his family:

So anyway, I just left. I said, "I'm turning it in now, cause I don't wanna be a church hopper." I didn't know what that was anyway. I started going to [church] and it was just crazy. My parents—I've stopped drugging and all that. Now I'm trying to live for Jesus. They said, "It's a cult up there. It's fanatical." I'm getting all this pressure. Then my religious family was like, "You're ruining the Smith name. He's gonna marry a black girl. I know he is." Which I did, but it wasn't my plan (laughter) but anyway, so I just got a lot of pressure.

Breaking barriers and changing the rules of engagement were consistent metaphors for Pastor Eli. He found great pride in standing out as an exceptionally talented athlete, as well as an exceptionally charismatic Christian, a man who married a black woman (against the wishes of his family at the time), and becoming the youth pastor of one of the largest black churches in the community, *who just so happened to be white:*

Tristan started being a youth pastor. And I was looking for a wife and being faithful. My friend Tristan felt led to start a church. And Pastor asked me to be the youth pastor in his place. At that time, you couldn't tell me nothing. I was a youth pastor at [church name] *full time*. I was all in the flesh. I was just young, but it was definitely an honor.

It should have come as no surprise that Pastor Eli used his decision-making power to go against the grain of what may have been considered appropriate teaching practice in his original white church setting. He shared why he sees absolutely no need for abstinence curriculum. The key is right relationship with God so that young people could have a tangible experience with God that made them feel special:

And then comes the direct communication about abstinence. I don't really call it that, or deal with it from that context. It's a Biblical standard. So I don't use text or curriculums, or anything like that. By the grace of God is how you live an abstinent life. You want to feel attracted, so that's natural. So long church has been, "Stick your head in the sand on the subject. But I say as a minister, "I know what you're feeling."

The need to feel special [associated with sex] can be met by personal relationship with God. That's the "specialness." So I work on helping them to have a tangible experience is my approach. I don't focus on a program or any

training. I teach Biblical ethics from a Biblical standard. I did sex classes when we first started, but I don't anymore because if I can show them that there is one relationship that solves all of this. You think because you had a conference they change. And that, I feel, is malpractice. They need to be ministered to, not just show off talents. That's not youth ministry (referring to talent shows, Bible memory verse competitions, and doing dances).

For pastor Eli, whether or not he felt special or stood out, motivated the pivotal moments in his life to include the decisions that he made spiritually and sexually. Therefore, he focuses on making sure that the children in his ministry feel special. Also, he appreciated an environment where someone *told him* how to live, and as a result sees his role as one who *ministers to*.

Pastor Eli was very careful to emphasize that other relationships with peer and parents were critical aids in the support of a decision for abstinence. Therefore, he *did* implement curriculum in parenting class that he began facilitating with his wife. He shared that his goal was to empower parents, and that if they could assume their rightful place in the power dynamic, then there was no need for curriculum on abstinence:

The whole progress is now I have a burden for parents. I have 2 hours a week with their kids. Parents get 160 hours and then not even that because of TV, Facebook, and videos. So, I help parents to understand that you can do it without knowing Genesis to Revelation. You repent to children. Be honest. Children love their parents even if they're crazy. God set it up that way to produce them after their own kind. The key is transformation. You live it. You don't have to have a whole bunch of classes. You live it. Everybody talks about training children, but the rest talk to parents. Most parents only train when there is a problem. Then they're already trying to justify their behaviors. That's our philosophy in raising our child and in parenting classes

here at [church]. Christianity should be other-centered because I'm in right relationship and respect what He values . . . no matter how they've treated me. That takes the Holy Ghost.

Kids are already moldable and pliable if you teach them stuff. The problem is that we have been taught not trained.

Pastor Eli recognized that parents were not meeting the standard of involvement in their children's lives. His goal became restoring power to parents, removing them from the margin in the process of rearing their children (compared to children being at the center with the youth pastor, and the parent being disengaged from the process). However, his recognition of parents needing to "repent to their children" suggested that he also was not seeking to remove any stake that children had in their own rearing process, by seeing their parents as authoritative partners who would inquire about their needs, to include those related to their sexual development.

Pastor Titus

My second interview was with Pastor Titus, a 30-year-old, black male who serves as a part-time youth pastor of a small-independent, predominantly black, non-denominational church located in North Carolina. I met Pastor Titus as the dating partner of a friend, Karen, whom he later married. I'd visited Pastor Titus's church on numerous occasions, where his father serves as the general pastor. Pastor Titus was only recently appointed to the position of youth pastor in the last year with his wife, Karen, of three years. They are the parents of two children, a son who is 17 months, and

a two month old daughter. Pastor Titus also serves as a full-time accountant for his church.

I chose to interview Pastor Titus because I'd witnessed a part of his experience as an abstinent adult when he dated Karen. Pastor Titus would be found attractive by any stereotypical terms, and received a great deal of attention from women throughout his singlehood. However, when I met Pastor Titus, he had already declared an abstinent lifestyle for the previous four years, which was unusual for a man of his stature, even in the Christian culture. Having a glimpse of his premarital experience, I was interested as to how he approached the teaching of abstinence to the young people in his congregation.

Similar to Pastor Eli, Pastor Titus could not recall any *teaching* about abstinence in his childhood. He only remembered being told not to have sex. Aside from those brief instructions, there was no dialogue in his house regarding the subject matter:

Sex was a big thing that I faced as a young person. I wasn't exposed to a lot of things early. However all of my friends and peers, dealt with it, talked about it, laughed about it, and would do things. But we weren't educated at church about sex at all. That was a topic that almost like, "Don't mention, don't bring up. Just do the right thing and keep going. It wasn't talked about. It wasn't related to us."

He had two older siblings, who both conceived children out of wedlock, but still remembered no discussion in the home, or at church regarding the topic.

He attributed the lack of communication about the topic at church to the fact that there was no youth pastor in the beginning of his father's ministry. They began

having church in the living room of their home, with less than ten members. At the time, the small number of children in the starter-church did not merit that anyone assume leadership over their population. However, as the church grew, Pastor Titus shared the experience with their first youth pastor:

With all that being said, starting off at church, we were not blessed with a large congregation, so we didn't have a lot of members obviously starting off so our parents were pastors to all ages. As we grew in number as years went on, we did have a youth pastor that was in place. And I can be easy to say, we didn't have a youth pastor that could relate to us at the time. My first youth pastor was ex-military. He was about 20 years into the military maybe 25, and he was very disciplined and strict, and downright mean at times just in how he would share. We felt like as teens, we weren't related to well. The things we faced at school, I don't feel like was always addressed and understood. I felt like it was another set of parents that was just on the bandwagon of parents are right we're wrong. So part of the struggle we had is we—we didn't—I felt like I didn't have anyone to talk to when I was going through a lot of the things dealing with sexual temptations.

This experience affirmed Pastor Titus' belief that an essential characteristic is that a youth pastor be able to *relate* to the youth of the church. He must be approachable so as not to intimidate the youth and create communication barriers.

Another similarity between the stories of Pastor Titus and Pastor Eli was their identity as high school athletes who were recognized as leaders, which indirectly attributed to the assumptions about being sexually active. Again, Pastor Titus was not active, but felt it necessary to allow the assumptions to perpetuate for fear of being ostracized:

I was pretty popular. Had a lot of um . . . lot of um . . . I guess I could say I was more of a jock (chuckles). Y'know the typical, athletic, played three different sports in school, everybody knows him, cool with the black, the white, Hispanic, all that. Everybody knew me. That kind of thing. So I was known as and thought of as having sex a long time before I actually started. I was one of those that didn't deny it, but never confirmed the truth. I just nodded my head in the locker room like everything was okay—just to kinda fit in and kill the moment. However, it was a struggle that I dealt with a long time.

The risk of being marginalized posed complications for Pastor Titus's ability to own his identity and therefore he behaviors that most resembled the majority of his male counterparts. To confound the issue of identity, Pastor Titus was a PK, or "Preacher's Kid," which made for a host of social expectation, that he readily admits, he desired to rebel from during high school and entering college:

However, there's a lot of things that I could say about being a PK or preacher's child or whatever preachers kid. We tend to at times want to rebel, to not be the stigma of what our parents are. I don't wanna be known as a PK. So what happens sometimes as being a preachers we're looked at as the Golden Child of the church at times and "they can do no wrong, they know better." They should do this right . . . do that right. So a lot of times when we're trying to create our own identity, we tend to see ourselves trying to create something opposite of our parents at times.

We go to school . . . face the same temptations, the same things other people do . . . other teens, other adolescents and we tend to say, "I wanna be like that too. I wanna live my life. I wanna do certain things."

Pastor Titus's status as a PK made him desire to rebel under the pressure. Many times, pastors and their families have been pushed into the co-cultural space, because the laity had the power to voice a certain standard of how pastors and their families should

conduct themselves. Individuality was compromised at the hand of ensuring that the congregation was pleased with the representation by pastor and family.

Once Pastor Titus had his first sexual encounter his senior year of high school, he referred to his sexual behavior as addictive. He realized that he could not stop. He recognized the advantage that he had over other students as an attractive, dominant figure on campus, and there was no one who contradicted his desire to engage in the sexual behaviors that majority of men on his predominantly black college campus were engaging in:

I had a roommate that was handsome also, and we just . . . we had our time. And it's what we did. It's what we did then. A lot of what I think happened is . . . there was no one to tell me, "You need to look another place for the things that you're looking for. You know it's wrong—you know it's wrong, but you still feel like, "Everybody else is doing it." It's just part of what the group that you're around is doing, so you find it easy.

While it would appear that Pastor Titus was in the position of power as a young, handsome available co-ed, he often felt as if he had no control over his sexual desires and that the assertiveness of women further impacted the power dynamic:

All that being said, I was the nicest guy—sweetest guy in the world. And a lot of times I wouldn't ask for the things that happened. They just happened. Again with the ratio being so large, there were a lot of women that I would say, pushed towards me, which helped me make decisions that I made bad, easier. I wasn't the one who was aggressive. I didn't give the punch-line, the same line to five different women. I actually didn't come on to women. It was just kinda what happened to me, and I wouldn't say no, so I think those things happened.

Power and prowess were not Pastor Titus's interpretation of his sexual experiences.

While he accepted responsibility for the role that he played, he often felt more so that his role was as a bystander who failed God when temptation came his way.

Pastor Titus shared his story of the pain of "failing God," repeatedly in his efforts to stop having sex. He referred to pressures that followed him to college to make the right choices because other people who knew his commitment to the Christian faith were watching him:

Long story short, I woke up one day, realizing that I had to make a change. I realized that that was one thing . . . the hardest thing to let go of. I wasn't one that would smoke. I didn't drink. I didn't do a lot of other things. Sex was my downfall. Sex was my one temptation that I couldn't just say no to, and I realized it. I actually realized it one day.

Now, in between all these things I'm saying I never missed a day of church. Every single Sunday, I was in church faithfully. My upbringing brought me that. It taught me that, and it let me know where I needed to be every Sunday morning. I could go out Friday night, and Saturday night, and be out 'til five in the morning. A female could even come home with me. She could lay beside me, and at 6 o'clock in the morning, maybe 7:30, I'm waking her up saying, "You have to leave because I'm getting ready for church."

I was never ashamed of who I served. I still believed that's where I needed to be when it 11:00 came around on Sunday morning. I could finish doing something wrong, or having sex, or whatever, would lay in the bed and look at the ceiling like, "What did I just do again."

He referenced the difficulty of pressing his way to church, being filled with regret and shame after committing fornication, but now attributes that "press" to the pivotal

moment where he made a conscious decision to stop. He heard a sermon about discipline that jolted his thinking:

So there was one particular day . . . I was in church, and I heard a word. And I'm in the military. I consider myself pretty disciplined. We were up at four o'clock every morning, doing training. And I'm a disciplined person in general. So, I just realized that I wasn't disciplined enough to just say, "Hey, I need to stop." So this one day, I'm sitting in my house and I remember saying, "This is the very last time I will ever do it." And I had done it. I mean I had just finished and I said, "This is it. I'll never do it again, until I'm married." And from *that day*, I stopped cold turkey.

Pastor Titus reflected on how his journey to abstinence has impacted the way in which he decides to teach the topic to the youth of his church. Recognizing that the failure of his leadership as a child to acknowledge the topic or to present it in a way in which he could relate has significantly impacted his desire to address the issue with a particular style:

So there's about 30 to 35 youth that we teach and that is definitely a topic—I would probably say number one [is sex] on their agenda just from surveys and different things. We ask them what they face, what they deal with. So take it upon myself to talk directly about these situations because it was not done to me . . . We ask the kids, "What are the biggest things you face? What are the biggest topics? What are the biggest struggles you guys have?" And they're quick to say, "sex, sex, sex. Sex is what everybody's doing. Sex is what we're doing. Sex is what we *cannot* stop. Sex is the one thing that if God said you can choose one sin and still go to heaven and do on earth, can it be sex? . . . So, again, coming from the background that I had, I was not taught a lot about it. So I take a lot of pride in talking about it with my own class. We deal with it, and we get to the route of it.

Pastor Titus had a burden for welcoming the voices of the youth that he and his wife serve. He was interested in their experiences and appreciated their fresh perspective. He firmly believed that the approach that he took was what kept them from becoming disconnected from the ministry irrespective of successes or failures with sexual purity.

Pastor Karen

Pastor Karen is a 30-year-old black woman. She resides in North Carolina with her husband, and serves as a youth pastor to a small-independent, predominantly black, non-denominational church part-time with her husband, Pastor Titus. They have served in the capacity as youth pastors for slightly over a year, and have been married for three years. They have two children, a 17-month-old son, and a two month-old daughter. She serves full-time as a middle school English teacher. I met Pastor Karen in college at a university in North Carolina. We served together as Residential Advisors, and continued our relationship beyond college.

I wanted the opportunity to interview Pastor Karen due to the fact that I witnessed her conversion to abstinence many years many years before she was appointed to any position in the church. I'd witnessed her efforts to remain abstinent throughout her dating and courtship with Pastor Titus. Though I knew part of her story, I was very interested in the way in which her personal and professional stories intersected to shape her perspective on how to teach abstinence.

Pastor Karen recalled learning that abstinence was the only acceptable way in Christ at an early age. What I found unique about Pastor Karen's narrative was her reference to the authority of God, and her early instinct to avoid mistakes:

I still had strong convictions personally, had strong convictions about sex or just doing anything wrong. I always wanted to just play by the rules, and live by the book and felt like God was just this authoritative figure that was just gonna "zap me" if y'know even *thought about* having sex.

Her emphasis on conviction at such an early age was different from other narratives. It had not only been instilled, but *received* that there were consequences, not only for sexual immorality, but *any* immorality of any kind.

Pastor Karen shared that she had a very naïve perspective when she was a child about sexuality stating that she could "just say no," if someone were to approach her with idea of having sex. As with most adolescent she realized that her desires may not have been as easy to curtail. Yet, she referred to a story about the preservation of her reputation which influenced her desire to wait longer:

I think the first time it really presented itself as an *opportunity*, I was 14 in the 8th grade and I had a boyfriend that I thought was just wonderful. But I was still just so shy and so timid around him, just not knowing what you're supposed to *do* as a 14-year-old girl in a relationship. Should I kiss him? Should I hold his hand? How far can I go, but not too far? I remember during one summer going from—I think it was spring break in the 8th grade, and um . . . I was in his neighborhood with a friend of mine that lived in his neighborhood and we were just going for a walk. And um . . . we happened to see him outside with his friends playing basketball or whatever. So I went up to his house and . . . um . . . y'know he said hey and everything. So we went in the house, and I guess that was what was expected because that's my boyfriend, so we just went in the house. And his

parents weren't home, and the other kids were outside, and they were like y'know, "Ya'll gonna do such and such!" And I told him y'know, "Let's just make it clear. We're just goin' in your house right?" and he was like, "Yeah. I'll just show you my house," and y'know . . . walked around and showed me his room. And then all of a sudden, something hit the window, and his little friends were throwing condoms at the window and at that point, I was like, "Oh my gosh!" I just got terrified. I was like, "Is he gonna expect me to do it? Is he gonna expect me not to?" And um . . . I think it just scared me into thinking, "I don't *ever* wanna have sex," because it was just such a unfamiliar moment and place. Even at 14, I knew friends who were, but I was like, "This is just is not what I want. It's just not what I want." He was cool with that, so we left and, long story short, it ended like that.

For Pastor Karen, aside from what she knew to be right or wrong, she felt compelled to protect her reputation. While she made a good decision, in her eyes, the motivation was based made based upon social perception, a fear of being marginalized by other "good girls" who may question her integrity if they were free to assume that she'd been sexually active.

Pastor Karen's story was similar to Pastor Titus as it related to her church beginnings. She too was a child of a preacher, who began in a small venue. They did not have a youth department or a youth minister during her formative years. She saw that as a direct challenge to having someone who could share the teachings of Christ *and relate* at the same time:

Um . . . I didn't grow up with youth leaders or youth pastors. It was always my dad [as the pastor]. And having your Dad as the mouthpiece of God in the church and at home, you just see him as like, whatever he says goes. So I wasn't really exposed to a lot of youth ministry or youth groups, and people that could actually relate to where I was as a teenager and the feelings I had—and y'know the challenges of being abstinent as a teenager.

Moving from high school into college, still didn't have that. And looking back, I think that so many more kids would benefit from just *having* somebody to talk to—or to—that's closer to their age. Or that just kind relate to them more than maybe a senior Pastor can, and just saying y'know, "You can't try it before you buy it." That's just the bottom line. Well what do I do with all of these feelings? What do I do when I really want to and what do I do when my hormones are raging?

Pastor Karen shares that her "emotions outweighed her convictions" at a certain point, which prompted her decision to have sex for the first time at age 17. However, similar to other narratives, a pivotal moment in Pastor Karen's decision to express her sexuality during college, where she felt that it was an opportunity to be liberated:

So I guess by college—I think by that time I just really didn't care—Not that I really didn't care, it was always in the back of my mind I guess. But like I said my emotions, and feelings, and you're exposed to so much. You kinda come up with your own philosophies, "Well I know God said this but—" You make excuses and you feel like you're grown, and also that rebellious side that kinda surfaces sometimes when you go off on your own . . . just wanted to exert your own—exercise your own independence can kinda be a way—Sex can be a manifestation of that. You just saying, "It's my life. It's my body. I know what I grew up believing, but this is my time, and this is time for me to do what I wanna do." So I think in that sense I was kinda self-centered in that way, and just wanted to do what I wanted to do.

Sex served as a vehicle of liberation from oppressive dominant cultures. In her life, Christian culture was the backdrop to all of life's decision. More specifically, there were people who had the authority (parents, other Christians) who had been granted the power to assess her life through a Christian lens and decide whether or not her actions were appropriate. Her reputation before men, and the importance of "looking like a

lady” had impacted her experience to the point that she wanted nothing to do with any sort of structured experience that would tell her what to do with her body.

Another uniqueness of Pastor Karen’s narrative was her motivation to commit to abstinence. Unlike the other participants who suggested that they simply felt the conviction of God on their hearts, Pastor Karen refers to the extraneous factor of heartache. A significant portion of her college career was spent in a romantic relationship with one man, with whom she was sexually active. Their relationship came to an abrupt and traumatic end. The painful impact of the demise of the relationship influenced her to “try it God’s way”:

So I think when I really made up in my mind that I was going to, as an adult, live a life of abstinence, it wasn’t of my own will. It was just like I kinda had come to the end of my own rope, and I was like, “Okay every time I try to make a relationship work and sex is involved, it just hasn’t worked. So let me try it God’s way.”

Y’know there was some pain and heartbreak and things that took place, but ultimately, I think I’d just gotten fed up with the way my relationships were turning out. And had gotten fed up with the dependency that I had on sex—for my happiness, for my pleasure. Maybe not sex, but the person, y’know, and not just the act per se, but the connection that comes with it and the person that you’re in a relationship with.

So I think my decision to abstinent honestly, with as *much* Christian teaching and background as I had—not from youth leaders and youth pastors, but just from my own family, and my own father as a pastor—As much as I knew it was wrong, it’s ironic that that’s not what kept me. It was me coming to the end of myself, and saying, “Okay. I’m gonna try it your way, God.”

Pastor Karen's motivation was emotionally driven. She saw a disconnection from premarital sex as a disconnection from emotional pain. While she acknowledges the moral component, and lived according to the ethical precept of the Bible, I found it interesting that her motivation matched a story of motivation so similar to so many women, who believed the abstaining, was the "last draw" after being hurt by someone romantically.

Pastor Karen spent six years living an abstinent lifestyle before marrying Pastor Titus. She refers to their courtship as the first time she'd actually been "tested" because of her efforts to resist temptation. During that six year period, Pastor Karen went on approximately five dates total (being generous). While the commitment to remain pure influenced an intentional decrease in exposure to men, she referred to her measures as "extreme" and isolating. She wanted a husband, and refused to interact with any man whom God did not send to be her mate, unless they were in a platonic capacity. While she was emotionally "safe" she also admitted that she had no way of actually assessing whether or not her commitment to abstinence was strong until she was in a tempting experience with her fiancé.

Pastor Karen took the opportunity to shed light on how her personal experiences impacted the way that she communicates the topic to the youth of the church, as well as the challenges in the effort to relate to them. She actually had an epiphany during the interview:

So I think even talking about this now helps me look in retrospect in my life and see that y'know I have to look at where they are and take everything with a grain of salt. Because it's easy to say once you've come through it, y'know, "God can keep you! He can—he can keep you if you wanna be kept. He can be your husband. He can be your wife." Easy to say that to somebody else when you've been there yourself. You've come out of the other side. You have a husband or a wife. And y'know, everybody thinks, "Well, when you roll over in the bed, you can do what you wanna do."

Pastor Karen acknowledged that even though the message of abstaining may be right, it could be seen as oppressive and detached from the experiences of the youth in that it comes from people who are already in a place of sexual liberty with God. She and her husband were in a position to express their sexual desires, in accordance with the Bible, which she deemed necessary to consider seeing as how she was passionate about relating and leveling the field of conversation with the youth.

Pastor David

Pastor David is a 23-year-old black male. He served for 5 years as the full-time, college pastor at a mega-church in the Church of God in Christ denomination, located in North Carolina. He has never been married and has no children. Recently, he was appointed to the position as the pastor of a smaller congregation within the Church of God in Christ. I have known Pastor David since he was approximately 15 years of age, as a visitor of his home church. I was also exposed to him as a member of a university community with which I was once affiliated.

My interest in Pastor David's narrative was based on his very outspoken stance about abstinence from the pulpit. During his tenure as the college pastor, Pastor David

was obligated to deliver sermons on “College Sunday,” among other times. He was always very deliberate about exposing the spiritual and practical woes of premarital sex, and very open to proclaiming his personal commitment to abstinence. It was understood in the congregation that Pastor David was a virgin, which was also found to be an intriguing accomplishment by most. As previously stated, regardless of religion, many young singles continue to engage in premarital sex. To confound the matter, a certain level of popularity in any environment (to include that of church, as the son of the pastor and a gainfully employed eligible bachelor) increases the likelihood of being pursued both romantically and sexually. However, Pastor David had managed to exist in church social circles without any sexual encounters being attached to his identity. I was interested in whether or not his ability to abstain within a culture of young people who typically were not able to abstain, impacted his ability to minister to the college population.

Pastor David was the first to begin his narrative at the period of his life in which he attended college. He began by saying that college really “exposed him to some things,” that he knew little about. He’d been reared in a Bible-based church and household by his parents. They were adamant about not allowing him to be exposed to any more culture than was age appropriate. He was intrigued by the fact that people had multiple and competing realities for what sexual purity actually meant:

I was shocked to find out that many people, even though they were professing Christians, some of the basic truths that you find in scripture, they weren’t

applying. And then when you hear—I think the biggest challenge was the variations amongst the different churches because now it causes people to ask, “What is truth? And what makes your truth greater than the truth that my pastor or my minister from back home has been teaching me?”

And so that’s the challenge when you have people that’s proclaiming the same religion, Christianity, but yet they have different doctrines, and different lifestyles. Cause I know some people, even my personal friends, who’ve said they’ve gone to churches, but they’ve never heard that abstinence was God’s ordained plan until marriage, and so they were shocked when I shared the message with them, like it was revolutionary, and that is something I have heard all my life. So I think that’s what’s made the difference in my life, because I see there’s another option.

I found it interesting that Pastor David asked me to stop the tape very early in the sharing of his narrative. He laughed sheepishly and stated that he was having trouble sharing any personal experiences and stated that he could probably do a better job of communicating his professional experiences. I reassured him that he had control over what he felt was most appropriate to share. At that time, Pastor David began to share his professional experiences, which he stated, also began during college as a burden to combat all of the messages that promoted sex on campus:

I remember in my dorm at a university, I remember seeing, “Make love and not babies.” And that’s the message that has been given out to society. I believe in a lot of different means—I mean, it’s very rare that even hear abstinence being shared on a college campus or even over the pulpit at local churches because people try to stay away from that. Because I think the way society’s presenting things, especially with condoms and things of that nature, people are pushing safe sex, but the only true safe sex is abstinence, and that’s not a popular message in today’s society.

Pastor David welcomed the opportunity to be vocal as a member of a co culture. As a devout Christian on a college campus, he knew that he was a minority. His message was not only unpopular, but also disdained by many communities in the liberal arts institution that were very vocal about the oppressive mandates of Christianity. However, in the vein of most preachers, Pastor David saw the campus for as an opportunity and less of a challenge. Pastor David went on to say that part of the problem with collegiate environments is that there is “no other option presented” to students about how to govern themselves sexually. He, like other participants, found it to be an overwhelming assumption that everyone is having sex, which he believed influenced the fact that abstinence was only preached minimally, even in campus ministries:

And so that’s what the surprise was when I attended college and I think that’s one of the reasons why I got involved in campus ministries—just to voice another side of the issue. I remember one of our first messages that we shared on the campus was, “The Truth about Sex.” We tried to deal with the issue of sex and God’s prescribed method for having sex within the context of marriage, which isn’t very popular. I mean people, they are very educated in the Bible, but when you talk about things such as that—issues—that’s when you take your separate roles.

A distinction in Pastor David’s narrative is his approach to educating students because of his marital status. His very identity as a single adult is a tool that he uses to communicate the importance of abstinence. He does not highlight any curriculum,

approach, or “strategy,” other than preaching what he knows to be true from the Word of God as a reference and solution combined with being a living example:

So I found out one of the successful ways of presenting that is not just telling people what to do, but showing people how to do, which a lot of people don't promote. They tell you the problem, but they don't give you a solution. So that's where I've found that there's some success—giving them helpful hints.

Pastor David's philosophy placed him in a position to disclose his challenges with temptation, which automatically reduced some of the intimidation that people, especially young people typically feel when in the presence of parishioners. However, he too was young, and saw his age, and marital status, as barrier breakers in his identity that preventing marginalizing the college students.

Pastor Goodson

Pastor Goodson is a 30-year-old black male. He serves as a part-time Singles' Pastor at a mega-church under the Church of God in Christ denomination in North Carolina. Pastor Goodson has never been married and has no children. He has served at his current church in some capacity of leadership for nearly 15 years. Similar to Pastor David and Pastor Titus, Pastor Goodson has been reared in the same church environment for as far back as he can remember into his childhood. His ties are very strong to his church community. I met Pastor Goodson at a single's event held in the Piedmont region nearly four years ago. As a Christian spoken word artist, I am very often invited to share pieces of my work at different venues. I shared a piece at a

singles' gala held by the church community, which Pastor Goodson serves. I was also visiting his church at the time, and very often crossed paths with him in that environment.

I became interested in Pastor Goodson's narrative because of the perception of his identity in the church, and the fact that he served yet another sector of the Christian population that would be educated in the area of abstinence; adult singles (seen as different from college aged singles). Pastor Goodson was known by other church members as being "deep," which is slang terminology in some church communities for people who are very open about their standards and commitment in living for Christ. Men actually acquire the label easily who openly confess an abstinent lifestyle, because the playful banter is that a man *cannot* manage to function without sex unless he is "deep" in the Word of God and covered by the Holy Spirit. The degree of "depth" for a man is (again playfully) based upon how he conducts himself in the presence of the opposite sex. For example, if a man is very careful to give "church hugs" (those where men avoid brushing against the front of a woman's body beyond her shoulder), does not laugh at any jokes that express *any* sexual connotation, and is generally seen demonstrating sex/gender boundaries (very few consistent public appearances with any woman other than his girlfriend—and that is rare), he is considered to be *very* "deep." In the case of Pastor Goodson, the general population viewed him as very deep, which is not an uncommon characteristic bestowed upon leadership within his particular church, especially young leadership (30 and under).

Ministers typically know that they hold the title of being deep. Sometimes the identity as such can have two different affects. The first is that one is admired for upholding the standards of Christ, though they do not always blend in with crowd. The other, is that a minister becomes unapproachable, seen as detached from the reality of lay members, and almost superhuman. I was unsure as to which one was the case for Pastor Goodson. And I knew that I may not find out considering my interview questions, however, I knew that the backdrop of his perceived identity could in some way impact his educational philosophy about abstinence in his church community.

Pastor Goodson, similarly to Pastor David and Pastor Karen, was reported being made aware that abstinence was the only appropriate option at an early age, which attributes to the denomination of church to which he belongs:

Having grown up in the Church of God in Christ, the Pentecostal denomination since childhood, it's always been taught to us that you abstain from sex until marriage. Um . . . That's just the basis of the old time church or the basis of the holy church is that sex was—Sex *is* primarily for marriage. That's how God instituted it, and that's how it is supposed to be used.

Pastor Goodson from that point on provides a blended narrative of his personal and professional experiences. He fondly recalls the experiences that he had as a youth leader, whereby his church helped facilitate an abstinence campaign in North Carolina . A unique account in Pastor Goodson's narrative was that he was the only one who reported participating in the collective experience that included actual curriculum development and an abstinence pledge:

The coined theme of this GPCC—how would you say . . . initiative, is that, “It’s Great to Wait.” That was what the program under the partnership of [church name] was, “It’s Great to Wait.” And I remember one specific instance where we were training for about a month on the weekends that we would be able to do training on different levels of teaching abstinence or showing the benefits of abstaining from sex for teenagers—The decrease—Well not the decrease but the elimination of the threat of pregnancy, the elimination for the threat of sexually transmitted diseases, the elimination of emotional turmoil that can go along with practicing sexual activity before you are ready to cope with what goes along with it.—Like the guilt, the shame, and if they leave you, that hard hurtful, emotional feeling. One of the things we learned was how to teach those benefits, and also how to express yourself in relationships beyond that of practicing sexual practices.

He emphasizes the importance of being spiritually pure:

We explained from a Biblical perspective—Different testimonies of different youth sharing testimonies of how they waited, how they abstained. And even those that may have fallen, the importance of their second virginity, and the importance of being pure and staying pure. And how they can stay pure even if you have fallen.

Pastor Goodson also reflects upon the seriousness with which he took the abstinence pledge.

This was a great program that we had, and at the end of the day, their pledges that were signed. Those that signed the pledges, they were pledging to keep themselves until marriage. Being a virgin, myself, I took that pledge very to heart—very key. What I was doing that day, I was pledging myself to God that I would keep myself for my wife. And other youth—although some y’know signed it just because others were signing it, there were sincere youth there that were signing it. They felt the need and they felt in the atmosphere, not saying felt God, but they felt the importance of the day. And we basically prayed that they felt that God was leading them to sign that pledge.

Pastor Goodson acknowledged that for some, the pledge signing was a group experience. It was not so much that they were committed, as it was the popular thing to do. Pastor Goodson's account describes a more holistic curriculum that delves into the multiple elements of an abstinent lifestyle, carefully pinpointing practical and spiritual elements. He referred again to the impact of the teaching within his particular denomination, and mentioned the spiritual enmeshing that accompanies sex.

Pastor Goodson acknowledges the fact perspective of singles who desire to abstain, that it can be discouraging but does not waiver in his opinion of what is right:

And even going into my young adulthood, being president of the Singles Department of my church [church name], we still hold to the keeping ourselves for marriage. And as you get older in age, it might get harder. You might think that, "If I don't do it now, it'll never happen." You still want to make sure that you are one that is pledging yourself to keep yourself holy and sanctified unto the Lord, meaning that you're set apart, you're separated, and that you're keeping yourself consecrated unto God until marriage for your marriage partner. That is the one gift, meaning your virginity; that you can give to your partner, beyond all else that is a precious gift that only yourself can give to that other person that you commit yourself to.

However, Pastor Goodson suggested no curriculum to maintain educate, but instead discussed programmatic efforts, which would serve as support for the population:

And then when we grow into adulthood, in what stage I'm in now, and seeing as how there's a lot of older singles—a lot of older youth that are frustrated in the fact that they are waiting, growing older in age, but yet still struggling in their sexuality. Still struggling in a desire to express their sexuality with the proper person of the opposite sex. I'm seeing that now, in *this* stage of life, we have to be a source of support—A good social support group for one another, where we can express what we're feeling in gender appropriate groups.

And also, be a support for one another, giving the good social outlets for our older single adults, our middle aged single adults, even our young single adults. And allowing them to express themselves, not showing biases or hampering down on them for what they do express, but allowing them to express themselves freely, in a good wholesome environment and atmosphere, where God can also hear, and we can hear one another, and what we're going through.

Summary of Themes

Just as there were a host of distinctions, unique experiences in each narrative impacted the participants' interpretations of power. However, there were some common interpretations, or themes, that impacted what they envisioned as an appropriate approach to abstinence education. The first was the necessity of *relating* to the population that each minister served. They saw it as their responsibility to find some common ground upon which they could *meet* their respective population in an effort to minister most effectively. For some, this even meant asking what they wanted to learn, which created more shared grounds of power and contribution to the abstinence education experience.

Another reoccurring theme was a challenge to the *role of the church*. There was a universal perspective that even in efforts to relate, one must not water down the message. This attitude was most articulated by the ministers who were seated in leadership in mega-churches (Pastors Eli, David, and Goodson). They spoke directly to the role of the church, and the fact that ministers at times did not address the issue head on as they should when ministering to the varying populations of youth and singles because the message lacked popularity and compromised their approval in the eyes of

laity. The lack of popularity was sometimes intimidating to ministers and there was a need to regain the power of communicating the truth despite opinions.

Each minister, irrespective of the specific population served, made reference to the *role of parents* either in their personal lives, or in the lives of the population that they serve, in the effort to communicate the message of abstinence. They acknowledged that the parents' lack of power in the process made some efforts to communicate abstinence futile. Some, like Pastor Eli, even recognized that the onus to steer the youth in the right direction was more on him than the parents. The pastors believed that the parent had to assume a rightful place in the process of educating their children and not avoid the opportunity. Even for Pastor Goodson, who ministers to singles, there was the confirmation that his work is based upon what singles were taught well before they reached his level. He insisted that abstinence education begin at an early age.

Accountability was another common theme. Three of the five ministers placed emphasis on the need to have a person who was directly responsible for observing your contact with the opposite sex in a romantic relationship. Pastors Karen, Titus, and David felt that this sort of partnership with fellow Christians was a strong aid in the effort to remain abstinence. In this relationship, you share the poser of your sexual decision-making with another person in your church community. In the cases of Pastors Titus and Karen, they both speak highly of the accountability process.

Another common theme was the *pivotal moments* that impacted their desire to serve populations and/or communicate the message of abstinence. For Pastor Eli, there were many defining moments that brought him to the place of becoming a Christian, to include the participation of a longitudinal survey which challenged his beliefs about morals and sexuality, which in the end which indirectly impacted his decision about abstinence. In the case of Pastors Titus and Karen, their pivotal moments were directly connected to their sexual activity. Pastor Titus, was convicted by his lack of discipline, and the way in which sex was controlling his life. For Pastor Karen, while convicted, she was highly motivated by the fatigue of failed relationships. For Pastor David, the pivotal moment was seeing the prevailing attitudes about sex among college aged Christians. And finally, for Pastor Goodson, the experience of participating in an abstinence initiative at an early age, to include signing a pledge, molded and shaped his commitment to abstinence.

An interesting observation was that their pivotal moments were in relationship to a collective. They were a part of a larger wave or movement. The paradox, however is that there is a simultaneous assumption of and relinquishing of power when becoming a part of a shared pivotal moment. The unity under which one makes change, may become imprisoning when trying to remain committed to the change because fear of failure in front of the masses, may serve as more of a motivation than the actual cause.

Race emerged as a blanket theme in the narratives, but of course manifested itself in different perspectives for the participants. For some participants there was the

perspective that black churches were too intimidated to preach against societal norms, and as a result the same tolerance for premarital sex was making its way into the household of faith. Others, like Pastor Karen, suggested that uniqueness and difference was something that would be easier to communicate with white children because their self-confidence was different than that of some of the black youth that she worked with.

Co-cultural Analysis

All of the aforementioned common themes; relating, the role of the church, accountability, shared pivotal moments, and parental influence, all have co-cultural components. There is a host of co-cultural dynamics that I proposed may influence abstinence curriculum development in black churches. One of the dynamics derived from the common theme of relating, was the co-cultural positioning of *lay members to leadership*. Pastors Titus and Karen spoke of childhood experiences where they felt as if their concerns were not heard because the person placed in charge of educating them as youth did not relate or connect to them in any way. The leadership had the only voice in developing teachings that would actually be communicated, and both Titus and Karen were in the position of receiver, not co-creator.

Both pastors reported that they implemented the practice which Orbe (1998) refers to as *censoring self*. Censoring self involves the decision to resist communicating in any way that would challenge established authority. Censoring self is derived from the communicative orientation of nonassertive simulation, where the member of the co-culture (youth) makes every effort to erase any difference between his/herself and

the member of the dominant culture (youth pastor), with the strategic goal of being non-confrontational. The implication is that youth do not communicate their experiences and needs which, according to Pastors Titus and Karen, was helpful in their development of topics from week to week for bible study. Therefore, they made the decision to engage the youth by asking them, what are you all facing and what do you want to know about, and reassured them that whatever the topic, they would find ways to address it. Therefore, the youth and the pastors become co-creators of curriculum, whereby decision-making power is shared.

The role of the church sheds light on the dynamic between *leadership and laity*, with leadership as the co-culture, and laity as the dominant. Pastors Eli, David, and Goodson were all in favor of relating to members, however they stressed the responsibility of the church not to manipulate the message or its importance based upon response from the membership, which they feared was the case in many churches and college ministries on campus. In this instance, ministers assume the role of *nonassertive simulation*, whereby they avert controversy, or shy away from topics that may cause dissension within the body of believers. The danger is that the knowledge that youth and singles could obtain in churches, must be sought elsewhere because the topic is deemed untouchable by the leadership at the site where *any* moral education should be open for discussion, church. Therefore, auxiliary pastors and head pastors may not challenge themselves to develop a curriculum of any kind, or they may create the “watered down” version. On the contrary, the pastors participating in this research,

assume the responsibility to bring the topic to light, and though some walk away disgruntled by the message, they feel a greater sense of obligation to communicate it for the sake of the masses.

Accountability partnerships and *collective pivotal moments* both have co-cultural dynamics. In accountability partnerships, those being held accountable for their actions when on dates with the opposite sex are the co-culture, while those who impose accountability are in the dominant culture. Typically, those chosen as partners are those who are not currently struggling with sexual temptation either because they are married, or have been more successful at resisting sexual activity than most (i.e. adult virgins). This relationship most resembles the dynamic of sexually active as the co-culture, and abstinent as the dominant. While both are abstinent, the one being held accountable runs the risk of having to disclose to his or her accountability partner that they were not successful in keeping their commitment to abstinence. As a result, they may engage in nonassertive or aggressive separation whereby they do everything possible to separate from their partner and church community out of shame (similar to what Pastor Titus described). They may also go so far as to *sabotage* their accountability partner, perhaps exposing a time where they were not so strong, so as to minimize the level of respect that the church may have for their partner.

However, the pastors suggested the accountability model as a means of two people being co-participants in the process of maintaining an abstinent lifestyle. The key was to educate partners about their role to *one-another* so that the power dynamic is

shared from the beginning. Too often that step in educating is neglected, and one “partner” may decide that in their effort to hold the other accountable that it is acceptable to use condescending tone, which automatically place one person subject to another in the co-cultural position.

Shared pivotal moments are also a part of the active/abstinent co-cultural dynamic. Abstinence campaigns that end in pledge-signing, similar to the experience of Pastor Goodson, are opportunities to encourage groups to commit to the experience of abstinence together. However, in the case that one does not adhere to the pledge, and actually engages in sexual activity, there is a greater likelihood that they will no longer feel “a part of” the experience, and assume the role of a co-cultural member. Such is the case in college ministry. Connection to the college ministry involves deep alliances, ideally. Students who desire to live for Christ, but are away from their normal support system with family, have a tendency to lean heavily on one another. There is great privilege in being connected to the group. Sexuality, as Pastor David already stated, is a “hot topic,” and one of the major markers of identity in the college ministry is supporting one another in abstaining. Should one “fall off the wagon” sexually, he or she runs the same risk of disclosing as those who sign purity pledges. Both Pastors David and Titus spoke of the way in which some choose to separate, but Pastor Titus emphasized the need to extend support so that young singles look forward to being connected to auxiliaries and a part of initiatives despite flaws in their efforts to live an abstinent lifestyle, to the point that he seeks them out when they attempt to separate (which is

the benefit of being in a small church where you know all the members). Both pastors Titus and Goodson stressed the importance of acknowledging shortcomings in the way that they teach so as not to disengage or marginalize learners.

Parenting roles presents another communicative power dynamic from a co-cultural perspective. All five pastors mentioned the role of parents, and the desire to have parents as partners in the communication of abstinence to youth and younger adult singles. However, all participants communicated that there was some sort of challenge that needed to be presented to parents to assume their place in the dialogue with their children on the topic. Many of the pastors shared their personal experiences where parents engaged in the communicative practice of *avoiding or averting* controversy as a way to engage in *nonassertive assimilation*. Nonassertive assimilation, according to co-cultural theory is best described a quiet, passive means of building no common bond with the dominant culture. One may ask how the parents become the co-culture. Simply stated, young and single people are ready to talk about the issue (because in youth culture, sex is an acceptable topic by and large), but those in parental roles feel at a loss of what to say and intimidated. They sometimes feel uneasy about entering uncharted territory, which is why auxiliary pastors have had no choice but to assume more of the responsibility in communicating with the populations in question.

The pastors, based on their own experiences (whether their parents operated in co-culture, or they had progressive parents who desired to take an equal stake in the experience of communicating about abstinence), have made conscious decisions about

the type of learning environment they wish to create in order to discuss the topic. Additionally, they are able to critique the parental role from both a personal and professional space and acknowledge the power shift that takes place when the topic of sex comes up. That is precisely the reason why leaders like Pastor Eli have made a commitment to himself to educating parents about their need to engage in a type of parenting that welcomes shared in-put between parent and child on the topic of sex exceeds the wall of the church and into home environment.

The final co-cultural dynamic involved race. While there were some differences in the particular perspectives about the role of race in developing and implementing abstinence curriculum, the overarching interpretation was that some sort of *inferiority, a lack of empowerment*, was the primary issue. Either black leadership, or black youth lacked a confidence to move beyond co-cultural boundaries. As a result, nonassertive assimilation practices were witnessed by the ministers.

After reviewing the narratives, I have concluded that all of the ministers have used their personal experiences to in some way impact their approach to developing an abstinence curriculum. Specifically, each minister, in his or her own way works to rearrange power dynamics such that some marginalized entity has a stake in the process. They see themselves in a position to welcome multiple experiences and share their own experiences, all the while seeing the challenges of avoiding dominance.

The ministers practice what Orbe (1998) calls *communicating self* and *educating others*, practices derived from the assertive assimilation orientation. Communicating

self involves seeking opportunities to *demonstrate* an identity that perhaps thwarts. They allow the population (youth, singles, etc.), to be made privy to the details of their lives, in multiple contexts, as do the members. They spend time in each other's company in a way that is not limited to a teacher-student dynamic. There is humanness exposed which allows others to see that both student and teacher live what they preach.

Many of the ministers are working to create an atmosphere whereby educating others is possible. In the act of educating others, a member of a co-culture exposes personal realities, perhaps uniqueness that clue the dominant culture into the make-up of their identity (that of the co-culture). For example, ministers may work to create an atmosphere that is "safe" for a sexually active member of the auxiliary to share his/her difficulty with abstaining based upon personal influences and motivations, as opposed to having to pretend that he or she is abstinent. A desired outcome may be that youth and singles are able to be more open, and less intimidated, able to identify with shortcomings as opposed to feeling compelled to perform.

The way in which to achieve a learning environment whereby communicating self and educating others are the prevailing practice to ask questions of the learners, as was the case with Pastors Titus and Karen. Give the verbal freedom for the students to articulate what they want to learn and why. Allow them to become co-creators in the process. Additionally, leadership needs to take the opportunity to educate others on their personal experiences as opposed to limiting the realm of possibility so that they

will never be far removed from the ability to dialogue openly about the topic, irrespective of how popular the topic of sex may or may not be from the pulpit. The key to is to establish an equitable stake in the process from all perspectives.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

I was reared during the sex education movement in our country. I am a product of the public sex education agenda to prevent pregnancy and disease. As a young Christian, I am also the product of the early efforts of churches to discuss the topic and encourage me to abstain so that I could “make it” to college. In either case, something was missing. When I converted to Christianity, I realized that there was a moral component that had been underdeveloped. The practical reasoning that God had more in store for my life was to appropriate, but it did not reach the core of my belief system. I was situated in a context that was, and still remains relatively uncharted territory for black church communities. The research is dedicated to exploring the numerous historical and social influences on the state of abstinence curriculum in black church communities.

First, it is important to make the distinction between black and white sex culture for those under the age of 35. While some of the primary themes of sex culture to include, immediate gratification, power and privilege maintenance, and influences of the media exist across both populations (Levy, 2005), the motivation and expression of those influences are different in black communities based upon factors such as gender identity, religion, and history impacted by slavery. Therefore, acknowledging the

difference is key to tailoring a curriculum that speaks to these experiences (Johnson & Staples, 2005).

The primary concern is existence, purpose, content of teaching materials, and the communicative process by which abstinence curriculum is developed in black church settings. Existence refers to whether or not some churches have a curriculum to begin with. To explore this factor, I examine the impact of black church development across history. The review of history revealed power dynamics that impacted black leadership (Mitchell, 2004). Black Ministers struggled to gain the power to communicate from the pulpit to the point that they were careful about their messages for fear that their position in leadership would be taken away. Additionally, myths about African sexuality permeated the walls of the church across slavery, and in an effort to “restore” a good acceptable image of blacks, black leaders and laity have chosen to avoid the topic altogether, hindering the existence of a healthy curriculum (Dyson, 2004; West, 1999).

Second, I consider the way in which church pedagogy impacts the purpose of abstinence education in black churches. Economy is a driving force in the distinction between two pedagogies that I coined: mega-church pedagogy, and small-independent church pedagogy. Mega-church pedagogy involves a belief in developing Christians that invest in the public market. They see financial development as a way to progress in outreach ministries (Flake et al., 2005). They use texts as curricular supplements to teachings, have financial management initiatives that teach membership how to become vendors of the public market. However, small-independent church pedagogy

focuses on oral histories and the ability to support community in a more intimate setting, with the belief that people are a more valuable commodity than contributing to the public market (this is not in any direct contrast that suggests that people in mega-churches do not value human relationship) (Payne & Ehlig, 1999). The implication is that based upon these varying value systems, mega-churches may develop and implement an abstinence curriculum that is more practically based, using factors such as educational opportunities and wealth for not “ruining” the plan of God for one’s life. On the contrary, small-independent churches may very well emphasize a rule-based, “because God said so” approach that does not delve into the practical motivations at all.

I shift my focus to the content of teaching tools that are made available in the Christian Inspirational genre on the topic of abstinence. Marx’s version of Political Economy Theory suggests that we examine the way in which an economy functions based upon the components that make up the culture (Milward, 2005). I examine the multiple factors that influence the production and consumption of texts for black church communities. Factors that influence the consumption are race, class, and gender influences. Texts that acknowledge the marginalized experiences of blacks, poor and working class, and men meet the needs of the greater market, according to Marx. However, if those populations are marginalized, and their experiences are ignored by writers, there is little chance that those sectors of the population will be consumers of the product. However, the church pedagogical philosophy also impacts the way which the market of Christian inspirational abstinence text is fed by blacks.

Finally, I explore the communicative process by which curriculum is developed in black churches via Orbe's (1998) Co-cultural Theory. Co-cultural theory suggests that marginalized populations to include, blacks, women, homosexuals, or any population that does not represent the majority exist in co-cultural positioning. I conclude that there are many interchangeable dynamics for co-cultures in a black church setting to include laity to leadership, leadership to laity, parents to children, sexually active youth and singles to abstinent youth and singles, women to men, men to women, etc., and the practices that accompany those positions. I make the claim that the positioning of members of a black church community will heavily influence the amount of in-put or *voice* that he or she may contribute to curriculum development.

I used three methodologies to explore the content and process of developing and implementing an abstinence curriculum in a black church setting. In order to assess the content of the messages in Christian inspirational texts by black and white authors, I used Mayring's (2000) approach to qualitative content analysis through the lens of Political Economy Theory. To explore the experiences of youth and singles ministers of black churches, I used narrative (Casey, 1993; Fisher, 1984) and co-cultural (Orbe, 1998) methodologies to assess the way in which power dynamics in their personal and professional experiences impacted the way in which they developed and implemented curriculum.

The outcome is that many of the Christian inspirational texts marginalize readers of black, poor/working class, and male identities. The intersection of identity may create

some relevance for middle class black readers, but by in larger the imagery of the texts in some way fails to capture the experiences of certain blacks. However, there are some Christian male and secular authors who have been able to communicate a *neutral* message that also incorporates the *village experience* of including parents in the discourse on the topic of sex. My suggestion is not that texts should communicate no elements of the author's identity, but that authors should be more careful to also contribute a multiplicity of experiences that reaches readers of all cultures. Reaching a greater population of readers who de-skew the slant of the publication market which currently publishes primarily white middle class authors for white middle class readers.

The narrative analysis revealed that many of the communication practices, primarily *avoiding and averting* were implemented in the personal experiences of the youth and singles' ministers of the predominantly black churches. They emphasize a need to relate to the populations that they serve, while maintaining a backing and support of church leadership to address the issue as professional ministers. They also emphasize the importance of accountability and parental roles, both of which contribute to the communal experience of supporting fellow members in the pursuit of abstinence. Combining the two data sets, I conclude that only texts that are inclusive of multiple experiences will be utilized by ministers in black churches. Ministers struggle with relating, connecting, and meriting the support of parents and other member of the church community in the process of creating a curriculum that works within and beyond the walls of black churches. Any teaching tool that exacerbates the difficulties of

bringing youth and singles into the discourse on the topic of abstinence is deemed useless.

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Appendix A

Personal Relevance to the Research

In this section, I articulate a personal connection to the research (Casey, 1993). For me, the connection extends across my lifetime, for sexuality is a natural, perpetual component of human development.

The youth director of our church changed while I was in college. She was young, and had been my personal mentor for the last five years of my life. She was a single parent, who'd gotten pregnant while in college, and had never married. She was a public middle school teacher who, dedicated most of her time and energy to reaching the high school population at our small church, and rearing her son. She was very contemporary, not only in presentation, but in conversation. As I reflect, I realize that she worked overtime to be able to relate to us. She delved into every contemporary topic from music, to dating and sex. I was 22 when she began a series on Sex and the Soul. Unbeknownst to the Christian Education department, she began to teach from a book, *Dating with Purpose* (2006) that discussed the moral implications of sex on one's whole person, to include their *soul*. She referenced scriptures, but this text covered so many emotional, mental, and spiritual implications. Sunday school was packed for months at the time. People were bringing their friends to class. We needed more space, but we preferred the privacy of the small room in the back of the church because we did

not want “others” (i.e. parents, ministers, or even the pastor) to know what we were discussing.

Our youth leader talked about soul ties, which referred to the connection between a man and a woman after they engaged in sexual activity, and how just because you “decided” that you did not want to be in a relationship anymore, you would still feel compelled to be connected to them. She paralleled this experience to that of a husband and wife, and why divorce *should be* difficult, if a man and woman were connected spiritually, emotionally, and sexually. At that moment, it made sense. Sex was not something that I abstained from in order to “coerce” God into blessing me. Sex was something that I *preserved* for a genuine encounter with someone whom I desired to share all of the other important areas of my life with (i.e. emotional and spiritual) for my entire life. I reflected back on the rollercoaster of anguish that I’d experienced with my ex-boyfriend; how for nearly 6 years at that point, I’d been drawn to him in the absence of any official commitment, irrespective of mistreatment, how I wasn’t able to preserve an ounce of “self” until I separated from him physically.

I was also learning about the other forms of physicality that were not necessary to share in the absence of marriage. I learned about the social and responsibility not only for myself, but for another, that would not engage in tempting acts that would increase the likelihood of sexual intercourse. I learned that to care for me, was to care for others. This was different from the “hormonal babysitting” responsibility given to me by older women.

My youth leader gave personal testimony about some of the practical challenges associated with premarital sex, but the class was less concerned with that, for it was what had been learned every year in the month of March during sex education courses through the school since the fifth grade taught in my county. We were hungry for mental, emotional, and spiritual transformation.

I felt empowered by the fact that I was able to articulate my reasoning to men who approached me. In past times, I had the tendency to recoil saying, “It just isn’t right,” to which they respond with a number of very practical reasons as to why sex was a great idea irrespective of the relationship context. My new voice resembled the candor and openness that I had in my relationship with my parents on the topic. They’d given me the liberty to elaborate on my decisions with honesty. The fact that my youth leader made no gender difference was even more empowering. She emphasized that sex was an amazing opportunity in the right context, but that God had given no green lights to men more so than women to do so out of wedlock. When I shared my standards with men who were interested in me, I boldly suggested that if abstinence were not their stance, and they were Christian, it should be, and I was able to use my synergy of spiritual and practical knowledge in order “level the playing field,” between myself and men. I had finally been educated holistically and had taken a stance for what I believed in.

My academic pursuits intersected with my personal sexual decision –making when I completed my Master’s in Marriage and Family Therapy at East Carolina

University in Greenville, North Carolina. I served as a couple's therapist intern in Fayetteville, North Carolina, serving a primarily military population. My theory of choice, which I believed best embodied my practice as a therapist, was that of Narrative Theory, an approach by which the clients author and then re-author their personal experiences with guided questions from the therapist. They also have a chance to *reframe* their experiences, by giving experiences new names and recognizing them in different contexts.

The practice that I worked for was faith-based. It was there that I discovered first-hand the peril of what happens when people with different sexual learning stories attempt to have a write one together regarding their sex life. Whatever each partner had learned from personal sexual encounters before marrying, translated into their sexual encounters. The experiences ranged from sexually abusive childhoods, where much sexual exploration had taken place well before marriage, to those who felt incredibly inexperienced due to having married as virgins. All of the young couples were able to identify the technicalities of sex, but there was little or no comprehension of the emotional, spiritual, or mental impact of those experiences. There would be stories of power dynamics that gave sexual communication a different meaning, which in turn affected their ability to share power in sexual dynamics with their spouses. An important detail in reference to the couples is that many of them were interracial. I learned that certain elements of culture impacted their understanding of sexuality.

Realizing that ethnicity was a critical influence in relationship development, and perspective impacted my decision to pursue Cultural Foundations as a doctoral student.

Upon entering the University of North Carolina at Greensboro as a doctoral student of Cultural foundations, I found that I was again intrigued by the way in which the narrative process was used to discover cultural similarities and distinctions. As in my Master's program, I began embarking upon the journey of analyzing my personal stories about my life which impacted the way that I demonstrate my current identity, one of which was the story of sexual experiences. Simultaneously, close male and female peers began to share with me their stories of sexual encounters, or the struggle with a lack thereof (for those who were abstinent Christians). I began to hear the same messages about sexual meaning, and realized that they were slightly different based upon race/ethnicity, class, or gender. Being exposed to critical race and educational theorists such as Cornel West, bell hooks, and classical political and economic theorists such as Karl Marx, affirmed that there was a scholarly lens through which to examine these issues.

A professional shift took place. I began to conduct Christian single's seminars in my latter twenties, and I desperately wanted to recommend resources as my singles leader had in earlier years. Simultaneously, I found myself wanting to engage sexually (a natural desire for an able-bodied woman), and had "fallen off of the celibate wagon" on two occasions over the last 12 years. Therefore I began to purchase books that I hoped would impact my spiritual development, as well as that of those who participated in the

seminars that I conducted. However, I was disappointed in the disparity of the messages, in most of the books by, black and white authors.

I enjoyed the incredibly spiritual dialogue about intimacy with God and man that came from white authors, but I found that some of the examples or personal narratives that the authors shared were culturally irrelevant. I had never been walking down a dirt path in the rain at Christian camp with anyone that I loved. At times, I remember focusing on how “white” the example was as opposed to the content of the reading. I enjoyed the practical message of black authors, but still found some of the message irrelevant. I found myself saying, “Yes, you can get pregnant, which will prevent you from going to school and obtaining more wealth, but I’m a PhD in the making. I will be gainfully employed, and I am approaching 30 years of age. What would be my fear of getting pregnant based upon these premises?” Other times, the extreme was suggested, that Jesus was all the husband that I needed. And while I recognized that life had to go on even if I never married, and that God was fulfilling on His own, I often wondered if I had to see Jesus as my husband in order to do so. But even more so, I wondered how men received a God, that was always referred to as “He,” as a “She” in the form of a wife? These, and many other questions, impacted my desire to study the content of materials.

I went on a quest to obtain texts on the topic of abstinence and discovered that there was an inequity in the way in which the books were distributed in communities. In many cases, Christian bookstores had the greatest volume of books on the topic, but

they were situated in areas of the city that were primarily middle-middle class to affluent. Additionally, the Gospel shops, typically privately owned by blacks, had fewer titles at higher prices because they could not compete with the mass consumption of larger chains.

I began to question the fact that the very communities that are impacted by some of the highest rates of premarital sexual activity have the least amount of available resources to address issues and concerns that they may have. The churches in those communities have little clue or little resources to begin providing a multi-faceted curriculum. My church was uniquely progressive because of a middle class teacher who knew how to adapt the material. However, I also had to come to grips with the fact that any of the churches seated in the communities at or below the poverty line were even developing curriculum. It was then, that I turned to political economy Theory in order to gain insight into the relationship between creation and consumption of books on abstinence.

My firm belief in practically applied knowledge has driven this project from beginning to end. I believe that it is the responsibility of scholars to use their gift of critical assessment to bring to life seeming mundane experiences that pose concern for our communities. As a narrative scholar, I embrace the opportunity to capture the lived experiences of members of our communities, in order to gain perspective, and assist in providing a platform for those who are marginalized. Additionally, I deem it critical to analyze the artifacts of our culture that directly influence the way in which we live our

lives. A combination of these beliefs and passions led me to explore the phenomena of abstinence curriculum seated in black Christian experience.

Appendix B

Co-Cultural Communication Orientation

	Separation	Accommodation	Assimilation
Nonassertive	Avoiding Maintaining interpersonal barriers	Increasing Visibility Dispelling Stereotypes	Emphasizing commonalities Developing positive face Censoring self Averting controversy
Assertive	Communicating self Intra-group networking Exemplifies Strengths Embracing Stereotypes	Communicating self Intra-group networking Using liaisons Educating others	Extensive preparation Overcompensating Manipulating Stereotypes Bargaining
Aggressive	Attacking Sabotaging Others	Confronting Gaining advantage	Dissociating Mirroring Strategic distancing Ridiculing self

Appendix C

Co-Cultural Dynamics in Black Churches

Co-Culture	Dominant Culture	Implication	Orientation	Practice(s)
Adult	Youth	US is currently driven by pop culture, which primarily appeals to youth culture.	Nonassertive Separation Nonassertive Assimilation	Avoiding Averting Controversy
Abstinent Youth In Church	Sexually Active Youth in Church	General culture is sexualized and permeates boundaries of the church.	Assertive Accommodation	Communicating Self
Sexually Active Youth in church	Abstinent Youth in church	The church environment is one that makes owning of sexual activity in any premarital state taboo.	Aggressive Separation Aggressive Assimilation	Sabotaging Bargaining
Black Christian	White Christian	Because of black history in US, most black church structures are influenced by white standards.	Aggressive Assimilation Nonassertive Separation	Mirroring/ Dissociating Avoiding
Black Female Christian	Black Male Christian	Because of history of women's rights and interpretation of Biblical principles, males are the dominant structure in black church. Sexual stigmas label black women as predators	Nonassertive Separation Aggressive Assimilation	Avoiding Ridiculing Self
Black leader of church in white denomination	White leader of church in white denomination	Black church leadership in white denominations is heavily influenced by the historical influence of whites on black church structure.	Nonassertive Separation Aggressive Assimilation	Avoiding Strategic Distancing
Lay members	Leadership	Communicative structure of church is such that leaders have more "voice" than laity.	Nonassertive Assimilation	Censoring Self
Leadership	Laity	If exercised, voice of membership may very-well "trump" that of leaders via voting rights.	Nonassertive Assimilation	Avert Controversy
Church Members Poverty Line	Church Members Middle/Upper Middle Class	Communicative norms of the middle class influences the practices of those below the poverty line.	Nonassertive Assimilation	Censoring Self

Appendix D

Analysis

An integral part of curriculum development and implementation, involves the assessment of the culture in which that curriculum is taught (Giroux & Simon, 1989). The overarching goal of my research is to examine the cultural influences that impact curriculum development and implementation from both a historical and contemporary perspective. The review of the literature provides a merger of historical and contemporary concepts that sex culture for black Christians. In turn, an assessment of black Christian sex culture spoke to the challenges of abstinence curriculum development and implementation in black churches, to include existence of an actual curriculum, its purpose, the communicative processes by which it is developed, and finally an assessment of the content of teaching tools.

In order to have a more complete understanding of the influences that impact curriculum development and implementation, I conducted research in order to fully grasp the process of development as well as the teaching tools used, thereby answering the following questions:

1. What communicative power dynamics influence the process by which church communities dialogue about sex in an effort to develop an abstinence curriculum?

2. How does the content of teaching tools impact the availability and consumption of teaching resources to be used in an abstinence curriculum for black churches?

As addressed in Chapter IV and Chapter V, both elements (process and tools) are imperative to the overall sex culture of black Christians.

The research methodology for this study is dedicated to exploring two of the four challenges to abstinence curriculum development and implementation in black churches: communicative processes in the development and implementation of curriculum, and the content of the teaching tools.

Three closely related methodologies are necessary in order to fully address the questions regarding content of teaching tools and process. I use *Qualitative Content Analysis* (Mayring, 2000) in order to analyze marginalizing messages of race, class, and gender via the lens of Political Economy Theory in Christian inspirational abstinence texts. I then combine approaches from narrative (Casey, 1993; Fisher, 1987; Harter et al., 2003) and co-cultural (Orbe, 1998) theories by which to analyze the personal experiences which yielded certain communication practices of black ministers in curriculum development and implementation.

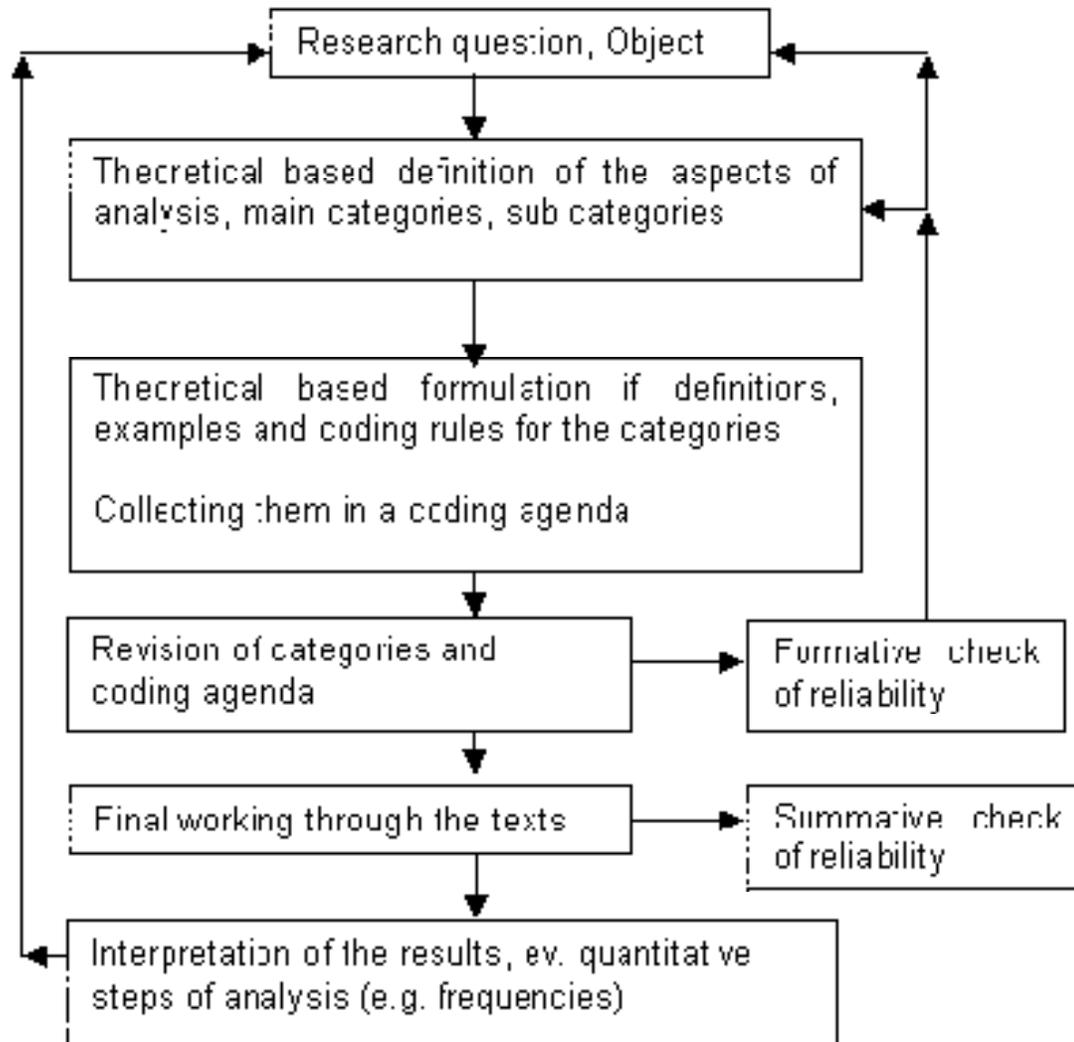
Qualitative Content Analysis

In order to determine the cultural relevance of teaching and inspirational materials on the topic of abstinence, I conducted a qualitative content analysis. Phillip Mayring (2000) devised a contemporary framework for qualitative analysis that that

preserved some components of the more traditional quantitative content analysis (whereby a researcher is assessing the *number* of times that an element of content emerges a given unit of text). Similar to narrative theme extraction or co-cultural reduction, content analysis seeks to highlight reoccurring themes that occur in texts. Mayring suggests that themes can be derived from either inductive category development, or deductive category development.

Inductive category development involves reading and analyzing a text based upon the goals of a given research question. The researcher codes information from the texts, with less certainty as to what the themes the text will yield. Once all information that is salient to the reader is highlighted, then he/she may go back and develop categories based upon whatever is most apparent to them in the body of work. This process is still highly similar to quantitative analysis because the number of times that the message manifests is what gives the categories significance (see Appendix C). I chose deductive category application for my research. Mayring (2000) describes deductive categorization as a method that begins with another theory guiding the way in which the researcher will separate themes from the text. I chose to use concepts from political economy theory to examine themes of race, class, and gender to guide the categorization of the texts.

Deductive Categorization Chart



I used themes of race, class, and gender through the lens of political economy to guide my deductive categorization. I searched for monolithic messages that marginalized certain populations of readers. I read each text (in its entirety) or chapter in search of experiences that were devoid of black, working class, or male Christian experiences. I then highlighted all of the quotes (using the same color highlighter) and then transcribed them into documents using each author as the heading. I then used a

color-coding process, whereby I gave each theme (race, class, gender) a specific color in order to make the distinction between the themes.

Narrative Interviews and Co-cultural Coding

Narrative theory is situated within the disciplines of Cultural and Communication studies. Narrative theory within the Cultural studies discipline surfaced in the early 1970s and is mainly derived from literary analysis. However, in the late eighties, Roland Posner developed a concept of narrative cultural studies more closely related to human social phenomena. Posner coined “culture” as the “collective construction of reality . . . derived of three semiotic dimensions; social, mental, and material,” (as cited in Erll, 2005, p. 90). My intent is to use narrative and Co-cultural methodologies to capture the mental and social influences that have impacted their communicative practices, followed by a qualitative content analysis of the material dimension of the culture (teaching tools) in a qualitative content analysis.

Walter Fisher (1987) introduced the narrative paradigm in the field of communication studies in 1984 as an all-encompassing way to examine the way in which human beings exchange messages. He coined the phrase “homo narrans,” to replace human beings, to convey the instinctive nature of communicating human story (Fisher, 1987). Fisher defines communication as, “an ongoing process of creating, using, and arranging symbols that organize human experience in sequential and *consequential* ways, as units of discourse and ways of seeing, behaving, and being.” There are five features that Fisher uses to describe narrative paradigm (Foss, Foss, and Trapp, 1991):

1. Human beings are essentially storytellers.
2. Decision-making and communication are influenced directly influenced by “good reasons” which are influenced by communicative context.
3. The production and practice of good reasons are ruled by matters of history, biography, culture, and character.
4. Criteria by which we judge stories are narrative probability (coherence) and narrative fidelity (the correspondence of the story with what we know to be true in our lives).
5. The world offers a set of stories among which we must choose.

According to Walter Fisher, human experience is consequential; one set of experiences influences a sequential set of experience, yielding a story. My focus, in this portion of the research is the consequences of power in human experiences on curriculum development and implementation.

Phenomenological Inquiry Co-cultural Narrative Methodology

The methodological approach to the study of co-cultural theory is that of *Phenomenological Inquiry*. Unlike other approaches, which seek out controlled, very specific experiences to serve as the focus, phenomenological inquiry focuses on the study of everyday occurrences. The researcher rejuvenates interest in “the known,” as opposed to the unknown of communication, calling into question the meaning of routine practices. I chose to explore the everyday experience teaching and learning about sex in the complexities of the church dynamic.

Orbe's approach to the in-depth interview involves minimal communication of behalf of the researcher. Rather, the interview is designed to serve as an open space, to be filled by the narrator or *co-researcher*. The purpose of the interview is to, "collect descriptions of lived experiences of co-researchers because they allow them to tell their stories in their own words . . . that represent salient issues in her or his own experiences" (Orbe, 1998, p. 40).

Orbe's in-depth interview approach is similar to that of Kathleen Casey. Her book, *I Answer with My Life: Life Histories of Women Teachers Working for Social Change* (1993) explores the intersectionality of gender, racial, professional, and spiritual (and several other) identities as they relate to their roles as educators and activists via narrative interviews. Casey implements narrative research methods to uncover the common themes in the stories of the women educators. Through the narratives, Casey explores the authors' interpretation of how lived experiences have molded and shaped the way in which they educate as a form of activism.

Unique to Casey's work, which alludes to the benefit of brevity of the researcher as instructed by Orbe, is the way in which she begins the interview with by asking the narrator to "tell me the story of your life." Casey (1993) suggests that this approach serves as "interrogation for social significance" (p. ??). In other words, she is encouraging the narrator to articulate identity. My goal is to see how ministers, in certain co-cultural spaces, learned in their past about abstinence has shaped the way in which they, in turn, develop and implement abstinence curriculum. What had become

of their identity as a minister or Christian educator, and how did it impact what and how they taught sexual moral values.

Antonio Gramsci describes “terrain of struggle” as the place where an individual or individuals make the conscious decision to learn and educate simultaneously. This terrain does not have a series of rules and norms that determines who has the authority of teacher, but a democratic experience where the possibility of learning is designed whereby the role of teacher as student is embraced. What the group (of teachers and learners) chooses to preserve in a church is coined as the *interpretive community* (Casey, 1993). By capturing the experiences of the ministers via narrative analysis, my intent is to assess for their ‘terrain of struggle,” where what and how they learned about abstinence in the interpretive communities of their churches molded the way in which they exercised power in their communicative style to their populations of youth and singles.

Description is the process by which data is collected, while *reduction* is the process through which the *capta* is translated for review. The process is a content analysis based upon recorded interview transcripts that are then screened for themes most pertinent to the research. Orbe (1998) describes the reduction process:

The first step is to read each transcript without making any notations . . . The next step involves reading the transcript a second time highlight words, phrases, and recollections that emerge as essential in the lived experiences of the co-researchers. The final step is to bracket these paradigmatic thematizations from the first transcript before beginning the same process for others. (p. 44)

A researcher continues this process a second and third time in order to completely flush out and/or combine relevant thematic categories. Interpretation, the final process of the phenomenological method involves linking the relationships between the themes in order to uncover meanings associated with the communicative behaviors and to better understand human communication (Orbe, 1998).

Collection of Narratives

The prompt, “Tell me the story of your personal and professional experiences with abstinence education seated in the black church experience,” encouraged narratives of the aforementioned participants regarding the culture of their churches racially, socio-economically, historically, and politically, in a way that allowed me to examine how the aforementioned impacts their communication about the topic within their congregations. I then used the data from the interviews to obtain personal accounts of discursive patterns in co-cultural dynamics within their churches.

I transcribed all of the interviews, and began the reduction (decoding) process based on themes that emerged from the stories. I read all of the interviews in their entirety without coding at least once. Then I began rereading each interview, but this time highlighting any messages that were significant about power in the first transcription using several colored markers and highlighters. I created a list of which theme each color represented, and repeated the process until I had uncovered each theme that related to power dynamics. I then compared each dynamic to the

communicative practices articulated by Orbe's co-cultural theory in order to conclude which themes contained the most reoccurring practices.

The outcomes of the research serve as a foundation to the discussion of abstinence education in black churches. I unpack the systemic influences that molded curriculum or deemed a curriculum unnecessary in some black church subcultures. Additionally, I uncover biases that hinder the discourse on the topic in churches, and offer solutions to the process of curriculum development.

Appendix E

Text Sample Chart

Title	Christian Inspiration/ Secular	Author: Man/Woman/ Couple	Author: Black/White
Martin, C. (2003). <i>First class single: Dating and waiting God's way</i> . United States: Xulon Press.	Christian	Woman	Black
Smith, K. (2005). <i>Living single: The different faces of singleness</i> . Huntsville, AL: Milestones International Publishing.	Christian	Man	Black
Elmore, R. (2008). <i>No-nonsense dating</i> . Eugence, OR: Harvest House Publishing.	Christian	Man	Black
Griffin, D. (2007). <i>Single for a season, married for a reason</i> . Lake Mary, FL: Creation House.	Christian	Woman	Black
Eagar, R. (2002). <i>Dating with pure passion</i> . Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishing.	Christian	Man	White

Title	Christian Inspiration/ Secular	Author: Man/Woman/ Couple	Author: Black/White
Ingram, C. (2003). <i>Love, sex, & lasting relationships: God's prescription for enhancing your love life</i> . Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.	Christian	Man	White
Dimarco, H. (2006). <i>Technical virgin: How far is too far?</i> Grand Rapids, MI: Revell.	Christian	Woman	White
Feldhahn, J., & Rice, E. (2008). <i>For young men only</i> . Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah.	Christian	Man (2)	White
Gresh, D. (2004). <i>And the bride wore white: Seven secrets to sexual purity</i> . Chicago: Moody Press.	Christian	Woman	White
Bell, R. (2007). <i>Sex God exploring the endless connections between sexuality and spirituality</i> . Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.	Christian	Man	White

Title	Christian Inspiration/ Secular	Author: Man/Woman/ Couple	Author: Black/White
Silvious, J. (2007). <i>Smart girls think twice</i> . Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.	Christian	Woman	White
Hughes, B. (2002). <i>True love waits: Living pure inside out</i> . Nashville, TN: LifeWay Press.	Christian	Man	White
Boyd-Franklin, N. & Franklin, A. (2001). <i>Boys into men</i> . New York, NY: Plume.	Secular	Couple	Black
Payne, D. (2000). <i>True love waits</i> . Nashville, TN: Lifeway Press.	Christian	M/W	White
Strack, J., & Strack, D. (1997). <i>Until you say I do</i> . Nashville, TN: LifeWay Press.	Christian	M/W	White

Title	Christian Inspiration/ Secular	Author: Man/Woman/ Couple	Author: Black/White
Jacobs, J., & Strubel, D. (2000). <i>Single, whole, & holy: Christian women and sexuality</i> . Camp Hill, PA: Horizon Books.	Christian	Woman (2)	White
Harris, J. (2003). <i>Sex is not the problem (lust is)</i> . Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers.	Christian	Man	White
Harper, H. (2006). <i>Letters to a young brother: Manifest your destiny</i> . New York: Gotham Books.	Secular	Man	Black
Harper, H. (2006). <i>Letters to a young sister: Define your destiny</i> . New York: Gotham Books.	Secular	Man	Black