At the Frontlines of God’s Army:
BattleCry as a Microcosm of Modern Evangelical Culture

by

Lilly Matson Dagdigian
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Introduction

BattleCry and Trends in the Evangelical Mainstream

BattleCry.com describes itself as “an online community and resource for Christian teens, churches, youth groups, and leaders.”

Founded in 2005 by Ron Luce as an offshoot of his Teen Mania Ministries, the site seeks to provide Christian teenagers with evangelizing tools and resources to analyze today’s mainstream culture, while also letting them create their own space online in a safely Christian environment. Teen Mania Ministries also runs Acquire the Fire weekend conventions, “a mix of pep rally, rock concert and church service,” events which BattleCry bloggers eagerly anticipate and write ecstatic reviews of afterwards. These weekends bring together Christian motivational speakers and popular Christian rock bands – a February 2008 concert in Newark featured performances by contemporary gospel singer Kirk Franklin, the electronic rockers of the David Crowder Band, and hip-hop group The Cross Movement, with speeches by Ron Luce and Bishop T.D. Jakes, an extremely popular preacher and motivational speaker. Acquire the Fire creates an adrenaline-fueled forty-eight hours during which many attendees rededicate themselves to Christ while promising to evangelize to more of their friends. In addition to weekend events and online organizing, BattleCry offers an accompanying guidebook

written by Luce, *Battle Cry for My Generation*. In this book, much of which is repeated in various places on the website, Luce outlines the problems facing American culture today and what teenage Christian “warriors” can do about it: “God has chosen you to be a part of this generation for such a time as this. He has allowed this book to fall in your hands as an invitation to the battle. God is looking for warriors who will fight for Him on the battlefield of minds and hearts.”

BattleCry makes use of print, electronic, and musical media to engage as many young Christians, and hopefully non-Christians, as possible.

BattleCry reaches out to church youth groups in an attempt to evangelize effectively to as many youth as possible:

“The crisis of unbelief that is ravaging an entire generation of teenagers can only be stopped through creating thriving and growing youth groups in every church in America. Supporting, strengthening and equipping the local youth group are the core purposes of the BattleCry Campaign.”

The villains in this “crisis of unbelief” are identified as the “corporations, media conglomerates, and purveyors of popular culture” who propagate ungodly ideals and images, normalizing, in BattleCry’s eyes, such activity as premarital sex, drinking, and drug use. BattleCry depicts the enemy as aiming to squeeze every dollar from every teenager, regardless of the negative effects on the rest of the teens’ lives. BattleCry urges its members to recognize and fight against the

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corrupting influences of modern society – one page displays letters written by
Acquire the Fire attendees to MTV: “Our generation is so sick and twisted
because of your TV shows and songs. …I am through going through life trying
to be like someone I am not. I want to be like Jesus Christ! I don’t want to be
branded by you. I want to be branded by God!”

As I will argue later, BattleCry places itself – and, subsequently, Christ – in opposition to mainstream culture
and its values, presenting the old notion of Christians as not of this world within
frameworks of modern-day rebellion, mainly the teenage impulse to defy
popular culture as put forth by MTV (or, alternatively, the “popular kids”).

A significant aspect of BattleCry’s popularity as a website is its personal
pages, which are intentionally similar to popular social networking sites such as
MySpace and Facebook. Each teen (and youth pastor, for that matter) can create
their own page, featuring a user picture, links to the pages of their
“trenchmates,” a blog, a space for comments, and “Warrior Disciplines” and
“Battle Tactics,” such as “I will recommit to be submissive to my parents,” and
“I will encourage my friends to talk to their unbelieving friends and invite them
to youth group.” Loyalty to Christ is articulated by BattleCry members through
declaring their outrage at “immoral” companies such as Victoria’s Secret,
writing about their mission trip, and listening to the latest Christian rock band.
This interactive side of BattleCry gives teens the chance to connect with each
other in order to organize more effectively for the Christian cause.

BattleCry, “Battle Cry: Letters from the Culture War,” Teen Mania Ministries,
The blogs in particular offer fascinating insight into the lives of BattleCry teenagers; used as an online hybrid between a diary and a message board, BattleCry blogs are filled with everything from fervent declarations of faith to confessions of spiritual uncertainty to links to completely secular surveys.

Despite BattleCry’s emphasis on resisting popular culture’s influences, the blogs reflect a typically teenage obsession with singers and bands – many users’ blogs are nothing more than a collection of links to music videos on YouTube or lyrics from favorite songs. Usually, however, these musicians offer a Christian-friendly, if not outright evangelical, message. While warning teens of the dangers of the mainstream, BattleCry creates a parallel popular culture for its members, rock concerts and all.

In this thesis, I will argue that BattleCry offers an accurate glimpse at major trends within evangelical culture at the beginning of the 21st century. BattleCry offers its members literature, rock concerts, and a full social networking website, not to mention mission trips and its own clothing line. Owing to this emphasis on varied multimedia experiences of Christianity, BattleCry sheds light on multiple aspects of modern-day evangelical life. In Chapter One, “The Internet and Evangelicalism,” I examine how evangelical Christianity has interacted with the new technologies of the 20th century, and how secular and evangelical theorists see the Internet continuing to affect evangelicalism in the future. I argue that just as televangelism changed the public face and, indeed, the reality of evangelical life in the United States, so the Internet will become not just a tool of evangelism but a force in forming and reforming the evangelical Christianity of the next several decades.

In Chapter Two, “‘This Is a Real War’: Militarism, Rebellion, and BattleCry,” I discuss the overtly militaristic language BattleCry employs, which can be seen everywhere from the name of the organization itself to the most
minute details of user profiles. I contend that this language reflects the modern evangelical sense of being in the middle of a “culture war,” as sociology and religious studies professor James Davison Hunter articulates it. Here socially conservative and progressive forces are seen to be quite literally warring for the souls of American citizens. BattleCry uses this metaphor to define itself, imagining its members as a rebel army prepared to do battle against evil corporations. In order to make this aggressive vision particularly attractive to an adolescent audience, BattleCry coopts the language and imagery of teenage rebellion, directing teens’ anger at those outside forces attempting to inculcate them with secular values.

In Chapter Three, “Baby Got Book: Gendered Perspectives on Dating on BattleCry.com,” I examine the attitudes towards teen dating to be found in BattleCry members’ blogs. Through analyzing the videos and lyrics these teenagers post on their user pages, I found entirely different expectations for young men and women on how best to avoid the temptations that come along with dating too soon. Girls are seen as the guardians of chastity, both their own and boys’, whereas boys are indulged as immature, hormonal creatures who, though Christian, will not be responsible for their actions until the haze of puberty has come to a close. I argue that these findings echo the expectations of evangelical culture at large – the recent phenomenon of purity balls, for example, reflects different standards for girls’ and boys’ behavior regarding chastity. Through scrutinizing the popular Christian music BattleCry teens list as

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their favorites, one can see how young Christian minds are imagining their own romantic lives when influenced by these artists.

In Chapter Four, “Secondhand Sex: BattleCry and Pornography,” I examine the relationship between BattleCry and one of its greatest enemies, pornography and our “oversexed” culture. BattleCry spends a great deal of its energies railing against the pornography industry and the “soft-core” pornography of MTV, advertising, and television programs. The rhetorical strategies they employ to do so, however, are particularly illuminating; I argue that BattleCry draws on the language and some of the fundamental principles of feminism, science, and rights-based debates to appeal to a mainstream American audience who may find those lines of argument more convincing than a simple “because the Bible says so.”

BattleCry and its mini-empire encompass many of the new frontiers of evangelism – through the use of the Internet and Christian rock and pop music, BattleCry is extremely accessible to and effective with today’s Christian youth. Theirs is not simply a particularly successful marketing strategy, however; because of its depth as an organization, BattleCry serves as a microcosm of current evangelical culture, reflecting the priorities, strategies, and rhetoric of many of their compatriots.
Chapter One

The Internet and Evangelicalism

Conservative Christians, the story goes, spent the middle part of the last century in hiding. Humiliated after the Scopes Trial, they retreated and formed fundamentalist enclaves, keeping to themselves and shunning the secular world as much as possible. Then, after and perhaps because of the sexual revolution of the late 1960s, they exploded back into the spotlight, attempting to change America by entering into its two national obsessions – politics and television.

Instead of taking a completely reactionary view towards all the inventions and objects of the modern world, evangelicals began to utilize modern devices to rail against modern moralities. Beginning with radio, and moving on to nearly monopolize religious television, evangelicals have harnessed the tools of this fallen world in an attempt to save it:

When modernity is defined as a flight from “traditional” values … then there surely are anti-modernist elements within the evangelical subculture. But that does not mean that evangelicals are chary about technology or innovation in general. Indeed, especially in the realm of communication, evangelicals historically have been pioneers in the use of media.  

Televangelism, of course, is the most visible example of evangelical use of modern media – evangelical Christians dominated religious broadcasting in the 1960s and 1970s, and religious television is still synonymous with

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conservative Protestantism in the American imagination. In fact, some observers, evangelicals and outsiders, have noted that the reverse became true – conservative Protestantism became synonymous with televangelism. In his exploration and critique of electronic culture, Shane Hipps, a pastor from Arizona, discusses the theological implications of an image-based church, exemplified by televangelism and continued by proselytizing over the Internet, as opposed to the print-based church that has ruled since the Reformation:

As image-based communication becomes the dominant symbol system in our culture, it not only changes the way we think but also determines what we think about. Images are not well-suited to articulate arguments, categories, or abstractions. They are far better suited for presenting impressions and concrete realities.

Televangelism paved the way for many of the twentieth century’s trends in evangelical thought and practice. With video screens available within and without the church space, many felt there was less of a need for small, personal congregations. These were replaced with the megachurch, which was (and is) often centered around the speaking power and charisma of a pastor, rather than the personal relationships he develops with his flock. Critics have argued that this emphasis on the personal magnetism of a preacher comes at the expense of the Christian message – that modern-day evangelical Christianity is more of a product than a coherent theology: “Like the rest of America, the super churches are numerically driven. Quantity counts, not quality. Success is often measured

11 Shane Hipps, The Hidden Power of Electronic Culture: How Media Shapes Faith, the Gospel, and Church (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 75.
by church growth. With some justification, the super churches have been described as McChurch.”

The use of the television program in evangelicalism has to some extent turned the “good news” into a product to be sold and marketed; programs such as The 700 Club and This Is Your Day are extended advertisements for Jesus.

Considering their massive commercial success in television, it is not surprising that evangelicals have begun to reach out towards the unsaved masses through the Internet. Some theorists, examining the impact of television on Christianity and projecting forwards, believe that the Internet will eventually effect a similarly huge change in the culture of American Christianity – contemporary Christian use of the Internet will create new depictions of faith more suited to the new technology. Stephen D. O’Leary, professor of communications at the University of Southern California, goes so far as to predict that the future of religious expressions on the Internet will be completely alien to prior audiences:

We must anticipate that the propositional content and presentational form of religion in the electronic communities of the future will differ as greatly from their contemporary incarnations as the teachings of Jesus differ from the dialectical theology of the medieval Scholastics or as the eucharistic ceremonies of the earliest Christians differ from the Latin High Mass.

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12 Kyle, Evangelicalism, 230-231.
O’Leary’s prophecy, published just four years ago, is already taking shape at BattleCry; evangelical Christians are exploring new and different strategies in order to adapt to the new culture.

In adjusting to the new generation’s technologies, tastes, and behaviors, evangelical Christians are transforming their perception of the Christian message - instead of emphasizing obedience to authority figures, BattleCry urges Christian youth to defy the “corporations and marketers [who] seek to profit from our destruction.”

While attempting to relate to youth through their own parlance and attitudes, evangelical Christianity itself is being changed – what started merely as a way to capture the attention of certain demographics becomes the religion itself. The signifiers of what an evangelical Christian looks like are changing; whereas before one might look for conservative dress, a cross around the neck, and a penchant for Pat Robertson, now a teenager with dyed black hair, rock music on their iPod, and a hoodie that looks like it belongs on the rack at Hot Topic may be the first to tell you earnestly about the kingdom of God and your place in it. While these young and old models of the evangelical share the belief that the modern world is full of sinful temptation, the older one may warn you to obey God and the Bible, while the younger will tell you to resist the lure of corporations out for only your money at the expense of your soul.

15 Hot Topic is a clothing store found in nearly every mall in America catering to adolescents who like to show their rebellion by wearing mass-produced Green Day t-shirts. Ask your local fourteen-year-old if you need more information.
This phenomenon is not exclusive to the rise of recent technologies – in fact, the advent of the printing press is the most obvious example of the medium changing what is emphasized in the message. The medium of print transformed most people’s experience of the Bible from an oral and visual account (mediated through the words of the priest and religious iconography) to an individual and textual account. Print also promotes the idea that one can gain an objective stance on the Gospel. As Pastor Hipps notes, “We presume the Bible presents an objective set of propositions that everyone will discover if they just read it properly. This inflated sense of objectivity, fueled by printing, breeds an unfortunate and arrogant illusion of omniscience.”16 When a standardized text of the Bible is available to every Christian, the sense of having access to the “truth” of Christianity grows. In sum, each medium used to communicate Christianity will change which aspects of the religion are understood most clearly and emphasized most emphatically. As the Internet continues to be used as a tool for evangelism, different ways of experiencing the Bible and a relationship with God will come to the forefront.

A major factor in the way this understanding will change, particularly through a site like BattleCry, is the interactive quality of the Internet17 – whereas televangelists’ messages are monologues broadcast to the masses with no immediate response, articles on Christian websites are immediately discussed in related forums, chat rooms, and message boards. On BattleCry, Ron Luce’s

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16 Hipps, *Power*, 55.
words are repeated, modified, and utilized by bloggers in multiple ways – some teens merely parrot the site’s catchphrases, others are sparked by BattleCry’s statistics to rail against aspects of modern society, and some are even critical of certain of BattleCry’s claims18: “I hate it when I have to fake a smile so that nobody suspects that anything is wrong… I don’t care what anyone says, Prayer and Jesus helps but you can’t make it through life if you don’t have a physical human being by your side.”19 Reactions to everything from Friday’s school dance to the imminent second coming of Christ are recorded and discussed among BattleCry bloggers, creating a much faster-paced and more “change-oriented”20 atmosphere than that in the communities surrounding televangelism.

Theorists examining the impact of the Internet on Christianity, and vice versa, have wondered what exactly the websites would do – that is, would they provide only information about your local Sunday service, or would online prayer circles conducting regular meetings begin to appear?21 Many studies have shown that the boundaries between the Internet and the “real world” are quite porous; even purely informational sites oftentimes offer a place to partake in some form of religious activity online:

…religion online and online religion often exist in continuity rather than opposition in Internet Christianity. Christian web sites

18 After much consideration, I have decided to keep the grammar and spelling of each blog entry as it appears on BattleCry.com, warts and all. My apologies. 
20 Dawson, “Mediation,” 33.
that appear to be oriented primarily toward the provision of information also include components that connect the information in some way to religious practice.\textsuperscript{22}

While BattleCry certainly provides plenty of information as to “real world” activities, members are quick to offer up a prayer in a comment on somebody’s blog or pass a chain letter around advocating the boycott of some immoral company. Despite the fears (or hopes) of some early Internet enthusiasts that perhaps, in the future, religious services would be held entirely online, it appears that Christian websites such as BattleCry will be used as another way to live a Christian life in all aspects, whatever the setting.

While the user pages on BattleCry represent real teenagers who discuss real events in their lives, it is important to keep in mind while examining their writings that the image they present will not be identical to their “real world” personalities. While BattleCry users are less likely than others to create an entirely fictional Internet guise, as their group affiliations are for the most part based in their “real world” youth groups, they are still free to present themselves in new and different ways:

Understanding the internet as ‘identity workshop’ allows people to use online space to learn and test new ways of being. The internet here is characterized as a place of freedom and experimentation. Individuals are able to ’re-present’ themselves by highlighting certain attributes or hiding others… The focus is on personalized use, seeing the internet as a forum in which users can recreate themselves.\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 105.
\textsuperscript{23} Heidi Campbell, \textit{Exploring Religious Community Online: We Are One in the Network} (New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 2005), 22.
My aim is not, therefore, to discover the “real” personalities of BattleCry users – rather, I am focusing on what they are choosing to present to the world through their personal pages, what is emphasized, what is left out, and what they choose to reveal in such a publicly accessible setting. Furthermore, by examining what BattleCry members feel they can and ought to say in this forum, we can uncover information about the setting itself.

This is not to say that teenagers’ religious identity construction online is completely dissimilar to its offline analog. Scholars examining the Internet in relation to religion have recognized that “even in a ‘body-less’ context like the Internet, identity construction still seems to be a social process – a process taking place in relation to other individuals.” Peer pressure, gossip, and imitation of others in one’s social group are still factors when identity construction takes place on the Internet – and in a context such as BattleCry, where the line between what is acceptable behavior and what is not is delineated more starkly than in other spheres, the teenage bloggers look to each other for reassurance that they are performing correctly, and conversely, are quick to point out when someone is failing to live up to expected standards.

One anxious male blogger by the username of battlecryjmd asks, in one long sentence, for help regarding a crush:

I want to ask this girl out but she is going out with someone but she told me that she really likes me and I'm confused because I don't know if she is just messing with me or if she really likes me but then I don’t know what to do because she is going out with

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someone and I really really like her so I don’t I just need like a 
sign or something to tell me what to do.\textsuperscript{25}

His suspicious lack of any outspoken righteous intentions sparks an immediate 
response from blogger wk4christ, who gives a warning intended to bring 
battlecryjmd back into line:

\begin{quote}
Just trust the Lord! Let HIM direct you! If it is HIS WILL for you 
to go out, then HE will provide! One of the things I’ve learned: 
DON’T PURSUE A GIRL UNLESS THE LORD SPECIFICALLY 
TELLS YOU TO OR HE BRINGS YOU TOGETHER! I’ve tried 
doing it on my own and it becomes a disaster.\textsuperscript{26}
\end{quote}

As this example indicates, even in a “body-less” environment, social cues and 
norms are still very much in play in the interactions on BattleCry. As many have 
noted, a deeply admired peer’s Christianity may be far more persuasive to a 
fourteen-year-old than that of their youth pastor: “Adolescent love is a sweet and 
wonderful thing, and if your beloved is a good Christian girl – ‘wholesome’ is 
the adjective my parents always favored – then your resistance to the gospel 
weakens further.”\textsuperscript{27} Idolized friends and intriguing romantic interests may bring 
as many people to BattleCry as youth pastors. In many ways, communities like 
BattleCry act as online support groups, reinforcing as well as helping to 
structure the personalities of its bloggers.

The advent of the electronic age is sure to bring about immense changes, 
both in looks and focus, to evangelical Christianity, and indeed, religion at large. 
As the interactivity of online communications becomes more and more a part of

\textsuperscript{25} BattleCry, “Battle Cry: Battle Plan,” Teen Mania Ministries, viewed 2 April 
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{27} Balmer, \textit{Eyes}, 100.
our daily lives, the way religious messages are disseminated will be transformed, both on- and offline. However, it is important to recognize that there is no evidence, as of yet, that religious activity online will replace churches in the “real world” — indeed, fears that the Internet replaces aspects of one’s offscreen life are so far unfounded:

People use the Internet to augment and extend their preexisting social lives, not as a substitute or alternative. ... As a significant material support for the networked structure of society in the twenty-first century, the Internet could play a leading role in the adaptation of religion to the new social reality, but only if the religions seek to explore the possibilities creatively.28

BattleCry is certainly on the right track for a creative exploration of the Internet’s possibilities; its founders have adapted perhaps the most popular aspect of the Internet for teenagers, the social networking site, and made it Christian-friendly, accessible, and attractive. Once again, evangelicals have taken the tools of modernity and crafted an effective tool for evangelism.

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The first thing many notice about BattleCry is its name. Conjuring up images of an underdog engaged in a ferocious fight against his oppressor, BattleCry quite purposefully invokes militaristic metaphors in order to combat the corrupting forces of modernity. Ron Luce sends a clear message to his teenage listeners – dedicate your entire life to God as a full-time soldier, not a “weekend warrior.” The imagery BattleCry employs is also quite confrontational; at ReCreate ’08, an Acquire the Fire event I attended in February of 2008, the opening video montage featured teenage silhouettes marching in line, then turning towards the camera with fists raised, in a jarring appropriation of the symbol for Black Power. BattleCry makes use of rebellious and warlike language and media in order to channel teenagers’ defiant impulses towards Christ; it teaches that there is an identifiable enemy, and that it is teens’ responsibility as warriors of God to defeat them.

In this chapter, I argue that BattleCry’s use of this militaristic language is reflective of feelings within evangelical culture at large. Evangelical Christians imagine themselves as a righteous minority within American culture, constantly under threat from the secular forces that surround them, yet destined and chosen by God to win at the end of the day. Many modern evangelicals see this world as

a literal battleground; forces they contend against, whether they be pro-choice advocates, pornographers, or homosexuals, are inflicting casualties by preventing potential Christians from absorbing the word of God and accepting Jesus Christ as their Lord.

I also argue that, in order to convey this message to an already cantankerous teenage audience, BattleCry coopts the language, clothing, image, and music of generically rebellious teenage sensibilities. Instead of directing their adolescent rage at the usual sources, i.e., parents, teachers, and authority in general, teenagers are encouraged to take out their anger on the corporations that are trying to ruin their lives and keep them from heaven by corrupting their innocent minds. I argue that this strategy is the newest manifestation of a tactic that evangelicals have been using since at least the 1960s – tapping into the popular culture of the time and covering the message of salvation with a layer of whatever the kids are loving at the moment. Despite their emphasis on individualism and resisting outside influence, however, I argue that BattleCry has its own systems in place to encourage members to follow the correct path towards accepting Jesus and growing as a Christian.

Section I: Militaristic Language and the Battleground of Modern Culture

Ron Luce employs the military metaphors of BattleCry in every context he can – to revisit the member pages on BattleCry.com, friends are labeled “Trenchmates,” messages are “Battle Shouts,” and to-do lists and goals are “Warrior Disciplines” and “Battle Tactics.” Luce also draws parallels from U.S.
military history to stress the urgency of the moment; in *Battle Cry for My Generation* he compares the current era to the fight against Hitler in World War II:

> It’s time to wake up and realize there is a real war going on for your generation. Just like Hitler, your enemy is not playing games. …I began with the story of the Nazis in World War II because it is a great example of a dangerous enemy we tried to ignore but who wouldn’t go away. My hope and prayer is that your generation will rise up together against a shrewd, relentless, and well-funded enemy.\(^\text{30}\)

By aligning evangelical Christians with the Allies in World War II, generally imagined as an unassailable position of moral rectitude, Luce demands action from his readers. The threat of the current adversary cannot be ignored; just as in World War II, the longer Christians wait to get involved and take a stand, the more souls will be destroyed by mainstream culture’s ruthless quest for profit. World War II is popularly considered to be a moment in history when pacifism was simply not an option; likewise, BattleCry makes it clear that Christian teenagers are responsible for the souls of their generation, which are not only unsaved, but being actively drawn away from God by “the enemy.”

In employing the language of war, and particularly in summoning images of World War II, Luce silences any alternative viewpoints – if Christians are Allies, any opposition to their cause is morally repugnant. Elizabeth Castelli, professor of religion at Barnard College, discusses these evangelical self-imaginings as persecution complexes:

> This trend mobilizes the language of religious persecution to shut

\(^{30}\)Luce and Guzzardo, *Battle Cry*, 10.
down political debate and critique by characterizing any position not in alignment with this politicized version of Christianity as an example of antireligious bigotry and persecution. Moreover, it routinely deploys the archetypal figure of the martyr as a source of unquestioned religious and political authority.\footnote{Elizabeth Castelli, “Persecution Complexes: Identity Politics and the ‘War on Christians,’” \textit{Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies} 18, no. 3 (2007): 154.}

Note here the double meaning of the word “martyr” and how it evokes both violent and non-violent responses to one’s adversaries. Jesus Christ himself can be considered the archetypal martyr, turning the other cheek and dying for the truth. However, suicide bombers and other violent protesters are often referred to as martyrs by their supporters in today’s culture. In both cases, as Castelli points out, the martyr is figured as righteous and noble.

Identifying BattleCry’s cause with that of the American soldier, particularly during times of war, leads to a sense of outrage at any protestations. As Castelli points out, people advocating for gay marriage or full reproductive rights can be figured as bigots focused on oppressing Christians: “Imagine all references to Christ and His cross removed from all emblems and city logos. Try to imagine a world where a pastor can go to jail for saying homosexuality is wrong.”\footnote{Luce and Guzzardo, \textit{Battle Cry}, 17.} As shown here, many conservative Christians are convinced that as gays and lesbians continue to gain access to institutions such as marriage, health care for domestic partners, and adoption rights, to name a few examples, we inch ever closer to restricting the right to speak out against homosexuality. The rights for which LGBT people are fighting are figured here as infringing upon conservative Christians’ right to practice their religion freely. As will be more
fully discussed in Chapter Four, BattleCry makes great use of rights-based language such as this to gain the sympathies of those who may not be swayed by Biblical arguments; declaring our “right” to do or not do something is considered by some authors to be one of the defining characteristics of American politics. Claiming that one’s rights are being violated is a powerful ideological argument in today’s culture.

Additionally, the idea of the child soldier should not be ignored. The image of the praying child is quite powerful on its own – what could be more persuasive and good than the innocence of a child talking to God? When the prayerful children in question are also being told that they are soldiers who must “enlist in God’s army,” however, the image gets much more complicated. Ron Luce focuses his efforts on teenagers for a reason; BattleCry operates under the assumption that most evangelicals are saved sometime during their teenage years. Moreover, groups of teenagers dedicated to bettering the lives of their peers are much harder for non-Christians to demonize or look down on than their adult counterparts:

It’s time for the young men and women of God to rise up with defiance and say, ‘I’m done with you. I won’t be deceived anymore! We’re tired of the devil oppressing us and destroying our generation. We are going to stand up, and with holy defiance, defeat the devil as a united army of God!’

When teenagers are excited about defying pressure to engage in premarital sex or drink underage, even the staunchest atheist would be hard pressed to come up

34 Luce and Guzzardo, Battle Cry, 112.
with a convincing argument why these fresh-faced idealists should change their minds. Too old to be dismissed as brainwashed children, yet young enough to be free of accusations of corruption and deceit, BattleCry teenagers present a facet of modern evangelicalism nearly immune to personal attacks and scandals—it’s hard to say no to teenagers on a mission, especially when American society at large would consider them such good role models.

Authenticity, godliness, and violence are closely interconnected within BattleCry’s proselytizing framework. True Christians must be willing to throw themselves into the fray and publicly dedicate themselves to the utter destruction of “the enemy.” Luce writes of the media as active agents of the devil, knowingly leading American teens into sin and despair. If Christians are the Allies, the media is most certainly the Axis:

Open your eyes! This is exactly what the media is doing to you. Only they are trying to tell you it won’t hurt you – they’re just trying to get you to think it’s cool. In reality it’s a formula for destruction. The only chance for winning over this garbage is for your generation to realize that this is not just a bunch of extreme moral talk, rather it is a real war, with real consequences, with real casualties.³⁵

Over and over again Luce stresses that the battle is not simply a metaphor – Christians are to view American society as a war zone, and every pregnant teen, self-injurer, and drug user is a casualty of the media and advertising industries. As I will discuss in Chapter Four, pornography and sexual images are seen as literally poisoning the minds of teenagers; uncritically depicting drug use or drinking in a music video on MTV is tantamount to delivering drugs right into

³⁵ Luce and Guzzardo, Battle Cry, 36.
impressionable adolescents’ hands. There can be no such thing as a Christian pacifist under this worldview; to be a Christian is to be a soldier, not merely ignoring but engaged in destroying the sinful influences in modern society.

I do not wish to give the impression, however, that all this talk of battles, casualties, and warriors is merely a clever marketing strategy evangelicals have thought up to gain the sympathies of the American public. While some may find it unbelievable that a teenager engaging in premarital sex could be considered a “casualty,” Luce and other conservative Christians find such events abhorrent and tragic. While one can certainly problematize BattleCry’s politics and language, it is important to keep in mind that they are fighting for what they believe is not only morally just, but the will of God: “[E]ach embattled side [of the culture war] upholds a different conception of the sacred, [so] it is not surprising that each side lashes out at the other. Humans simply cannot tolerate the desecration of that which is most cherished.”36 In the worldview of BattleCry, “that which is most cherished” is the innocence of young people, the purity of premarital lives, and, of course, a close relationship with God gained through their specific interpretation of the Bible. Mainstream culture is seen as threatening and destroying all that is most important in one’s life and one’s relationship to God; evangelicals are, in fact, going to war to defend their way of life.

Interestingly, just as those on the “progressive” side of the culture war often accuse the “orthodox” side of a hidden agenda, Ron Luce and BattleCry

36 Hunter, *Culture Wars*, 153.
are certain that the mainstream media is quite aware of the harm they are doing to teenagers, but considering the bottom line instead. Adults who may question whether premarital sex is always such a bad thing are demonized; they must know deep down that such actions are unilaterally harmful to teenagers. Again, it is no coincidence that Luce compares his opposition to Nazi Germany; the enemy is committing acts of such atrocious malevolence that they have to know, somewhere in their souls, that they are ruining young lives.

BattleCry and Teen Mania Ministries at large are by no means the only groups invested in this warlike, defensive view of modern evangelical Christianity. As 2006’s popular documentary *Jesus Camp* showcased, evangelicals and fundamentalists across the country are, in essence, preparing for war. Children’s pastor Becky Fischer talks about her Kids on Fire School of Ministry, the subject of *Jesus Camp*, as a direct counterpoint to Muslim madrassas, and the Christian children are compared to Muslim children with machine guns. Indeed, much of this increase in militarism in Christian America seems to arise from a post-9/11 fear of Muslim fundamentalism – if they are creating an army, then we shall as well. It is interesting to note, however, that BattleCry itself makes little to no mention of any Muslim threat; in fact, a web search for the words “Muslim” or “Islam” on BattleCry.com turned up nothing but a reference to a preacher who converted from Islam. The villain in Ron

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38 Though the word *madrassa* refers to any sort of school in Arabic, Fischer uses it to signify the stereotype commonly held by Americans of a radically extremist, anti-American, violent training camp for future terrorists.
39 Castelli, “Complexes,” 167.
Luce’s piece is most certainly the media, not any other religion; it is the fault of the United States alone that there are so few (according to BattleCry, anyway) Christians in the country today.

If anything, radical Muslims are to be admired for ingraining their faith into their children so well; as Fischer says,

It’s no wonder, with that kind of intense training and discipling, that those young people are ready to kill themselves for the cause of Islam. I want to see young people who are as committed to the cause of Jesus Christ as the young people are to the cause of Islam. I want to see them as radically laying down their lives for the Gospel as they are over in Pakistan and Israel and Palestine and all those different places, you know, because we have, excuse me, but we have the truth. 40

Muslims may have the wrong message, but their devotion to God should be admired. BattleCry members should not be merely metaphorical soldiers – if necessary, they must be ready to sacrifice their lives for the greater good of God’s kingdom. The militarization of young people is a necessary step towards creating a future Christian United States.

**Section II: Harnessing Rebellion and Subcultural Affiliation**

According to BattleCry, today’s teenagers need to be militarized because they are being victimized. Purveyors of popular culture are pictured as consciously attempting to lure teenagers away from Christ and towards a life of premarital sex, drug and alcohol use, and materialism:

Hollywood, the music industry, advertisers, and even the

40 Ewing and Grady, *Jesus Camp*.  

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mainstream media are using their arsenal of tools to win the battle for our teens’ hearts – and so far they are winning! In order to defeat our enemy, we must know how it thinks and understand the weapons it uses.\textsuperscript{41}

Indeed, BattleCry demonstrates a clear understanding of mainstream society’s “weapons” – the same strategies are used to market their products as are used to sell anything from clothing to music. BattleCry pits Christians as the misunderstood rebels of this world, a theme with which most teenagers are all too ready to identify, and tells them that they are in fact cool, enlightened, and unquestionably correct about the entire universe.

BattleCry’s logos, designs, and apparel look like they could be found in the closet of any up-and-coming young rebel unsure of where to begin their style transformation – the clothes show a certain commodified punk sensibility, emphasizing off-center images, edgy graphics, and mainly dark colors. While many casual observers may imagine evangelical Christianity as diametrically opposed to the goth and punk subcultures, BattleCry has effectively harnessed these identities and their association with rebellion in order to create an attractive aesthetic for their customers. Wearing black or dyeing your hair is no longer a necessarily secular act; young Christians who see themselves as radical want to bring a certain credibility and “extreme” attitude to every aspect of their lives, and aligning oneself to a subculture associated with solemnity or authenticity enhances their ultra-dedicated persona.

A study of evangelical tattooing reveals similar findings; in many New

Paradigm churches, defined as those that appropriate elements of popular culture and integrate them into worship, subcultural forms of protest are assimilated into the Christian framework:

Although it is often condemned by the larger society, tattooing is unashamedly ‘out there,’ confronting anyone and everyone who happens to gaze upon it. There is a marked similarity to the form of evangelical Christianity practiced in New Paradigm churches; an encompassing Christian identity that confronts ‘the world,’ and high moral demands coupled with a conservative theology, sectarian in content but not in form.42

A sort of conforming rebellion is acceptable for many teenagers today – goths and punks are in some ways as acceptable as the preps and hipsters.43 It is, however, understood that by adopting the stylings of goth or punk culture you are marking yourself as different in some way from the mainstream. Evangelicals have always emphasized that they are not of this world, and contemporary Christian teenagers use that knowledge to mark themselves in culturally recognizable ways as the enlightened other. Rejecting the mainstream culture in favor of a total commitment to Christ leads to a sideways identification with visible means of resisting popular culture, such as goth and punk styles and tattoos – or perhaps, as BattleCry hopes, the reverse will happen, and by turning away from the norm these teenagers will turn towards Christ. In any case, Ron Luce and the edgy rockers at Acquire the Fire are prepared with

43 Again, I am talking about the superficial trappings of these subcultures, i.e., clothing and hairstyles, and not necessarily any affiliated political stance or even music choice. Ask a purple-haired thirteen-year-old who Joe Strummer, lead singer of The Clash, is and you may very well get a blank stare.
an attractive alternative.

Luce is by no means the first evangelical to make inroads with popular youth movements. The Calvary Church movement of the 1960s dramatically changed physical and behavioral standards for evangelical culture at large by not only allowing hippies into their churches, but actively recruiting them. Furthermore, they were not looking necessarily to change the hippies’ ways of dressing or language; rather, the Calvary Chapel movement was attempting to draw them to Christ as they were:

With the incorporation of subcultural styles of music into worship in the late 1960s, as well as the reception of certain elements of the hippie culture (bare feet, blue jeans, beads, and so on), Calvary Chapel set a precedent of cultural acceptance and appropriation for that generation as well as for those to come.44

The key precedent here is appropriation; while evangelicals appeared to become much more receptive and welcoming to popular culture and subcultures, it was only the superficial aspects of hippie culture that were accepted. Long hair and dirty clothes may have been in, but free love and mind-expanding drugs were still emphatically out. Likewise, BattleCry teens may have the fashion sense of Johnny Rotten, but they certainly won’t be singing “Anarchy in the UK” at the next Acquire the Fire weekend.

Over and over again, in their literature, at their rallies, and on the website, BattleCry emphasizes how “real” and “authentic” a relationship with Christ can be, particularly as opposed to the shallow and unfulfilling replacements secular culture offers. At the Acquire the Fire weekend event I attended, Luce’s speech

44 Jensen et al., 25-26.
opening the second day characterized America as “Pleasure Island,” a place so rich in resources that they began to devote their lives to pleasure, ignoring the troubles of other “islands” and distancing themselves from God. Inevitably, no matter how shiny and pretty Pleasure Island was, only renewing their relationships with God – and bringing the knowledge of Jesus Christ to the other islands – could lead these characters to happiness. Here, Luce is telling his teenagers to ignore the flashy advertisements they encounter in their daily lives – however, he is combating spectacle with spectacle, creating an explosive, interactive, graphics-heavy experience for concertgoers using many of the same strategies as MTV. Though Luce would reply that his spectacle, unlike MTV’s, has substance behind it and is intended to bring people to the Lord, the fact remains that the finished product is just that – a product designed for maximum efficacy.

This “authentic” experience of God is highly, yet falsely, individualized at BattleCry. Over and over again, the speakers at ReCreate told the audience to forget about their friends and what they were doing, to close their eyes and connect with God by themselves. While explicitly stating that there was no peer pressure and that he wanted all experiences to be genuine, Luce created many instances where the unchurched or the unsure were singled out and visible to the rest of the crowd – the most blatant example being when he asked all the Christians in the stadium to stand up. Additionally, there were moments during which everyone was asked to pray while touching each other, hold hands, and repeat certain lines to your neighbors; with all of the previous self-identification
and visible avowals of belief, it became quite clear just who was in need of
prayer. While Luce emphasizes resisting corporate influence and following your
own path to Jesus, his events provide their own systems of pressure to encourage
young churchgoers to solidify their commitment to God and BattleCry.

Such an environment, wherein most concertgoers are “saved” evangelicals
but there is certainly room for conversion, creates a sense of huge
accomplishment at the end of the day – both altar calls resulted in a massive
number of people making their way to the stage to dedicate or rededicate their
lives to Christ. Although Acquire the Fire events are certainly attended
predominantly by Christians, each altar call affirms to the attendees how
persuasive and obvious the truth of Christianity is:

While claiming that all power belongs to God, they actively
appropriate some of that power as their own. …The very act of
marking off boundaries between themselves and the rest of the
world allows a vastly increased sense of efficacy within the social
territory they claim as their own.45

BattleCry figures evangelicals as the primary victims in a cultural war on
Christians; events such as ReCreate show Christians that they can be effective,
that the fight is worth fighting, and reminds them that they already know that
they are on the winning team.

Perhaps knowing that he would receive a large response no matter what
with such a packed and enthusiastic crowd, Nicky Cruz’s altar call was notable
for its harshness. Cruz is a well-known Puerto Rican American minister whose
dramatic conversion from head of New York gang the Mau Maus to devoted

45 Nancy Ammerman, *Bible Believers: Fundamentalists in the Modern World*
Christian is documented in biography, memoir, and film. He uses his violent background to reach out to urban youth who may be going through struggles similar to his own:

These kids are young, hardened criminals who don’t respond to parents, teachers, or the jail system. They receive a glorified message of gang activity everyday in rap music, television, and films. …But, believe it or not, they will respond to a message about God if it comes from others who have survived their same living hell.46

Cruz’s sermon at ReCreate recounted his life story, ending with an overtly masculinist altar call. Cruz told the audience he was only going to wait one minute, no more, for everyone to get out of their seats and start walking forward, because going to Jesus was not for the “pussycats.” He then addressed the young men in the crowd, asking them to come forward with their girlfriends – and if the girls didn’t want to come, no worries, because God would find hotter girlfriends for them. In his call for only those genuinely moved by God to come forward, Cruz engaged in rhetoric that equated masculinity to authenticity, which is linked by BattleCry to violence. BattleCry is looking for real soldiers for the frontlines of the culture war, and there can be no uncertain followers of Christ in these harrowing times.

The militaristic rhetoric of BattleCry reflects their deeply held belief that Christians’ daily lives are a battle for the souls of their friends and family. Just because Christians can be sure in their own salvation does not mean they can rest easy on the sidelines of the end times:

There is a day coming when every battle – physical and spiritual – will come to an end. That’s the day when the King of kings and the Lord of lords, Jesus Christ, returns to this earth. On that day all of mankind will be called to give an account of our lives to the Lord. …Don’t stay blind to the battles raging around you. Live each day wholeheartedly for God so that you will not be unprepared for when Christ returns.47

Even for saved Christians, there is no escaping from God’s judgment, and you had better hope you spent your life fighting for the souls of the unsaved.

Pointing out the deceptions of mainstream culture and visibly resisting their influence has become an important part of the battle; while BattleCry encourages its members to resist mainstream culture and examine the unethical practices of large corporations, it provides them with another very distinct and rigid path to follow. While individualism certainly plays a role in evangelical culture – after all, having a personal relationship with God is the definition of salvation – there is still a specific way to live your life and act in a Christian manner that BattleCry, and evangelical culture at large, sets forth. Being authentic is of primary importance; however, everyone is expected to be authentic in the same way.

The difference between the path that mainstream culture offers and what BattleCry offers, however, is crucial – in the Christian mindset, it is God’s will that everyone follow His path. Rebelling from mainstream culture and obeying God’s commands are not seen as incompatible. In Chapter Four, I discuss the concept of submission to God as liberating to Christians, particularly women; similarly, living a morally demanding conservative Christian lifestyle is figured

47 Luce and Guzzardo, Battle Cry, 122-123.
as rebellion from the ways of the secular world. Although Ron Luce may use some of the same rhetorical strategies as his nemeses, the end result, another saved soul, is what makes the difference.
Chapter Three

Baby Got Book: Gendered Perspectives on Dating on BattleCry.com

Despite its detailed diatribes regarding which corporations to avoid and which of popular culture’s messages to discard, BattleCry remains conspicuously silent on a major point of tension within evangelical culture—teenage dating. While Teen Mania Ministries as a larger organization occasionally discourages dating, it is never discussed as more than a distraction—participants in the Honor Academy, a year-long internship program for Christian teens, must swear off any form of dating while attending, because their focus for that year should be on increasing personal faith and expanding their evangelizing skills.48 BattleCry itself shies away from any mention of the topic; there is one brief disparaging reference to the “dating frenzy” on a page dealing with depression,49 but otherwise the site provides no official stance. This fits with BattleCry’s overall trend of channeling teenagers’ anger and rebellion towards corporations and mainstream culture at large; for an evangelical Christian website, BattleCry is remarkably sparing in offering direct do and don’t lists to its members. Teens are told to resist, and told who the villains in the piece are, but their own potential bad behavior is not emphasized.

The teenage bloggers themselves are, unsurprisingly, far more interested in discussing the ethics of dating. A large percentage of this discussion takes place around the songs of Christian artists – lyrics are quoted, videos are embedded, and concerts are reviewed. BattleCry members use the wisdom of their favorite musicians to negotiate the idea of teenage romance; here, I will examine the messages of three artists who show up with great frequency in blog entries dealing with dating – BarlowGirl, Superchick, and Southpaw. These artists provide very specific instructions for dealing with temptation, yet the message is dramatically different for girls than for boys. While everyone, of course, is to remain chaste until their wedding night, the methods girls and boys are told to use to achieve this goal reveal wildly dissimilar expectations. I argue that women are constructed as the guardians of chastity, responsible for both their own purity and that of their male counterparts. This idea runs throughout evangelical culture, as seen in the purity ball craze sweeping the country – teenage girls’ purity is endlessly discussed in the name of protection and the sanctity of marriage. Furthermore, I contend that expectations for teenage boys are not only less emphasized, but nearly absent. In the songs I examine, boys are figured as at the mercy of their hormones during their teenage years, and cannot be expected to put in their fair share of the work of keeping everyone virginal. Even Christian young men are indistinguishable from the pack until adolescence ends its tyranny.

While it may seem that artists who hold no official allegiance to BattleCry are not a reflection of BattleCry’s ideology, it is important to
remember that online community-building and identity formation are often reflected through third party information: “An individual constructs an online persona by the texts they generate and the online sources or sites they link themselves to.”\(^5^0\) Both the personal entries and the media the bloggers discuss are primary forms of establishing who they are and what they represent on BattleCry; even if the bands in question have never heard of BattleCry, their appearance on many members’ blogs informs the culture BattleCry.com creates among its member pages.

Section I: BarlowGirl and Active Submission

BarlowGirl consists of three sisters, Rebecca, Alyssa, and Lauren Barlow, currently aged 28, 26, and 22, respectively. They play guitar-based rock music with a clear Christian message, and were the youth ambassadors for the 2007 National Day of Prayer.\(^5^1\) They have played at several Acquire the Fire concerts, and their song “Average Girl” has become an anthem of sorts for many girls on BattleCry – with a rock’n’roll hook and fierce vocals, BarlowGirl tells the listener to put off all thoughts of dating until God brings your intended to you.\(^5^2\)

\(^{50}\) Campbell, Community, 22.
\(^{52}\) Complete lyrics to this and the other songs discussed are located in Appendix A. Additionally, as of this writing, one can listen to the songs by searching YouTube for the title and artist.
“Average Girl” starts off with a strong and dramatic opening line; as the guitars momentarily drop out, Lauren Barlow sneers, “So what, I’m not your average girl. I don’t meet the standards of this world.” This opening defiance of mainstream society’s morals is a direct reference to Romans 12:1-2:

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of the world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will. (my emphasis)

This lyric practically taunts those conforming to secular standards; most evangelical listeners will pick up on the reference and take the rest of the song with Romans 12 (and its mandate) in mind. Even if the listener does not recall the specific passage, ze will recognize the attitude as evangelical – rejecting mainstream society’s practices in favor of a Biblical guide has been, of course, common practice for decades:

Evangelicals have maintained their rigid codes of moral discipline, and therefore, they are said to find the experimentations represented by the ‘new morality’ to be self-indulgent, hedonistic, and reprehensible to the life of the community and the values of the American heritage.

Despite their realignment with the trappings of mainstream culture, evangelicals such as the Barlow sisters are firmly resistant to what they see as the moral failings of the modern world.

53 All Bible quotations are from the New International Version; although this is not the most scholarly of translations, it is most popular among BattleCry users, and hopefully will therefore elucidate their interpretations most effectively.

Hunter’s observations apply aptly to the next line, in which Lauren scoffs, “Chasing after boys is not my thing – see, I’m waiting for a wedding ring.” Teenage dating is painted here as an act of desperation; self-indulgent and hedonistic girls chase after boys in an attempt to achieve romantic bliss, something BarlowGirl stresses is not available during one’s teenage years. The song’s first musical climax, as it were, is at “wedding ring”; all three women sing in harmony, and the phrase is stretched out, creating a rather epic moment – the obtaining of the wedding ring, while placed in the future, is still cause for much awe and anticipation.

The chorus of “Average Girl” displays a stunning array of stylistic contradictions. While the innocent listener is enjoying BarlowGirl’s hard rock aesthetic and rebellious tone, it suddenly hits: BarlowGirl is shouting about waiting. Preferably, sleeping while waiting: “No more dating, I’m just waiting. Like Sleeping Beauty, my prince will come to me … ‘cause God is writing my love story.” Despite their independent rocker chick appearance, the Barlow sisters are, they would have you know, sleeping princesses, passively waiting for God to send their princes. The concept of teenage girls as God’s princesses is ubiquitous on BattleCry, and finds its biblical basis in John 1:12: “Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.” Indeed, BattleCry suggests that we meditate on this verse when we need to remember that “I am a prince (princess) in God’s kingdom.”

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God is King; we are his children; ergo, we are princesses and princes. As royalty, we – or at least, we females – are also exempt from having to do any work towards finding our intended, as one BattleCry blogger points out: “I love you tons princess. You are exactly right, God has a prince coming for you, so you don’t need to do ANY of the work. Just wait. Wait on the Lord, not on your prince.”\(^\text{56}\) Note the interesting bit of doublethink here; as a good Christian girl, you are supposed to wait passively for your prince to arrive, but he too has little agency in this interaction – he may be the one approaching on a white horse, but God put him in the saddle. Meeting your future spouse is entirely orchestrated by God – no one is allowed to take undue initiative.

This idea also conveniently lends itself to the very twentieth-century conception of the princess, sponsored by Disney; as God’s/Walt’s princesses in a modern world, we are pure, beautiful, patient, and can expect to be discovered at the climactic moment of our lives by our one true love, whom we will be able to identify as such within five minutes. Just like Disney princesses, BarlowGirl fans know that true love will be \textit{first} love – there are no jaded Prince Charmings in Cinderella’s past, and neither should there be in yours.

BarlowGirl makes it clear through their lyrics and musical stylings that they view their stance on dating as radical and rebellious; rock music has here been appropriated and re-channeled to better worship God. However, the actions,

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or lack thereof, that they prescribe for evangelical girls in place of dating are hard to imagine as defiant:

To be sure, both boys and girls are encouraged to see the commitment to chastity as a means of rebelling against peer pressure and the prosex attitudes of mainstream society, but since conservative ideas about masculinity and femininity remain very much in place in evangelical culture, it may be harder for girls to see themselves as rebellious.\footnote{Heather Hendershot, \textit{Shaking the World for Jesus: Media and Conservative Evangelical Culture} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 106.}

Fighting against society’s influences in order to emulate Sleeping Beauty is hardly the most coherent of worldviews for BattleCry girls; after all, they are constantly being encouraged to enlist in God’s army, create a battle plan, and become a \textit{“warrior in the army of God.”}\footnote{Luce and Guzzardo, \textit{Battle Cry}, 124.} However, within BattleCry’s framework, submission to God’s plan \textit{is} radical; stating that \textit{“God is writing my love story,”} while relinquishing your own power over your life, disavows any earthly power’s hold on your life.

Many aspects of evangelical culture emphasize submission as the key to a happy life, especially for women. In her examination of Aglow Women’s Fellowship, R. Marie Griffith chronicles how submission to God’s will can be seen as an active step in making one’s life better: \textit{“Through prayer she experienced a change – first in her attitude and second in her circumstances – that eradicated the suffering. Surrendering to God, these stories tell us, leads to}}
freedom from depression, guilt, and hostility; submission brings victory."59 The attitude of “let go and let God” handle your affairs, though based in submission, creates a sense of liberty for many evangelical women; God will take care of you if only you let Him.

BattleCry member MaryAnne reflected this enthusiasm for radical submission in a blog entry of October 2006, written when she was a sophomore in high school; maintaining purity is an exciting challenge, and the rewards make it worth every second:

Well here I am again, to encourage you guys this time basically to stay pure. Pure in body, pure in mind, pure in heart. Its important. Im excited for the day when God will bring my Prince (probably not riding in on a horse) and we will live happily-ever-after…well…we will be in unity with God and with eachother. Its important to pray for your future spouse and for yourself that way you can stay intune with God and will be on the right track when they come for you.60

Instead of something to be passively maintained, purity is figured as something for which you have to fight – secular forces are constantly threatening God’s hold on you, and sinful influences are everywhere. In his guidebook for teens, Ron Luce tries to galvanize BattleCry readers against the pervasive grip of the media: “Doesn’t it make you mad to think that someone’s trying to talk you into choosing life-destroying behaviors? Think about your future husband or wife – right now the same thing is being done to him or her. And why? So people can

make money.” Adherence to God’s commands sets Christian teens apart from the crowd, opposing them, in Luce’s eyes, to evil corporations; maintaining one’s purity is a full-time job, and one, as we shall see, specifically assigned to girls.

Section II: Superchick and Male Accountability

Superchick is a Christian band from Chicago that has achieved moderate mainstream success in the last few years – some of their songs have been featured in movies such as *Legally Blonde* and *Nancy Drew* and television series such as *Brothers & Sisters*. Featuring male/female vocals and incorporating different genres, such as punk rock and rap, into their rock music, Superchick sings about clean and safe topics that are not usually overtly Christian. “Song 4 Tricia (Princes and Frogs),” however, despite not mentioning God or Christianity, sends a message similar to “Average Girl” – kisses should be saved for one’s intended, and not wasted in youth.

“Song 4 Tricia” is sung primarily by Superchick’s male vocalist, and is explicitly addressed to girls, particularly those frustrated by the immaturity of their male peers; Superchick advises these girls to restrain themselves and be patient, because teenage boys are quite literally nothing more than animals: “All princes start as frogs, and all gentlemen as dogs. Just wait ‘til it’s plain to see what we’re growing up to be. ‘Cause some frogs will still be frogs and some dogs will still be dogs, and some boys could become men – just don’t kiss us ‘til

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Luce and Guzzardo, *Battle Cry*, 42.
then!” Notice that there is no way to differentiate between the boys who will grow up and those who will remain animals – the good Christian boy is invisible in this scenario, and it is up to the Christian girl to determine who will become a man, because the boys themselves have no idea.

Male responsibility is completely excised from this version of teenage sexuality; even upstanding young men cannot be held at fault for their actions as teenagers. It is up to the girls to stave off hormonally induced advances and resist temptation until the boys have become men. Indeed, in both “Average Girl” and “Song 4 Tricia,” the lyrics address hatred of men and try to persuade the listener to put aside her grievances. BarlowGirl tries to simply deny the validity of negative feelings towards men: “Boys are bad, that’s certainly not true, ‘cause God is preparing one for you.” Men in “Average Girl” must be good, because one of them is your soulmate, which precludes bad behavior. Superchick, on the other hand, advocates that young Christian women turn the other cheek until puberty’s ravages are over: “You hate men is what you say, and I understand why you feel that way. All girls dream of a fairytale, but what you’ve got is a used car salesman trying to consume what’s wrong behind the smile and the song, and I’m not saying boys are not like that, but I think you should know that some of us will grow.” The lyrics explicitly state that even Christian boys, those who will someday “grow,” are likely to deceive girls into kissing them (or more!) when they are still “frogs.” Girls are expected to act like women once they turn thirteen, but boys are given a great deal of leeway and even painted as incapable of basic humanity while under the influence of raging
hormones. Some bloggers appear to think that teenage boys are in fact the only ones with hormones. CRYSTALxROSE, while complaining about the amount of swearing at her middle school, offers those pesky chemical reactions as the excuse for male classmates’ behavior:

Is this kinda thing hormones or something? … I’m pretty sure that it’s dignity or respect [that stops some from cursing] but, if that’s it, then what’s stopping the vast majority of them from doing the same? … I know that girls also have their freaky moments but, to me, it’s the guys who show it more often. I think it’s hormones, but I dunno…

While Crystal is most likely aware that girls are under the influence of hormones as well, boys are the ones whose behavior is excused by them – the girls are figured as above such pressures. Indeed, in the evangelical worldview, it appears that the only hormonal changes girls go through are physical – female sexual desire is absent from all of these discussions regarding chastity, as all of the challenge in maintaining your virginity comes from convincing boyfriends to wait until marriage.

The maturity ascribed to girls by Superchick is not merely a compliment rehashing cultural beliefs about the varying stages of development; if anything happens to jeopardize the purity of either party, it is the girl who is to blame: “The frog you’ve got seems cute enough to kiss, and maybe frogs seems like that’s all there is… And what if your prince comes riding in while you’re kissing the frog, what’s he gonna think then?” Christian girls are here explicitly being told that if they kiss the wrong boy, they will endanger and potentially ruin their

future happiness with the man destined to be their husband – they had a chance for eternal bliss with a prince, and spoiled it by taking momentary pleasure in the company of a frog.

Ron Luce gives a similarly chilling warning to teens in *Battle Cry for My Generation*. In a sense, if you know what he’s talking about, it’s already too late: “Perhaps you can relate to these young people who have learned too much, too early, by their exposure to secondhand sex. Their minds have been violated, and they have lost the innocence and purity that God intended only for intimacy in marriage.”63 “Song 4 Tricia,” despite its first impression as a happy ditty poking fun at boys’ immaturity, completely absolves males, even the Christians, of sexual responsibility: “So look into his eyes – are you a princess or a fly?” Until maturity, boys are only capable of looking at girls as “flies” to be consumed.

This focus on female sexuality as invisible yet always to blame is reflected throughout modern evangelical culture. Purity balls, father-daughter dances in which the daughter makes a public vow to save her virginity for marriage, are a growing trend across the United States – significantly, these are only for young Christian women, despite the fact that it is young men who are figured in the cultural imagination as the “dogs” most willing to engage in premarital sex. Many accuse these events and the cultural atmosphere at large of further commodifying women’s sexuality – female virginity is a prize to be given to her husband by her father as a reward for finding a virtuous Christian girl: “When you sign a pledge to your father to preserve your virginity, your

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63 Luce and Guzzardo, *Battle Cry*, 41.
sexuality is basically being taken away from you until you sign yet another contract, a marital one. It makes you feel like you’re the least important person in the whole equation. It makes you feel invisible.”\(^{64}\) While Eve Ensler’s statement is more than a bit unfair – she has never taken a virginity pledge, and should not be making statements as to how they make girls feel – she hits on an important point regarding female sexuality. Sexual desire is, in fact, supposed to be invisible for these girls; your virginity is something you should safeguard, and patiently watch over, until the day when the right man will kindly take it off your hands for you. Again, sexual desire never enters the picture.

Purity balls are usually a strictly father-daughter affair; examining some of the events that various organizations have thrown for teenage boys as an analog is quite illuminating. The Christian Center of Peoria, IL, for example, holds a father-son event called “The Journey”; instead of discussing the importance of the son’s virginity, however, the night focuses on “encourag[ing] men in the areas of faith, integrity, responsibility, purity, and leadership. The evening will challenge them to hold high moral values in the midst of a culture that destroys such values.”\(^{65}\) Men are supposed to instruct their sons on how to live righteous Christian lives – how to gain agency and take action in an unfriendly world. Their daughters, however, must remember that they do not have agency, or at least, are not supposed to use it: “The Bible lays the

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responsibility of protecting daughters at the feet of their fathers. We desire to charge men to take up this mantle of responsibility!" While young men are learning how to become leaders and moral citizens, their sisters are being taught to be stewards of their own sexuality, keeping their virginity unblemished until its true owner returns.

Some of the bloggers at BattleCry have clearly absorbed the message that they are responsible for everybody’s purity during their teenage years. Thexdreamer, a senior in high school from Aurora, Colorado, writes about how guilty she feels about a male friend’s infatuation with her: “I am truly a hypocrite. I’m always the one that says that my charming prince will come someday and that I’m not going to date until I find him. There’s this boy at school. I only like him as a friend. He seems to think otherwise. I’m the most horrible person I know.” Thexdreamer states clearly that she has no romantic intentions towards her friend, and his interest is unrequited – yet still, his attraction towards her means she is a hypocrite who is putting her and her friend’s future marriages in jeopardy. It seems that the very fact that her friend is attracted to her means she has been unintentionally leading him on. Although everyone is to maintain their virginity, it is the girls who are responsible for removing temptation from themselves and others. The temporary desexualizing of the (Christian) male is never even attempted.

Section III: Southpaw and the Mook

A prime example of “appropriate” channeling of Christian male sexuality is Dan “Southpaw” Smith’s “Baby Got Book,” a parody of the extremely popular early-nineties rap song by Sir Mixalot, “Baby Got Back.” Yes, that’s right – Southpaw has just replaced butts with Bibles. The parody is extremely well done; his lyrics fit precisely into the original song, relating back to them at key points, and the music video is an enlightening accompaniment. A side-by-side comparison of certain lines is quite illuminating. For example, “when a girl walks in with an itty bitty waist and a round thing in your face you get sprung” is replaced with “when a girl walks in with a KJV [King James Version] and a bookmark in Proverbs you get stoked”; “that butt was stuffed” becomes “that girl is saved”; and “36-24-36, only if she’s 5’3” is now “39 plus 27 equals 66 books – and if you’re Catholic, there’s even more!” In each of these instances, sexual language regarding the ideal female body is substituted by an example of extreme holiness – instead of being attracted to a shapely bottom, the men to whom Southpaw’s version of the song speaks are supposed to pine after a girl who knows her Bible.

Southpaw shows a familiarity with and understanding of the lyrics to an extremely racy song, by evangelical Christian standards; his listeners are assumed to have a basic familiarity with the song as well – in fact, they need to in order to understand all the jokes. Over and over again, Mixalot’s lines that

68 I highly, highly recommend that readers view the official music video for this song before continuing – it is well produced and adds a lot to the understanding of the lyrics and the depiction of Christian male sexuality. The video can be found at http://youtube.com/watch?v=tTYr3JuueF4.
emphasize his lust for physical attributes are replaced with lines emphasizing Southpaw’s lust for piety. Male sexuality cannot be erased as easily as female sexuality, it can only be funneled into more holy manifestations – and even then, it is a transparent stand-in, because everyone knows what he really means. In the end, “Baby Got Book” is still a song objectifying women with a certain characteristic, and male sexuality is still uncontrollable when presented with its favorite fetish.

The same underlying message of girls saving boys from themselves discussed above is apparent in Southpaw’s music video. In the call and response sections, the men are asked if their girlfriends got the Book (“Oh yeah!”), while the women are asked if they want to save people from Hades (“Oh yeah!”) – once again, the women are saving the men, while the men are just proud that they have acquired such pious girlfriends. Furthermore, the female lead is featured as constantly instructing Southpaw, who is infantilized – first she points out pictures to him in her illustrated Bible, and later she applauds him when he correctly places Bible figures on a felt board. The idea of women keeping men in line is prevalent throughout evangelical culture; in fact, women need to take on submissive roles in order to restrain their men’s behavior: “Her [a Christian self-help author’s] claim – that the doctrine of submission is ultimately beneficial to women – gets added energy from the belief that men’s natural passions need to be domesticated and contained; left unchecked, these passions will rage out of control and may cause injury to women.”

69 Griffith, Daughters, 180.
submissive at all times in order to *control* their husbands; without women’s contributions, apparently, it is unlikely whether men could maintain a Christian lifestyle at all.

For example, Southpaw’s motivations are not always clearly holy in nature. He asks the female lead to “bless me, bless me, and teach me about John Wesley” – with all these requests for teaching coming from someone who is educated enough to make puns regarding *koinonia*, we might suspect that ulterior motives are in play. Indeed, Southpaw successfully puts his arm around the female lead’s shoulder without her noticing, and then squirms with pride; yet again, the men’s behavior hasn’t changed, just what they find so attractive.

Southpaw even contends that he will greet Christian girls with “some holy kissin’”, a claim which he immediate follows with, “Some pervert tried to chase, but he didn’t make it past first base [generally understood as French kissing].” Though the “pervert” and Southpaw are performing the exact same action in this scene, the difference supposedly lies in the fact that Southpaw’s kissin’ is holy.

When Southpaw flirts with the female lead, there is nothing naughty about the woman’s behavior, as mischievous attitudes towards female sexuality tend not to exist in evangelical thought: “Both boys and girls may be instructed to control their bodies, but boys have more opportunities to blow off steam. Girls, conversely, must remain contained.”

Therefore, in Southpaw’s video, the female lead does not even notice Southpaw’s flirtation; she cannot possibly, for

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70 Hendershot, *Shaking*, 107.
acknowledging its presence would be acknowledging that she has failed in her duty to deflect male attentions.

Interestingly, Southpaw’s character in the video is typical of the “mook,” a pop culture depiction of young men that BattleCry criticizes vehemently: “You can find [the mook] almost any hour of the day or night somewhere on MTV. He’s not real. He’s a character – crude, loud, obnoxious, and in-your-face. …He is arrested in adolescence.”71 Although Southpaw is obsessed with the Bible instead of, say, jokes about flatulence, he is still very much the same character template, and is attempting to appeal to the same demographics. Inanely pleased with himself for snagging the perfect evangelical Christian girlfriend, Southpaw’s character is depicted as bumbling his way towards love; just as in depictions of the mook in secular culture, we have no idea why such a flawless woman would entertain the notion of dating a slob like Southpaw.

Heather Hendershot notes that an exaggerated version of masculinity such as the mook is common when discussing premarital male sexuality; because young men are not allowed to enact the stereotype of a “real man” as a promiscuous stud, they must overcompensate:

Ironically, in order to control the male body, to save it from its own heterosexual aggression, that body must be constructed as aggressively heterosexual and masculine. Thus, ‘natural’ heterosexual gender roles are maintained in spite of a constant attempt to control and reconstruct ‘natural urges.’72

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72 Hendershot, Shaking, 93.
Though of course Southpaw’s character would never overtly try to have sex with the female lead before marriage, he must still constantly flirt with her in order to maintain his masculinity in the face of his virginity.

The double standard for male and female behavior is especially clear at the intersection between the “Mooks and Midriffs” article and “Baby Got Book”; Southpaw specifically denigrates his female counterpart: “So I’m sittin’ here thinkin’ what if I find me a girl that shows midriff? You can have those bimbos, I’ll keep those chicks that do devos.” The female violation of what an evangelical is supposed to look like is far more serious than a male violation – Christian boys can still fool around, play immature pranks, and make mistakes, but Christian girls are allowed no room for error. Even the introduction to the female lead shows her being perfectly righteous while Southpaw is engaging in what looks like secular fun: “I saw her prayin’ while I was DJing.” Every little thing the Christian girl does must be explicitly righteous. The safeguarding of their purity extends past the bedroom and into everyday life; not only must she remain a virgin, but she must be obviously Christian in every aspect of her behavior, or else.

BattleCry is an illustrative example of how evangelicals are adapting to and profiting from the new technology and communications offered by the Internet. Yet, as is always the risk when adjusting to new systems, some ideas stressed in previous incarnations of evangelicalism are fading out, while others are coming to the forefront. Shane Hipps warns Christians against taking their quest for relatability too far:
The danger in pursuing the holy grail of relevance is that we become chameleons, morphing into whatever colors our culture puts before us. We run the risk of inadvertently camouflaging the very aspects of the gospel that should remain visible. ...In the process we lose our distinctive identity as a penetrating contrast to society in the world. If we are truly faithful to the gospel and authentic in our identity as the people of God, we will inevitably betray aspects of cultural irrelevance.73

Does Southpaw’s parody of popular culture come too close and relate too strongly to secular life? In turning a song about women’s body parts into a song about piety, Southpaw may have lost more of the Gospel message in translation than he intended.

BattleCry’s blogs act as a microcosm of evangelical popular culture – simply by linking or referencing those songs, videos, and bands that resonate most with them, BattleCry bloggers provide invaluable information as to what messages make sense to evangelical teenagers. The messages that are being offered to girls, however, are remarkably different from those offered to boys; while boys may play around with their chastity, still able to verbalize the lust they feel, girls are placed in the paradoxical roles of passive princesses and responsible defenders of purity. The potential sexual desire of Christian girls is never directly addressed; they are simply told to wait, and that is enough. However, many of the female bloggers take pride in their submission to God’s will that they remain chaste; despite an apparent lack of agency, power can be found in obeying the rules:

Conservative evangelical women who believe that their true liberation is found in voluntary submission to divine authority consider this a bold surrender, an act of assuming the crucial role

God has called women to play in the making of history, especially in these critical ‘last days.’

Whether waiting for your prince with BarlowGirl or affirming that your father is in control of your sexuality, many teenage evangelical girls find that surrendering agency to a divinely ordained authority figure is a logical and empowering action. I note this primarily to point out that evangelical culture cannot be seen so simply as women without power and men in control; as I have shown, the playing field is far more complex than a simple division like that, with women figured as both actively responsible for everyone’s chastity while simultaneously leaving their future marriages to their heavenly and earthly fathers. While roles for young women and men may be strictly laid out in some regards, the power exchanges within evangelical culture constantly interweave.

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74 Griffith, Daughters, 199.
Chapter Four

Secondhand Sex: Battle Cry and Pornography

The fight against pornography and oversexualized mainstream American culture takes up a great deal of BattleCry’s energies. In Battle Cry for My Generation, Ron Luce bemoans the sexual imagery he finds everywhere on television, in movies, and on the Internet, tellingly describing the phenomenon as “secondhand sex”:

Even if you don’t want to look at it, you can’t help it. Just try to buy something at the grocery store without having sexual images forced on you by the magazines at the checkout stand. Like secondhand smoke, these images invade our public places and private spaces. Whether you like it or not you can’t get away from it because it’s all around you.75

In this chapter, I examine the language BattleCry uses to discuss pornography and evangelical culture in relation to it, and I argue that their rhetorical strategies and arguments reveal many trends currently popular in the evangelical mainstream, primarily a superficial embrace of “liberal” styles of debate. Using the language of civil rights, feminism, and yes, even science, BattleCry presents a thoroughly modernized Christianity, modified to be intelligible and attractive to all.

75 Luce and Guzzardo, Battle Cry, 38.
Section I: The Proper Place of Sex

Evangelical Christians have certainly taken a very public attitude towards pornography and sex over the last three decades. Most notably, Christians made uneasy alliances with some radical feminists in the 1980s in an attempt to pass anti-pornography legislation; while both sides agreed that pornography as an industry was an evil that must be stopped, their reasons for believing so, and even their definitions of what makes something pornographic, were vastly different: “To Jerry Falwell … pornography means dirty movies, whereas to [Andrea] Dworkin it means representations of sexually explicit violent attacks upon women by men.” Yet pornography meant more than just “dirty movies” to Christians of the time – it was a real threat to American society, which was (and is) in danger of complete moral collapse. Jerry Falwell, as quoted in Susan Harding’s anthropological study of conservative Christian rhetoric, uses warlike imagery to describe Christians’ opposition:

I believe as we trust in God and pray, as we Christians lead the battle … as we take our stand against pornography … we stand up for strong national defense so that this country can survive and our children and our children’s children will know the America we’ve known.

BattleCry, years later, continues to refer to anti-pornography efforts as a war, in keeping with their militaristic theme discussed in previous chapters; however, what exactly pornography is out to destroy has changed somewhat:

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I have heard people say that companies like MTV ‘care about teens’ and ‘understand what teens are going through.’ They don’t care about you! All they want is to take your money. They couldn’t care less that what they are pushing may destroy your future and the future of your husband- or wife-to-be.78

Instead of emphasizing the total destruction of America, potentially through the wrath of God, Luce emphasizes the destruction of the innocent teenage mind. Furthermore, BattleCry declares that exposure to pornography – i.e., bad sex – can and will ruin your future marriage – i.e., good sex. This claim is particularly potent in the current culture of what I like to call marital-sex-positive Christianity.

In what can be seen as an attempt to relate to a post-sexual-revolution society, many Christian self-help authors have come out with books intended to enhance the sex lives of married Christians. Even a cursory glance through Amazon.com’s Christianity section reveals such titles as *Sex God: Exploring the Endless Connections Between Sexuality and Spirituality,* *A Celebration of Sex: A Guide to Enjoying God’s Gift of Sexual Intimacy,* and *The Gift of Sex: A Guide to Sexual Fulfillment.* As the titles of these books suggest, there is a concerted effort to link Christians’ sex lives with their spiritual lives, and indeed to make them indistinguishable. These authors refer to sex as God’s gift to married couples, claiming that true sexual fulfillment can only be found in a Christian marriage:

Josh McDowell, a traveling evangelist for Campus Crusade for Christ, talks about sex and prayer as two dimensions of the same experience, and Peter Gardella, a scholar who examined

78 Luce and Guzzardo, *Battle Cry,* 42.
conservative Christian sexual ethics in *Innocent Ecstasy*, argues that Christianity gave America an ethic of sexual pleasure.\(^{79}\)

While Ron Luce does not tell his teenage audience specifically about the pleasures of the wedding night, the implication is certainly there – God wants you and your intended to enjoy a sexually healthy marriage, and this oversexualized culture of ours can destroy that idyllic future. In the marital-sex-positive world of modern evangelical Protestantism, pornography is the opposite of godly sex, a twisted version of the holy experience to be found in the marriage bed.

**Section II: The Right to Live Without Pornography**

The rhetorical devices Luce employs when discussing the effects of pornography deserve more examination. Again and again, he emphasizes the unfairness of modern culture and its effect on the average well-meaning Christian:

> I hope you’re beginning to see the trap that is being laid out for you. …So when finally an e-mail comes that allows you to see a porn site, you have already been baited and are ripe to become addicted.\(^{80}\)

> Doesn’t it make you mad to think that someone’s trying to talk you into choosing life-destroying behaviors? Think about you future husband or wife – right now the same thing is being done to him or her. And why? So people can make money.\(^{81}\)

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\(^{79}\) Weaver, “Pornography,” 71-72.
\(^{80}\) Luce and Guzzardo, *Battle Cry*, 43.
\(^{81}\) Ibid., 42.
Luce is employing language that suggests victimhood, a community of Christians abused and oppressed by the oversexed culture of America. He insinuates a corporate conspiracy to cause premarital sex, divorces, and even suicide, and tells young Christian soldiers that they must fight for their right to lead holy lives. His rhetoric is reminiscent of civil rights speeches that called foul on racist American policies, exposing systems of oppression within American society. Countering claims that could be made about free speech, Luce essentially states that his rights are more important than his opponents’: “I have often thought, Don’t I have the right to take my daughter to the mall without somebody’s lingerie ‘secret’ – and crude vision of womanhood – being imprinted on her brain? Shouldn’t you have the right to grow up in a clean environment?”82 Luce claims that if his rights are favored, the benefit to all, including young people unable to morally fend for themselves, will be worth the limitation of free speech or freedom of the press. Just as, for those opposed to abortion, the fetus’s right to life surpasses the woman’s right to choose, Luce wants us to reconsider whose rights are really being violated when sex is everywhere in American culture. As University of Nevada, Las Vegas, political science professor Ted G. Jelen points out,

Most frequently, religious conservatives have used the language of rights to justify some of their policy preferences. The general strategy is to suggest that the advancement of Christian Right policy positions involves the protection of other individual rights which may compete with, or indeed, may supersede, rights

82 Ibid., 58.
claimed by those whose behavior is outside the bounds of “moral traditionalism.”

Adopting “rights-based” speech may seem an unlikely choice for a community traditionally viewed as in opposition to many “rights-based” movements, such as feminism and the LGBT movement. However, I propose that the use of this language is part of the modernizing trend in evangelical culture that BattleCry exemplifies; personal rights are a powerful trope in American society, and Luce’s emphasis on the right to live a pornography-free life is an attempt to connect with this strongly individualistic value.

Just in case readers or lawmakers are not convinced by the right of every person never to be exposed to pornography, BattleCry’s literature emphasizes the effect of pornography on preteens and even younger children. Examining the effects of the Internet, television, and ubiquitous advertising, Ron Luce tells his readers that no matter how hard they try, their children or younger siblings will be exposed to sexual imagery, even hardcore pornography, on a frequent basis: “Family Safe Media reports that 80 percent of 15- to 17-year-olds have had multiple hard-core porn exposures. And 90 percent of 8- to 16-year-olds have viewed porn online (most while doing homework).” Note the emphasis on “while doing homework” – perhaps to alert parents that even if they restrict the Internet to academic pursuits, their children are still not safe?

84 Ibid., 312.
85 Luce and Guzzardo, *Battle Cry*, 43.
Having confirmed that there is no way to safeguard yourself or your loved ones from pornography, Luce hopes to stir his Christian readers into action – they can no longer assure themselves that their efforts will be enough to shield their children from corrupting forces, as technology is outpacing them. Once the idea of protecting the young has been established, Luce’s anti-pornography stance is much more amenable to the American mindset. American culture does not take kindly to the corruption or exploitation of those who cannot fend for themselves:

[C]ulturally conservative policy positions are often justified by arguing that the activities religious conservatives seek to regulate do not fall within the rubric of self-regarding actions, but can have negative effects on preadults, who are presumably lacking the cognitive resources necessary to combat such influences.86

The right of children to maintain their innocence tends to trump, in the American mind, the right of free speech, at least when the issue at hand is pornographic or sexually explicit material.

Section III: Conservatism in the Guise of Feminism

As discussed earlier, evangelical Christians are not the only people concerned about the effects of pornography; many feminists problematize pornography for its overtly sexist aspects. To oversimplify an issue that deserves, and has received, theses and books of its own, much of mainstream pornography raises issues of violence towards and degradation and humiliation of women: “Heightened social concern about both domestic violence and sexual

abuse has led frequently to indictments of pornography for its alleged contribution to the decline of civility and respect – especially toward women.**87**

As some of the basic tenets of feminism (or, at least, watered down versions of the same) have made their way into the cultural mainstream, evangelicals have used pseudo-feminist arguments for many of their own causes. I refer to their arguments as “pseudo-feminist” because, as we shall see, feminist terms are thrown into unrelated arguments as a sort of lip service to feminism’s accomplishments; however, merely acknowledging that something is harmful to women does not a feminist make.

BattleCry certainly takes the trappings of feminist critiques of pornography and uses them as more supporting evidence for the evils of the industry. Ron Luce, citing two 1988 studies, both authored by Dolf Zillman and Jennings Bryant, asserts that pornography of any sort provokes violence against women:

Think about this, researchers found that after exposing college men to many presentations of non-violent or “soft” erotoxins over only a six-week period, these formally [sic] “normal” college males: Developed an increased callousness toward women, and would trivialize rape, while some rejected the idea that rape is a crime; Needed more deviant, bizarre, or violent types of pornography because normal sex no longer excited; Devalued marriage, doubted it would last, viewed having multiple sex partners as normal and healthy behavior.88

While people from various political and social positions have argued over the years that pornography causes violence towards women, Luce specifically notes

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here that the men in the study watched “soft,” “non-violent” pornography. This statement points to the primary difference between feminist and Christian critiques of pornography – whereas feminists object to pornography primarily due to the degradation of women, “treating them as sexual objects or representing them engaged in sexual practices that might be considered humiliating,”89 most socially conservative Christians base their arguments on the depiction and enactment of sex outside marriage, and, of course, the viewing of other people engaging in such acts.

Additionally, Luce implies that the pornography the students in the study were shown was particularly innocuous, as porn goes – however, in the abstract to the study, the authors describe the pornography shown as “common,” as well as “non-violent.”90 Considering the problematic status of “common” pornography, this leads me to believe that the alleged lack of violence is a quite literal interpretation, i.e., there were no depictions of rape or physical abuse in the films shown. However, this does not necessarily meet all standards of what “non-violent” pornography entails; much of the violence in pornography is more to do with the power relations depicted, “the coercion of a less powerful person by a more powerful one.”91 It is certainly feasible that such representations would have the observed effect of making the subjects “less [satisfied] with their intimate partners – specifically, with these partners’ affection, physical

89 Mielke, Christians, 8.
91 Mielke, Christians, 9.
appearance, sexual curiosity, and sexual performance proper.” Yet Luce implies, through his talk of “erotoxins” (a point on which I will elaborate further later), that it is simply the effect of seeing erotic images, any erotic images, that provoked the subjects’ dissatisfaction with their partners.

Finally, the alleged trivialization of rape is only one of three negative effects – Luce also denigrates “bizarre,” “deviant” sex, and notes the lack of trust in marriage. Pornography, then, is not a threat to women per se – it is a threat to the status quo and the ideal of Christian marriage. Despite a thin coating of feminist concern, what Luce is really worried about is pornography’s destruction of marriage as the proper space to contain all sexual relations.

Luce is not the only source of anger towards an oversexed culture on BattleCry. Battlecry.com’s introductory pages, in which they describe their purpose and their mission, cite statistic after statistic regarding teens and their corrupting culture: “This generation views 16 to 17 hours of television each week and sees on average 14,000 sexual scenes and references each year. That’s more than 38 references a day.” Specific companies and products are attacked as well; again, the language of feminism is co-opted and used to make their points more effective and attractive. In an uncredited diatribe against Axe body spray and its overtly sexual commercials, the author throws in one line about Axe’s disrespect towards women:

This type of sexualized advertising fuels lustful fantasies among young men and encourages sexual behavior. It serves as a gateway to further involvement in pornography. Furthermore, through this

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92 Zillman and Bryant, “Impact,” 438.
93 BattleCry, “Magnitude.”
a type of advertising, women are reduced to objects of sexual gratification.\textsuperscript{94}

Obviously, the real concern here is the “lustful fantasies” Axe commercials could inspire among viewers – whereas an exposé of the impure thoughts Axe causes is the main thrust of the article, the acknowledgement of the objectification of women is thrown in almost as an obligation. But the influence of feminist modes of thought and language is still present, and could potentially be used to build modern-day alliances with feminists, who also have many problems with Axe’s commercials.\textsuperscript{95}

Other than the last sentence quoted above, there is no mention of the effect Axe’s commercials may have on women; the article focuses on the message sent to young men, namely that seducing absurd numbers of women is a desirable and feasible action. BattleCry’s focus on Axe warping men’s minds is particularly jarring when one considers that in most of their advertisements, women are uncontrollably drawn to men wearing Axe – in some cases ripping their clothes off, pushing them onto beds, or spraying whipped cream all over themselves. One commercial goes so far as to mock sexual assault by publishing “warnings” of “women … becoming sexual predators when they get a whiff of


\textsuperscript{95} The following links are articles from a feminist blog, all criticizing various Axe advertisements or commercials. An example: a print ad with the text “Imagine the power of Axe” and a picture of Hillary Clinton wearing an Obama pin (http://feministing.com/archives/008587.html); other problematic ads can be found at http://feministing.com/archives/007636.html and http://feministing.com/archives/005874.html.
Yet the only mention of women in BattleCry’s article is an offhand comment that they are being objectified. As I discussed in Chapter Three, BattleCry, and evangelical culture at large, constantly deny the fact that women, particularly teenagers, have hormones and could desire sex. That omission is particularly visible in their attack on Axe – perhaps the most defining characteristic of Axe’s advertisements, women filled with uncontrollable lust, has been left out.

**Section IV: Science and the Modern Evangelical**

Modern evangelicals have also begun to use language associated with an area they are famous for avoiding – science. The usual timeline of 20\textsuperscript{th} century conservative Christian history starts with the Scopes Trial, the embarrassment of the fundamentalists, and their move “underground.” They did not return to the public spotlight until the 1970s, with the Moral Majority and the rush to return America to an idealized past through political action. This conception of the Christian century has Christians fighting science at every turn – losing the Scopes trial, but fighting back in the 1970s, and still today, with requirements that intelligent design be taught alongside theories of evolution in the classroom. However, evangelicals today are not merely responding to textbooks with Bible passages – they are writing their own textbooks, and performing their own studies in order to give their theories scientific backing as well.\textsuperscript{97} In the popular


\textsuperscript{97} Jelen, “Esperanto,” 314.
documentary *Jesus Camp*, for example, a mother is seen homeschooling her son with a creationism-based textbook – when asked what the logical inconsistency is in the argument for global warming, he states that the temperature has only gone up .6 degrees, a correct answer according to his textbook.\(^98\) Scientific language and experiments are used to confirm Biblical claims that other, more commonly held scientific beliefs go against. According to Jelen,

> Religious conservatives have used modern, empirical, and rational methods to justify faith-based explanations, apparently (and, in my view, correctly) believing that there is greater agreement on the veracity of natural science in the United States than on the theological tenets of evangelical Protestantism.\(^99\)

Yet again, modern evangelicals are using language and methods that mainstream Americans trust to convince them of their theologically-based arguments.

Ron Luce is a prime example of the trend towards using scientific proof for evangelical ends. In *Battle Cry for My Generation*, he makes great use of the controversial pornography study by Dr. Judith Reisman. Reisman holds a Ph.D. in Communications, founded the Institute for Media Education, and is most well known for her accusations that Alfred Kinsey promoted sexual relations between children and adults.\(^100\) She has been called before the Senate as an “expert witness” on the topic of the science of pornography addiction\(^101\), and reports that pornography is physically, irreversible addictive:

\(^{98}\) Grady and Ewing, *Jesus Camp*.
\(^{100}\) Dr. Judith Reisman, “Dr. Judith Reisman – About Dr. Reisman,” viewed 10 April 2008 (http://www.drjudithreisman.com/about_dr_reisman.html).
\(^{101}\) Ibid.
Almost all teens have had exposure to sexual images and most are exposed on a repeated basis. Each time this happens, your mind is actually restructured through pornography’s “erotoxins.” Erotoxins is [sic] a type of brain poisoning. … In case you didn’t catch it, Dr. Reisman was saying that every single time you view pornography, whether it is “soft-core” or “hard-core,” it changes your brain in a negative way and brings you closer to addiction.  

Reisman claims that exposure to any erotic image produces hormones in the brain, the combination of which result in an addictive cocktail that permanently change the structure of one’s mind. The importance of this argument for Luce and other theological conservatives is hard to overstate – not only can Reisman’s work be used to argue against pornography itself, but her thesis that any erotic imagery will have this result can be applied to advertisements, television programs, and other media Luce considers equivalent to “soft-core” pornography.

Luce applies a similar neurology-based argument to premarital sex:

It has also been proven that during intercourse a “bonding” hormone called oxytocin is triggered. Oxytocin basically works to attach the lovers more deeply to one another. Since God intended sexual intercourse for marriage, this “bonding” hormone serves as something that creates a special bond that no other relationship has. Over the course of time as this bond continues to grow it enhances the intimacy that a husband and wife will experience. But one’s capacity for this special bonding is weakened by having sex with multiple partners or by repeated self-stimulation to pornographic images. This road leads to many intimacy problems, including impotence. 

Luce seamlessly integrates theological and scientific language in order to prove, in effect, that you don’t have enough love to go around. In this framework, God

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103 Ibid., 54.
created oxytocin for just one purpose, and if you waste it on the wrong person or pornographic image, you will never be able to perform adequately in your future marriage. Both emotional and sexual performance are destroyed by this waste of oxytocin, apparently, and you will be both medically unable to perform because of the debilitating influence of erotoxins, and emotionally unable to perform due to the endless loop of pornography playing in your mind whenever you are in a sexual situation with your spouse.\textsuperscript{104}

\textbf{Section V: A Constant Discourse}

For people convinced that pornography and sexual imagery in American culture is literally poisoning teenagers’ brains, BattleCry spends a great deal of time discussing pornography with its young members. When I attended the ReCreate festival in February 2008, nearly every speaker and performer, from T.D. Jakes to Nicky Cruz to Luce himself, made some reference to the scourge of pornography or the allure of premarital sex. Indeed, confessing the sins of one’s own flesh has become a predominant way to share one’s story of salvation.\textsuperscript{105} Popular gospel singer Kirk Franklin told the crowd at ReCreate of his own teenage struggles with pornography; later, when singing “How Great Is Our God,” he asked “only the perfect people” to sing, and cheered at the silence. Sharing one’s own failings and subsequent re dedications to the Lord are an important part of the “self-narration” of evangelical culture. This can be seen in the constant altar calls at revivals – most people who come forward to pray have

\textsuperscript{104} Ibid., 56.
\textsuperscript{105} Hendershot, Shaking, 97.
been “saved” before, but many evangelicals advocate a constant renewal of one’s promises to God.

Being honest and forthright with fellow Christians about the difficulties of living a righteous life is an integral part of modern evangelical practice, and discussion about sexual temptations is anything but left out:

[Most] media promoting chastity … teach viewers that they desperately need to talk about their sexual feelings. In fact, the evangelical invective to speak one’s sex is evocative of the forced ‘infinite task of telling’ sexuality that Michel Foucault speaks of in the first volume of The History of Sexuality.\textsuperscript{106}

Modern evangelicals have indeed nearly “transformed sex into discourse”\textsuperscript{107} – sins and potential temptations must be thoroughly examined, cataloged, and repented publicly, in order to assimilate the fleshly event into one’s overall story of salvation. As Foucault elegantly states, “Discourse, therefore, had to trace the meeting line of the body and the soul, following all its meanderings: beneath the surface of the sins, it would lay bare the unbroken nervure of the flesh.”\textsuperscript{108}

The constant damnation of pornography, exposition of its effects on the teenage mind, and revelations of everyone’s past transgressions serve as an attempt to demystify what evangelicals consider an illicit form of sexuality. If the monster is named then perhaps it will lose its power.

However, the constant discussion of sex surely raises curiosities in the minds of some BattleCry members; one blogger by the username of

\textsuperscript{106} Ibid., 97.
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid., 20.
CRYSTALxROSE angrily posts what appears to be a chain message on her BattleCry blog:

This may make you sick! Why do we sleep in church, but when the ceremony is over we suddenly wake up? Why is it so hard to talk about God, but so easy to talk about sex? Why are we so bored when we look at a Christian magazine, but find it easy to read Playboy? Why is it so easy to ignore a Godly myspace message, Yet we repost the nasty ones? Why are churches getting smaller, But bars and clubs are growing? Think about it, are you going to repost this? Are you going to ignore it, cause you think you’ll get laughed at? Just remember God is always watching you.¹⁰⁹

She titles this entry “Don’t read if you’re under 13,” implying that those who haven’t reached the maturity of their teenage years should be kept safe from talk of pornography, yet as Luce himself points out in his book, age restrictions on the Internet are easy to ignore or circumvent.¹¹⁰ Furthermore, there are no age minimums at BattleCry events, yet discussion of pornography and premarital sex was ubiquitous at ReCreate. At what point does the condemnation of pornography become an introduction to pornography? A conscientious Christian teen attempting not to think about sex until later in life may find ze has an impossible task ahead of hir: “Evangelicals strive to eliminate sex outside the boundaries of marriage, yet it is precisely outside these boundaries that discourses of sexuality propagate with reckless abandon. ... Prochastity teen media make ignoring sex impossible.”¹¹¹ Evangelical teens get caught in a cycle

¹¹⁰ Luce and Guzzardo, Battle Cry, 43.
¹¹¹ Hendershot, Shaking, 99.
of avoiding sex, being told how to avoid sex, transgressing somehow, and publicly repenting their sins and rededicating themselves to God.

If we return to CRYSTALxROSE’s blog entry for a moment, notice how the use of the pronoun “we” sticks out. “We” find it easy to talk about sex, “we” read Playboy instead of Christian magazines, and “we” pass on dirty jokes and e-mails. This choice of pronoun is not the wild accusation of a lone teenage Christian fanatic, but a reflection of the evangelical culture of “shared experience.” Evangelical leaders and motivational speakers make sure their listeners know that there is and was no such thing as a perfect person – except, of course, Jesus Christ. Believers can bond together in the face of constant sinning and redemption – we are all together in our imperfections. In fact, such constant falling into sin is essential to the evangelical outlook; no person is free of sin, and no act we can perform can possibly redeem us to God. The only route to salvation is accepting Jesus Christ as our Savior and asking his forgiveness. Many evangelicals advocate saying the “Sinner’s Prayer” at the moment of conversion as an expression of repentance:

Father, I know that I have broken your laws and my sins have separated me from you. I am truly sorry, and now I want to turn away from my past sinful life toward you. Please forgive me, and help me avoid sinning again. I believe that your son, Jesus Christ died for my sins, was resurrected from the dead, is alive, and hears my prayer. I invite Jesus to become the Lord of my life, to rule and reign in my heart from this day forward. Please send your

\[112\] Ibid., 97.
Holy Spirit to help me obey You, and to do Your will for the rest of my life. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.\footnote{Sinner-Prayer.com, “Sinner’s Prayer,” viewed 1 April 2008 (http://www.sinner-prayer.com). There are many versions of this prayer available in books and online, and most bear a strong resemblance to this one.}

This prayer can be modified to suit the Christian’s needs – Luce repeated prayers in much the same format throughout the ReCreate festival, asking specifically, for example, for people to rededicate themselves to Christ, be honest about whether they are called to go on mission trips, or to heal the pain of parents’ divorce. In each case, the prayer reminds the listeners of their constant state of sinfulness, yet urges them not to despair, because they have been saved by faith in Jesus. Like Kirk Franklin, they may rejoice in their imperfect nature.

Though some secular critics may find it hard to believe, Ron Luce and his evangelical compatriots are not out to demonize sex. Rather, they would argue that the current American culture demonizes sex, by taking it out of its proper context and turning God’s gift into a poison, ruining the future marriages and lives of Christians and non-Christians alike. Through assimilating the terms and basic rhetoric of rights-based discourse, feminism, and science, BattleCry hopes to make its point more compelling and evidently \textit{true} to an audience raised around such modes of speech. As Heather Hendershot argues, explicitly Christian language has gone out of fashion, both within and without Christian culture: “[Evangelicals] are rarely directly targeted as desirable consumers by the mass culture industry. Advertisements may sometimes be conservative and speak to old-fashioned values, but they rarely risk alienating non-born-agains by
using overtly Christian discourse.”\textsuperscript{114} Ergo, if your terminology is not drawing in the lost sheep, use your competitors’ language. By no means have evangelicalists abandoned Biblical language entirely, replacing theology with something more attractive to the masses; they have just linguistically adapted to the arguments most favored by mainstream American society.

\textsuperscript{114} Hendershot, \textit{Shaking}, 31.
Conclusion

In his letter introducing new visitors to the BattleCry website, Ron Luce stresses the importance of reaching out to young people, and their popular culture, in order to gain converts: “You may not spend that much time with teens or be familiar with their culture. But there is something you need to realize: the battle for teens’ hearts is real, and something must be done.”115 The effort to engage young people on their terms, with the elements of their popular culture, is certainly a purposeful one; Luce is involved in the effort to make Christianity cool again, relevant to the lives of its adherents at all ages. With the help of catchy pop-rock bands, overwhelming audiovisual experiences at their revival events, and, of course, their very own social networking site up to the high standards of Facebook or MySpace, BattleCry has made evangelical Christianity not only appealing, but the independent, rebellious alternative to mainstream society.

Luce goes on to warn the visitors about the slick enemies to be found everywhere in secular, and even Christian, life: “The battlefield that was once confined to the fringe of society is rapidly expanding. What started decades ago as the unthinkable has now made its way into mainstream culture and is even creeping into the church.”116 While, as we have seen, there are places where Luce does not shy away from naming his enemies, here he leaves it purposefully

116 Ibid.
vague – the enemy is attacking on many fronts, from drugs and alcohol to pornography to atheism. Luce stresses that these insidious forces are not merely decreasing the quality of life for those who disagree on a moral basis; the influence of the enemy is preventing people from reaching heaven and condemning them to an eternity in hell. As Luce emphasizes over and over again, it is a real battle, with real casualties – if not the death of the body, then the loss of the soul.

There is an interesting dichotomy, however, between the need to save teenagers and the need to militarize them. Teens are at once pictured as helpless victims of the culture wars, lost and confused by all the conflicting messages they receive, and as fearless soldiers who would throw their lives down for God if only they knew the Truth. Such seemingly contradictory images, however, are in line with other patterns seen above – namely, the idea that young Christian women are told to be simultaneously the active guardians of their own and their friends’ virginities and also passive recipients of the will of their father and then their husband. As I argued in Chapter Three, submission brings a sense of freedom to many of these women; likewise, teenagers as victims of modern culture can find release in becoming a soldier for God. As Luce says, “[The battle] is fierce and there are many casualties, but there is hope. There is a desire in teens for Truth. I have seen firsthand that once we show it to them, they grab it and run with amazing energy.”117 Once anger and despair at being victimized

117 Ibid.
are channeled in the proper directions, it seems, teenagers will find a similar sense of freedom in dedicating their lives to God.

With its message boards, user pages, and blogs, BattleCry is inherently interactive, which adds a new dimension to how the evangelical message gets communicated. As we have seen, many members use their blogs for completely secular purposes (as with battlecryjmd and his romantic travails), some express their troubles with fulfilling the roles assigned to them (thexdreamer and her over-affectionate male friend), and some just link to their favorite artists’ videos. While a first impulse might be to accuse BattleCry of revealing a deep schism in evangelical culture, wherein the teenagers are not focused on the correct ideas or are plagued with doubt, I argue that such a multifaceted and interactive atmosphere works in concert with the evangelical mindset. The blogs prove that, as Kirk Franklin was so fond of reminding his audience, no one is perfect – everyone falls away from God, has doubts, and sins at some point in their life. The point is to recognize that, try to remedy one’s faults, and renew one’s relationship with God. The BattleCry blogs humanize evangelical Christianity by making it obvious to even the most casual observer that evangelical teenagers are still teenagers.

BattleCry’s range of services, from rock concerts to the Internet to self-help textbooks, gives it a scope that encompasses nearly all of modern evangelical culture. As I have shown, BattleCry embodies many of the current trends within the evangelical United States, from its sneer of rebellion to its call to arms, and given its focus on and popularity with evangelical youth, it seems
that their way of delivering God’s Word may very well stick around. To quote Ron Luce a final time, “With the battle for their hearts and minds more fierce than ever before, this generation is at a crossroads moment that will shape the future of our country. Will you join us?”

BattleCry is indeed on the road towards shaping this country’s future – the face, language, and focus of tomorrow’s evangelical can be found on BattleCry’s homepage.

118 Ibid.
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Appendix A

BarlowGirl, “Average Girl”

So what, I’m not your average girl, I don’t meet the standards of this world

Chasing after boys is not my thing, see I’m waiting for a wedding ring

No more dating, I’m just waiting

Like Sleeping Beauty, my prince will come for me

No more dating, I’m just waiting

‘Cause God is writing my love story

Boys are bad, that’s certainly not true, ‘cause God is preparing one for you

If you get tired waiting till he comes, God’s arms are the perfect place to run

Sleep – that’s the only thing for me

‘Cause when I sleep, God’s preparing one for me
Superchick, “Song 4 Tricia”

All princes start as frogs, and all gentlemen as dogs
Just wait ‘til it’s plain to see what we’re growing up to be
‘Cause some frogs will still be frogs, and some dogs will still be dogs
And some boys could become men, just don’t kiss us ‘til then
You hate men is what you say, and I understand why you feel that way
All girls dream of a fairytale, but what you’ve got is a used car salesman
Trying to consume what’s wrong behind the smile and the song
And I’m not saying boys are not like that
But I think you should know that some of us will grow
You found him is what you said, and we all want you to feel that way
The frog you’ve got seems cute enough to kiss
And maybe frogs seems like that’s all there is
And just because you haven’t found your prince yet
Doesn’t mean you’re not a princess
And what if your prince comes riding in while you’re kissing the frog
What’s he gonna think then?
So look into his eyes, are you a princess or a fly?
Southpaw, “Baby Got Book”

I like big Bibles and I cannot lie, you Christian brothers can’t deny
That when a girl walks in with a KJV and a bookmark in Proverbs
You get stoked
Got her name engraved so you know that girl is saved
It looks like one of those large ones, with plenty of space in the margins
Oh baby, I wanna read witcha, ‘cause your Bible’s got pictures
My minister tried to console me, but that Book you got makes me so holy
Ooh, mamma mia, you say you want koinonia?
Well, bless me, bless me, and teach me about John Wesley
I saw her praying while I was DJing
She got grace, pretty face, she ain’t goin’ down to the bad place
I’m tired of heathen guys saying they like pocket-size
Ask the average Christian to take a look, she’s gotta pack much Book
So fellas, fellas, has your girlfriend got the Book?
Well read it, read it, read that holy Book, baby got Book
I like ‘em leather and bound, it’s fifty pounds
I just can’t understand how it is some weenie wants the Bible on CD
She wanna get you saved, Amen! Double up! A-men!
I ain’t talkin’ about a paraphrase, ‘cause Paul wouldn’t use those anyways
I like ‘em real thick and red-lettered, you can’t find nothing better
Southpaw’s in love, Bibles that big are unheard of
So I’m sittin’ here thinking, “What if I find me a girl who shows midriff?”
You can have those bimbos, I’ll keep those chicks that do devos
A word to the Christian sistas, I can’t resist ya, I’ll do God’s time witcha
But I gotta be straight when I say I wanna pray til the break of day
Baby, got it goin’ on like the wife in Proverbs 31
We just might get engaged when we finish reading this page
Cuz it’s worn and it’s torn and I know this girl’s reborn
So ladies, ladies, do you wanna save people from Hades?
Then read it, ‘til the pages fall out, even white preachers got to shout
Baby got Book
When it comes to a good book, Stephen King’s resume just can’t compare
39 + 27 = 66 books, and if you’re Catholic, there’s even more!
So your girlfriend quotes Bill Hybels, but does she got a big Bible?
Cuz that little thing she’s got won’t start a revival
My Bible study don’t want none unless you got Book, hon
You can read Clancy or Grisham, but please don’t lose this Book
Some brothers wanna play that hard role and tell you that Book’s too old
So they toss it and burn it and I pull up quick to just learn it
So your girl likes paperback? Well, I ain’t down with that
Cuz my girlfriend’s hot, her Bible’s rocking, and she’s got good doctrine
To the atheist chicks who try to diss, you ain’t it, Miss Priss
Give me a Christian, I’m insisting, and I’ll greet her with some holy kissin’
Some pervert tried to chase, but he didn’t make it past first base
She’s quick to resist temptation, and she loves a new translation

So ladies who were lost and found, if you want the triple six thrown down

Dial 1-800-reads-a-lot, and teach me about those Psalms, baby got Book

Bible college knowledge but she still got Book