To my Mum, my Nan and
To Liz, always
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IDENTITY WORK AND THE NEW CHRISTIAN RIGHT: HOW FOCUS ON THE FAMILY RHETORICALLY CONSTRUCTS THE “EX-GAY” SELF

By

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My study examined where the discourses of evangelical religion, sexuality and self intersect. The Love Won Out conferences of Focus on the Family, an evangelical religious organization, promote the message that homosexuality is both preventable and treatable. In so doing, Focus on the Family actively endorses a specific kind of sexual identity, that of an “ex-gay.” My study I asked how Focus on the Family defines the conditions of possibility for an ex-gay self. I drew on the theory of institutional selves to interrogate how the Love Won Out conferences put on by Focus on the Family narratively construct sexual identity. Institutional selves are defined as those selves produced in the service of an organization and I examined those selves produced by Love Won Out to further the political goals of Focus on the Family.

My study analyzed the transcripts of the Love Won Out conferences I attended in St. Louis and Ft. Lauderdale in 2006. In addition, I examined the textual material promoted by the conference speakers, including a number of books, pamphlets, and supporting materials. Results show that to successfully promote sexual identity transformation, Love Won Out must first produce a mutable, troubled gay self. Having done so, Love Won Out supply the narrative resources necessary to recognize the causes of homosexuality, and then to manage the
transformation from a troubled gay self to a healed ex-gay self. More specifically, *Love Won Out* draw upon discourses of religion, psychotherapy and self-help. They further reinterpret the nature of the healing process such that it becomes more of a spiritual transformation than a sexual one. Focus on the Family also empowers the audience to be active agents of change themselves, and provide the interpretive tools to advocate for social change across a variety of social institutions. I argue that the ex-gay self identity has political utility outside the discursive boundaries of the *Love Won Out* conferences since to embrace a heterosexual identity would mean being subsumed into wider culture and thus rendered politically and socially invisible. Ex-gay keeps the message that sexuality is mutable at the forefront and therefore becomes important in the fight against the claims of gay and lesbian civil rights groups.
CHAPTER 1
ROOTS OF THE EX-GAY IDENTITY

The homosexual activist movement … have been working to implement a plan that has as its centerpiece the utter destruction of the family. (Dobson 2004:19)

[Homosexuality] is a prison that leaves many individuals feeling hopeless and abandoned … many of these individuals desperately want to be free of this same-sex attraction. (Dobson 2004:72)

Prevention is effective. Change is possible. Hope is available. (Dobson 2002)

Introduction

Since 1998, Focus on the Family, an evangelical Christian organization, has been visiting megachurches across the country, hosting “ex-gay” conferences known as Love Won Out. Focus on the Family uses these conferences to strike rhetorically at the heart of the lesbian and gay civil rights movement. As I will show, they do this in part by denying the existence of a gay and lesbian identity by arguing that God has made everyone heterosexual, by arguing that same-sex attraction is a sin of which believers can repent, and by promoting the concept of an “ex-gay” self—one which cannot deny past sins, but can live a present and future life of redemption. The very idea of an “ex-gay” or “ex-lesbian” self suggests a fluidity in sexual identity which Focus on the Family uses to negate the drive by gay and lesbian civil rights groups for the extension of legal protections to homosexuals based on the argument that they are “born gay.”

The battle over gay and lesbian civil rights, not least of which has been the debate over gay marriage, is one of the most important social and political issues in recent history. Such is the strength of feeling, that the division has been likened to a culture war (Gilgoff 2007). Gay marriage has been a pivotal issue in numerous elections, including the 2004 presidential election and the 2006 state elections–which featured marriage amendments in 8 states.

At the heart of the debate are the competing discourses of “civil rights versus special rights.” On one side gay and lesbian civil rights organizations are arguing for increased legal
protection and legal recognition of same sex relationships, whereas opponents are vehemently denying the need for any legal recognition of homosexuality. For the most part, denial of civil rights protections is formulated around the idea that homosexuality is not a viable social identity. Gays and lesbians are not viewed as a legitimate minority, and consequently homosexuality should not be recognized under law. In this study, I examine the institutional discourse of one antigay organization, Focus on the Family, and the manner in which it simultaneously delegitimates individual homosexual identity and the gay and lesbian movement more widely.

Central to the opposition are the organizations of the religious right; of these, Focus on the Family plays a pivotal role (Diamond 1995; 1996; Gilgoff 2007; Hedges 2006). Founded in 1977 by James C. Dobson, Focus on the Family has an extremely active role in the fight against gay and lesbian civil rights. As the beginning quotation highlights, Dobson views homosexuality as one of the most serious threats to American culture. For that reason, he and his organization routinely involve themselves in working against any perceived advances of the gay and lesbian movement, and encourage their followers to do the same.

1998 saw the advent of the most blatant example of Focus on the Family’s anti-gay activism—the institution of the *Love Won Out* conferences. These one day conferences were started to promote the message that homosexuality is preventable and treatable. As Dobson argues in the second and third quotations, many homosexuals want to be freed from homosexuality and “change is possible.” The idea that gays can change strikes at the very heart of identity politics, and in so doing, completely denies the legitimacy of claims by lesbians and gays that they should be treated as a recognizable minority group. *Love Won Out* is designed to provide the discursive environment necessary to define, understand and produce a new kind of
sexual identity; one in direct opposition to the sexual identity familiar in much lesbian and gay political activism— that of the “ex-gay.”

The goal of this study was to attend the *Love Won Out* conferences in order to understand more fully the manner in which Focus on the Family narratively produce the ex-gay self. To do this, I draw upon the theoretical and methodological conceptualization of Gubrium & Holstein’s (2001) “institutional self.” Notions of the institutional self allow me to interrogate the rhetorical production of the ex-gay self under the narrative auspices of the *Love Won Out* conferences. Specifically, I can identify the narrative resources privileged by Focus on the Family and examine the discourses used to describe what is, at its heart, a highly controversial sexual identity.

Research of this nature is of fundamental importance on two levels. Firstly, it allows me to further our theoretical understanding of postmodern narrative identity. Indeed, the *Love Won Out* conferences provide a particularly important research site as they are actively engaged in changing and reinterpreting self and narrative identity, following strict institutional resources. This study provides an in-depth case illustration of the active production of selves in an important international organization. Other studies have used notions of the institutional self to examine the production of such disparate selves as “battered women” (Loseke 2001) and “social movement selves” (Broad 2002). This dissertation contributes to this research by training the lens on the construction of a different self, that of the ex-gay. This is a particularly potent narrative identity, as it is one constructed on the very battlefield between the religious right and gay and lesbian civil rights movements.

The examination of this particular discursive environment allows political organizations to counter the inflammatory rhetoric of Focus on the Family. Through denial of sexual identity,
Focus is attempting to negate all claims to political legitimacy of gay and lesbian civil rights movements. Not only is the organization trying to remove political identity, however, but the *Love Won Out* conferences also argue that there is, in fact, no such thing as a “gay identity.” As a result, a thorough understanding of these narrative formulations allows gay and lesbian individuals, groups, and allies to redefine and reclaim their personal social and sexual identity.

The upcoming chapters document how conservative Christians produce a mutable sexual identity, and then use this notion to construct ex-gay and ex-lesbian selves. My focus is as much on the cultural context in which these selves are produced, as on the self production. My specific research question asks: what narrative conditions make an ex-gay or ex-lesbian self identity possible and what conditions make it necessary? My research, therefore, examines the manner in which Focus on the Family construct a troubled and unhealthy same-sex sexuality and then uses this to mandate sexual identity transformation.

In the remainder of this chapter, I explain the historical development of the New Christian Right, and provide a brief overview of their core belief system since this is a pivotal narrative resource used by Focus on the Family. I then examine how notions of individual sexual identity, in particular the idea of being gay or lesbian, developed. In so doing, I trace the development of sexual identity politics. I conclude this chapter by situating my study at the crossroads of these two discourses, in the literature of the ex-gay movement. In chapter 2 I explain how the concept of the social self developed into a narrative self and then into an institutional self. I use this theoretical development of self identity to guide my methodological approach, which is outlined in that chapter also. Chapter 3 documents the narrative resources used by Focus on the Family and *Love Won Out* to produce a troubled, sinful and sick lesbian or gay self, since the idea of being “ex-gay” in part rests on having been “gay.” I also note how *LWO* details the way lesbians
and gays can change and are mandated to do so. I then shift my analytic focus in chapter 4 to interrogate the way in which ex-gay selves are constructed and maintained. What does it take to become ex-gay? How does one stay being ex-gay? Of particular interest here is the way *Love Won Out* reinterprets the goal of sexual identity transformation such that heterosexuality is not necessarily the desired outcome. In chapter 5, I examine the political utility of the gay and ex-gay selves *LWO* constructed across a variety of social institutions. Finally, in chapter 6, I argue that the construction of gay and ex-gay selves has as much to do with Focus on the Family’s political ideology, as it does their religious viewpoint.

**Background and Literature Review**

**The Evolution of the New Christian Right**

Focus on the Family (FOTF) and their attendant ministries, including *Love Won Out*, are firmly rooted in the emergence of the New Christian Right (NCR–also called the religious right) in the late 1970’s and early 1980’s. Indeed, FOTF was founded in 1977 by Dr. James Dobson, an evangelical Christian family psychologist. In order to be able to understand the evolution of FOTF, it is therefore necessary to trace the origins of the NCR, and the political reemergence of evangelical Christians in the United States. Furthermore, as the discourse of the NCR is firmly embedded in evangelical Christianity, it is important to recognize the theological and cultural history of the fundamentalist and evangelical movements.

The term “fundamentalist” was first coined in 1920 by Curtis Lee Laws, conservative editor of a Baptist newspaper, to describe those people ready to defend their faith and fight for what they perceived to be the fundamentals of Christianity (Marsden 1975; 1991a; Marty & Appleby 1992; Riesbrodt 1993). Rather than signifying the beginning of a movement, however, the term was more a reflection of decades of arguments and fighting within American Protestantism: the fundamentalist v modernist controversy that culminated in the arrest and
prosecution of a school teacher, John Scopes, in 1925 (Averill 1989; Gasper 1963; Hunter 1987a; Marsden 1975; 1991a; Sandeen 1970). The teaching of evolution in schools, indeed the advancement of modern scientific thought in general, was one of the primary factors of the fundamentalist v modernist arguments (Gasper 1963; Krapohl & Lippy 1999; Marsden 1971; 1980; 1991a; Wilcox 2000). From the 1870’s, which Marsden (1975; 1991a) describes as the first of four stages of American evangelicalism, theological liberals (the modernist side of the controversy) strongly advocated the adaptation of Christianity to account for modern scientific advances (Hunter 1983; 1987a; 1987b; Krapohl & Libby 1999; Marsden 1975; 1980; 1991a). As Krapohl & Lippy (1999) explain, modernism in this context meant: “(1) the conscious, intended adaptation of religious ideas to modern culture, (2) the idea that God is immanent in human cultural development and revealed through it, (3) the belief that human society is moving toward realization of the Kingdom of God” (41). In other words, theological liberals were moving toward looser interpretation of biblical texts to allow for scientific explanations and away from the idea of literal biblical truth (Gasper 1963; Hunter 1983; 1987a). In its most extreme form, this new liberal theology would be secular humanism (Gasper 1963).

Theologically conservative Protestants were appalled by the modernist approach to science and biblical teaching. Some argue that fundamentalism arose as a direct reaction to the liberal theological ideas of the late 19th century (Gasper 1963; Hunter 1983; Krapohl & Libby 1999; Marsden 1975; 1980; 1991a). Certainly theological conservatives began to espouse a more formal doctrine of biblical inerrancy—belief in the literal truth of the Bible—than was previously apparent (Hunter 1983; 1987a; Marsden 1975). Although many Christian groups in the past assumed the absolute truth of the Bible, there had been no formal positions from their respective churches to support this position (Hunter 1983; 1987a; Marsden 1975; 1991a). Challenges from
modernists served to crystallize fundamentalist ideas and started the movement toward inerrancy as central to fundamentalist protestant Christian faiths (Gasper 1963; Hunter 1983; 1987a; 1997b; Marsden 1975; 1991a; 1991b):

the doctrine of inerrancy came to mean that the statements and teachings of the Bible, as the inspired revelation of God written by men are completely without error of any kind; the Bible is absolutely and exclusively true … Finally, though not designed as historical and scientific text, where it makes historical and scientific statements, it is again entirely accurate and true … any scientific conclusion that does not conform to the factual statements of the Bible is regarded as illegitimate and even unscientific. (Hunter 1987a: 21)

The rising prominence of biblical inerrancy also paralleled the anti-evolution crusade of theological conservatives.

In addition to the anti-evolution and biblical inerrancy arguments, a number of other beliefs were associated with conservative Protestants in the late 19th century. The most prominent of these was dispensational premillennialism, or dispensationalism. Dispensational premillennialism is described as the belief that “history [is divided] into distinct eras, or dispensations. The final dispensation would be the ‘millennium’ or one thousand year personal reign of Christ on earth” (Marsden 1980: 5). The dispensations were aspects in which God tested people in some aspect of his will (Marsden 1975; 1980). Premillennial refers to the fact that we are supposedly in the dispensation prior to the second coming of Christ (Averill 1980; Marsden 1975). As Weber (1991) explains, “to qualify as a premillennialist all one has to believe is that there will be an earthly reign of Christ that will be preceded by the second coming” (6). Dispensational premillennialism is, again, a thorough rejection of evolutionary human progress and scientific ideals (Averill 1980; Marsden 1980; Weber 1991). Harding (2000) argues that even today most fundamentalists believe in both premillennialism and biblical inerrancy, to the point that many use this to support their crusade against anything perceived as “modernist,”
including acceptance of homosexuality as a normative behavior and the continuing battle against the teaching of evolution.

Many of these views were laid out in the arguments that followed between liberal and conservative theologians, which led to the publication of a series of volumes called *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth* between 1910 and 1915. The evolution of the fundamentalist position is important to understand, if one is to understand how and why it manifests itself in the present. Beginning with the 1910 five part declaration of the fundamentals of faith released by the Presbyterian General Assembly, the five fundamentals of faith included; (1) the inerrancy of scripture; (2) the virgin birth of Jesus Christ; (3) his substitutionary atonement; (4) his bodily resurrection; and (5) the imminent second coming (Gasper 1963; Marsden 1975; Krapohl & Lippy 1990). Following the publication in 1919, theological conservatives formulated an organization called the World’s Christian Fundamentals Association (WCFA) to try and defend against threats to their faith (Hunter 1987b; Marsden 1991b).

The second stage of American evangelism encompassed the period from 1919 (after the formation of the WCFA) to 1925 and the Scopes trial (Marsden 1975). During this period, at the end of World War I, fundamentalists attempted to strengthen their control in Protestant denominations (Marsden 1975; 1980) as they perceived that moral and theological failings were pushing the country into disaster (Krapohl & Lippy 1999). The dispensational premillennialist belief structure underpinning much of the conservative theological endeavor led them to believe that Armageddon was imminent; not only was the Protestant church perceived as thoroughly corrupt (due to the influence of the modernists) but US culture was becoming increasingly secular (Hunter 1983; Krapohl & Lippy 1999; Marsden 1975; 1980). Conservatives responded to the concerns by increasing attacks on mainline denominations for their supposed apostasy and by
strongly driving to eliminate evolutionary theory from public schools once and for all (Krapohl & Lippy 1999; Marsden 1980).

The strength of the crusade against evolution led to the introduction of legislation to restrict the teaching of evolution in twenty state legislatures (Wilcox 2000), and the passing of said legislation in a few southern states (Marsden 1980). The strictest legislation, in Tennessee, banned the teaching of evolution in public schools (Gasper 1963; Linder 1975; Marsden 1980). A biology teacher in Dayton, TN, John Scopes, flouted the law, was arrested, and subsequently brought to trial. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) provided defense for the trial in the person of Clarence Darrow, one of the most preeminent lawyers of the age, and the prosecution was handled by William Jennings Bryan, a fundamentalist leader and former presidential candidate (Krapohl & Lippy 1999). Although Bryan won the trial, Darrow’s articulate and passionate defense of Scopes ridiculed Bryan’s position. Darrow’s cross examination of Bryan showed Bryan to be ignorant and foolish (Krapohl & Lippy 1999; Martin 1996; Wilcox 1992; Wuthnow 1989) and not even able to answer simple questions about the literal interpretation of scripture he was supposed to support (Marsden 1980).

The trial was a disaster for the fundamentalist movement. The popular press painted fundamentalist Christians as rural, backward, illiterate and anti intellectual (Ammerman 2003; Feldman 2005; Linder 1975; Martin 1996; Marsden 1975) and they became associated with intolerance and bigotry (Hunter 1983; Linder 1975). Within five years of the trial, all legislation restricting the teaching of evolution had been repealed (Martin 1996). By the end of the 1920’s, evangelicals were in retreat across the spectrum of American evangelicalism (Krapohl & Lippy 1999), and commentators were boldly proclaiming that conservative theology had run its course (Ammerman 2003; Marsden 1991a; Watt 1991).
Far from disappearing, however, the fundamentalist-evangelical movement reorganized (Marsden, 1991b). The regrouping characterized the third stage of American evangelicalism and lasted through the 1940’s (Marsden 1975). During this time, there was a shift in focus throughout the fundamentalist and evangelical movement, from trying to gain control of the mainline denominations to an emphasis in working through local organizations, churches and colleges (Hunter 1983; Krapohl & Lippy 1999; Marsden 1975; 1980; 1991a; Smith 1998; Wilcox 1992). Some fundamentalists worked from within the main denominations to form fundamentalist groups resistant to liberal influence (Gasper 1963; Hunter 1983; Marsden 1991a; 1991b). However, the mainline denominations were viewed by others as too corrupt; dispensationalists in particular were concerned that the churches were becoming increasingly apostate (Marsden 1991a). As a result, an increasing number of evangelicals adhered far more to the doctrine of strict separation, thus spawning a growth of independent evangelical churches following conservative fundamentalist theology (Ammerman 2003; Carpenter 1984; Gasper 1963; Hunter 1983; Marsden 1980; Smith 1998).

The advent of World War II inspired fundamentalist critiques of both world and U.S. society (Ammerman 2003; Carpenter 1984; 1997). Primary among these criticisms was the idea that WWII had been prompted by “a materialistic concept of progress” (Carpenter 1984: 8) directly counter to orthodox Christian values. For fundamentalists, with liberal theology’s support of modernization, war had been started and millions slaughtered (Carpenter 1984). Such sentiment provided one of the spurs for increasingly separatist evangelicals. These separatists recognized the need for some kind of unity to support their doctrinal stance (Gasper 1963; Hunter 1983; 1987a). As a result, the American Council of Churches (ACC) was founded in 1941 (Gasper 1963; Hunter 1983; Marsden 1980). The ACC demanded that members be strictly
separate from mainstream denominations as these were still viewed as apostate. Its founder, Carl McIntire, described the ACC as “militantly pro-Gospel and anti-modernist” (quoted in Gasper 1963, p. 23). Its principles included,

adherence to these truths [pro-Gospel and anti-modernist] … the full truthfulness, inerrancy and authority of the Bible which is the Word of God; the holiness and love of the one sovereign God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit; the true deity and sinless humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ, His virgin birth, His atoning death, ‘The just for the unjust,’ His bodily resurrection, His glorious coming again; salvation by grace through faith alone; the oneness in Christ of those He has redeemed with His own precious blood; and the maintenance in the visible church of purity of life and doctrine. (Gasper 1963: 23)

ACC was still clearly committed to the five fundamentals of faith advanced in the early part of the century and was a strong advocate of the need to disassociate from modernism.

The formation of the ACC underscored deepening divisions within American evangelicalism, and in 1942 a rival organization composed of moderate evangelicals was constitute –The National Association of Evangelicals, later called the Neo-Evangelicals (Gasper 1963; Marsden 1991a; 1991b; Smith 1998). Although ACC and NAE were doctrinally similar, they widely disagreed on matters of policy: ACC was strictly separate while NAE advocated cooperation and inclusivity within mainstream denominations (Gasper 1963; Hunter 1983; 1987a).

The Neo-Evangelicals concentrated much of their efforts on building a strong network through resurgent revivalist trends across much of the U.S. (Hunter1983). Of particular importance was a radio show called The Old Time Gospel Hour, which drew an incredibly large audience. There were also the inaugural evangelical television programs and a number of new youth evangelical organizations that proved immensely popular (Hunter 1983; 1987; Marsden 1980). This last provided evangelicals with one of their most enduring legacies from this period: Billy Graham got his start as the first full-time paid evangelical in the Youth for Christ organization in the 1940s (Carpenter 1997; Hunter 1983; Marsden 1980). His mass rallies were
held country-wide, reached huge audiences, and quickly served to make premillennialism and evangelical Christianity popular once again (Carpenter 1997).

On the other side of the divide, the strict separatists of the ACC were engaged in the anti-communism crusade (Gasper 1963; Wilcox 1992; 2000; Wuthnow 1989). “Godless Communism” was viewed as one of the greatest threats to U.S. culture and seen as a “false religion” (Wuthnow, 1989: 41). By 1953, all of the leaders of the anti-communist movement were associated with the ACCC (Wilcox 1992). The focus in targeting threats to U.S. culture is significant to this project as the message was not limited to anti-communism. Both Medicare and sex education in schools also posed threats (Wilcox 2000)--Medicare because it was seen as socialized medicine and sex education because it threatened the moral fiber of the country. However, the collapse of McCarthy’s crusade against Communism negatively impacted the evangelicals associated with it and eventually the influence of those evangelicals faded in the early 1960s (Wilcox 2000).

The late 1950s and early 1960s also signified a major realignment in both the fundamentalists and the Neo-Evangelicals. A split in the fundamentalist camp occurred around the New York City crusade of Billy Graham in 1957 after he accepted sponsorship from the city’s Council of Churches. Fundamentalists were upset because they regarded some of the city’s church organizations as too liberal, since they did not follow their rigid theological traditions (Marsden 1991a). The Neo-Evangelicals split over the question of Biblical inerrancy (Marsden 1991a) with those supporting inerrancy, including Billy Graham, leading most of the evangelicals (Carpenter 1997; Hunter 1983; 1987a; Marsden 1975; 1991a). Further divisions occurred around the need for evangelical social programs and the prospect of involvement in progressive politics (Marsden 1991a).
These developments made it increasingly difficult to define different groups as either fundamentalist or evangelical, and even to talk about a united evangelical movement (Hunter 1983; Marsden 1991a; 1991b; Nash 1987). The term evangelical had become increasingly used to describe any “theologically conservative Protestant who affirmed the necessity of regeneration” (Marsden 1991b: 31) and could be used to describe any number of organizations with a variety of beliefs (Marsden 1991b; Nash 1987). Neo-evangelicals retained the term evangelical and continued work in the inclusivist tradition (Hunter 1983). Fundamentalist, however, referred as a self designation to “separatist, dispensationalist Baptists and members of individual Bible churches” (Marsden 1991b: 31), except for one major organization within the Southern Baptist Convention that gained the majority voice in the 1970’s and 1980’s. Therefore, “‘fundamentalist’ could be used to refer almost exclusively to noncharismatic (nonpentecostal) dispensationalists” (Marsden 1991b: 31). In other words, fundamentalist came to refer to those conservative Christians who wanted to keep separate from the apostasy of the wider church community, and who still believed in the imminent second Coming. Despite a seeming unity in the fundamentalist camp in the 1970’s, they too were split into two camps: militants who insisted on separation from any formal religious denomination, or individual within a denomination, that allowed liberal theology; and moderates, who, although still separate from major denominations, did not insist upon such strict separation (Carpenter 1984). Both, however, denounced evangelicals for their perceived liberalism.

Throughout all the shifting alignments and splits within both the fundamentalist and evangelical movements, both continued to build a strong infrastructure of churches, publishing houses, magazines, newspapers, colleges and, perhaps most importantly, television ministries (Ammerman 1987; 2003; Hunter 1983; Wilcox 2000; Wuthnow 1989). Much as the radio
evangelicals of the 1940’s and 1950’s had reached massive audiences, so the television ministries in the 1970’s, the so-called electronic church, also reached huge numbers of people (Himmelstein 1990; Ostling 1984; Wuthnow 1989). The success of the televangelists meant that such themes as biblical inerrancy and personal salvation in the form of Jesus Christ, already critical within the fundamentalist and evangelical movements, reached a far broader audience (Feldman 2005; Himmelstein 1990; Krapohl & Lippy 1997; Ostling 1984). Some estimates put viewing figures at 10 million in 1970, and several times that by the 1980’s (Himmelstein 1990). Not only did television widen the appeal of conservative Protestant ideals, it also served as a mechanism for raising massive amounts of money for the broadcasters and their causes (Ammerman 2003; Diamond 1995; 1996; Himmelstein 1990; Krapohl & Lippy 1997). Of these newly-popular television ministries, the best known were Jerry Falwell’s *Old Time Gospel Hour* (modeled after Fuller’s 1940’s radio show), Pat Robertson’s *700 Club* and Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker’s *PTL Club* (Feldman 2005; Himmelstein 1990; Krapohl & Lippy 1997).

In addition to the increased prominence of evangelical Christianity due to the massive success of the electronic church (Himmelstein, 1990; Krapohl & Lippy, 1997; Reichley, 2002; Wuthnow, 1989), the origins of the NCR can also be traced to the success of a number of local political movements based on evangelical ideals (Himmelstein 1990; Liebman 1983; Wald 2003); the election of a born again President, Jimmy Carter, in 1976 (Pierard 1984; Wuthnow 1989); and increasing numbers of college graduates identifying as evangelical Christians (Wuthnow 1989). During the 1970’s, there were three key grassroots campaigns that Liebman (1983) and Wald (2003) argue mobilized evangelicals and provided both motivation and a sense of political involvement that prompted later national campaigns. The campaigns were: textbook challenges in West Virginia that ultimately led to a changed textbook adoption procedure; the
1977 repeal of a gay rights ordinance in Miami-Dade County; and the defeat of the Equal Rights Amendment after a campaign spearheaded by religious conservatives (Wald 2003). Each of the campaigns were successful and, as Wald (2003) explains,

> although motivated by different issues, the three campaigns were tied together by a common dissatisfaction with what the participants saw as a godless society that had replaced firm moral standards with a system of relativism … [The campaigns] appealed most strongly to white evangelical Protestants who saw each movement as a crusade in defense of traditional Christian values. (207)

In other words, just as the fundamentalists battling the evils of modernism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, evangelical Christians of the 1970’s and 1980’s were appalled at what they saw as widespread moral depravity that could only hasten Armageddon (Diamond 1995; Watt 1991).

The success of these three campaigns was also noticed by secular conservatives looking to revitalize the Republican Party by harnessing the power and energy of the evangelicals (Himmelstein 1990; Moen 1992; Wald 2003). These political activists, Howard Phillips, Terry Dolan, Paul Weyrich and Richard Viguerie, approached Christian conservative leaders with an idea for mobilizing evangelicals (Himmelstein 1990; Liesnesch 1993; Wald 2003; Wuthnow 1983; 1989). This new alliance of secular and Christian conservatives soon turned to the powerful televangelists, and through a combination of the political resources of the activists, and the reach of the television preachers, formed a number of new national organizations (Wald 2003; Wilcox 1992; 2000; Wuthnow 1989). The most prominent of these were the Moral Majority, founded by Jerry Falwell in 1979, the Religious Roundtable (later renamed just as the Roundtable), founded by Ed McAteer, and Christian Voice, founded out of an anti-homosexual crusade in California. FOTF was also formed at this time, although it did not immediately come into national prominence.
1976 also saw the election of President Jimmy Carter, an evangelical Southern Baptist who was outspoken in his faith and as such brought even greater national prominence to evangelical Christianity (Corbett & Corbett 1999; Feldman 2005; Reichley 1987; 2002; Wuthnow 1983; 1989). While in office, Carter frequently stressed the importance of public morality and urged Christians to become politically active (Liesnesch 1993; Wilcox 1992; Wuthnow 1983; 1989). The Carter presidency and increasing political success validated not only evangelical Christian identity, but also ignited political sensibilities. This combined with the higher level of education, thus a greater likelihood of voting, spurred an evangelical Christian return to political activity and political power (Moen 1992; Wuthnow 1989). As Moen (1992) explains, “the infusion of conservative Christians into politics en masse gave the movement’s early leaders the opportunity to sharpen their political skills and provided a large pool of interested people out of which a small cadre of politically adroit leaders could emerge” (2). In other words, the mobilization of evangelical Christians in the later 1970’s spawned a far more politically sophisticated set of theologically conservative Christians through the 1980’s and 1990’s.

The combination of evangelical Christian ideology, increased political activity, massive, visible national organizations and the convergence of public morality and politics formed what is now the New Christian Right (Feldman 2005; Moen 1992; Wald 2003). Organizations such as the Moral Majority had massive voter registration drives and used their public platform to encourage evangelical Christians to become politically active—from being mostly apolitical prior to the 1970’s, suddenly preachers were stressing the idea that to be good Christians, congregants and viewers had to vote to preserve Christian morality in the US (Wuthnow 1989). As Wuthnow (1989) explains, “suddenly it was part of one’s Christian duty to exercise the responsibilities of citizenship” (199). Estimates put the numbers recruited during these drives to anywhere from
200,000 to multiple millions; the numbers were certainly high enough to prompt evangelical Christian leaders to claim credit for Ronald Reagan’s 1980 election victory (Wald 2003; Wilcox 1992; Wuthnow 1989).

The strength of evangelical Christian belief in biblical inerrancy also provided what evangelicals saw “as a clear set of moral guidelines for them to follow” (Wuthnow 1989: 202). Furthermore, the emergence of morality as an important element emboldened evangelicals to begin imposing these morals in the political arena: “the two were so closely linked, in fact, that many evangelicals probably failed to see that for the first time in many years they were becoming politically active. Rather they considered they were merely taking a stand on matters they knew to be morally mandated as part of scripture” (Wuthnow 1989: 202). By the mid-1980’s, the NCR had become a formidable presence in the Republican Party with the strength to influence the political agenda (Moen 1992; Wuthnow 1989).

The NCR were instrumental in developing a moral political platform they dubbed a “pro-family” agenda, or a “return to traditional values” (Moen 1992; Wald 2003; Wuthnow 1989). Critical issues in this were abortion, homosexuality, extra and premarital sex and traditional marriage (Moen 1992). Such was the strength of the “pro-family” agenda that President George H.W. Bush touted it in 1992, and the Republican Party convention during that same campaign heard speeches on these issues from evangelicals Pat Robertson and Pat Buchanan (Wald 2003). NCR activists used this platform to link what they perceive as a moral crisis to concrete social problems. In the introduction to Dobson, founder of FOTF, and Bauer’s (1990) book *Children at Risk*, William Bennett, Secretary of Education under Reagan, wrote that America’s social regression was due to three things: (1) Americans had abandoned morality; (2) value judgments had been replaced by “an expansive notion of ‘rights’ … that masked a destructive underlying
philosophy … that found its way into public policy’ (xix); (3) liberalism in the form of the Democrats had led to a whole series of “misguided social policies” (xx), including abortion rights and welfare checks for unwed mothers, that “effectively tore down out cultural guardrails” (xx). Furthermore, Bennett (1990) argues, the social pathologies have worsened to the point that only a return to traditional religious values can “save” society.

One of the key voices in the NCR’s “pro-family” campaign was James Dobson’s Focus on the Family (Diamond 1996; Moen 1992; Wald 2003). FOTF was founded in 1977 by Dobson. At the heart of his organization are his syndicated radio broadcasts that reach an estimated 5 million listeners daily and that are broadcast on over 4000 radio stations worldwide (Wilcox 2000). Headquartered in Colorado Springs, FOTF has over 1300 employees, generates well over $100 million annually, operates numerous active ministries (including everything from an institute where college students can spend a semester, to a public policy unit and international outreach) and maintains an email list of over 2.5 million (Alexander-Moegerle 1997; Diamond 1996; Wilcox 2000). Dobson has become so powerful that a 2005 Time (Van Biema 2005) article named him as one of the 25 most influential evangelicals.

Although Dobson has repeatedly tried to distance himself rhetorically from the NCR, his policies, mission statements, public works, broadcasts, and even other well known evangelical Christian leaders, place him at the forefront of the NCR movement–to the point that Falwell even referred to him as a “rising star” of the movement (Moen 1992). Moen (1992) ascribes part of this reluctance as a desire not to be seen to be involved in the NCR and therefore associated with its previous scandals–this despite Dobson setting up a political arm of FOTF, the Family Research Council, and also publishing a monthly political magazine. He also recently left the presidency of FOTF to Jim Daly in order to involve himself more actively in politics. Critics
have suggested that Dobson did not want to appear politically active so as not to jeopardize the tax-exempt status of FOTF (Alexander-Moegerle 1997; Diamond 1996). Despite his protestations, however, Dobson has been consistently involved with attempts to mobilize his readers and listeners to advance the conservative social agenda (Moen 1992; Diamond 1996; Wilcox 2000). His emails, broadcasts, and published material often include examples of laws and legislation threatening the “pro-family” agenda, indirectly or directly (depending on the publication), exhort the audience to political action and always end with financial pleas to help with the “defense of the family” (Dobson 2006: 5). By way of illustration, here is an extract from the financial plea included with the June 2006 Family News from Dr. James Dobson:

If you and I fail to defend the most vulnerable of our members, perhaps millions of kids now in public schools will be coerced into believing that same-sex marriage is morally equivalent to the traditional family and that there are no reliable standards of right and wrong. Safe-sex ideology will be taught instead of “abstinent until married,” and that homosexuality is genetic and therefore inevitable … .It must not be allowed to happen.

All of us at Focus on the Family would appreciate you joining our effort to defend the children of the nation, after you have met your obligations to your local church. Any contribution you make will be used carefully and wisely, not only to help nourish the institution of the family, but to defend it and protect its children as well.

As the above example shows, at the core of FOTF is the same belief system that characterizes both evangelical Christianity and the NCR, and they follow the same moral campaigns promoted but the NCR’s “pro-family” agenda. In other words, FOTF promotes what its leaders perceive as traditional family values: “to put it succinctly, the institution of marriage represents the very foundation of the human social order. Everything of value sits upon that base. Institutions, governments, religious fervor, and the welfare of children are all dependent on its stability. When it is weakened or undermined, the entire superstructure begins to wobble” (Dobson 2004: 9). So strong is Dobson’s view about the threat that he calls it the “second great civil war” (1990: 22). As he explains,
Something far more significant than money is behind the contest for the hearts and minds of children. Nothing short of a great Civil War of Values rages today throughout North America … . Bloody battles are being fought on a thousand fronts both inside and outside of government. Open any daily newspaper and you’ll find accounts of the latest Gettysburg, Waterloo, Normandy, or Stalingrad. Instead of fighting for territory or military conquest, however, the struggle is on for the hearts and minds of the people. It is a war over ideas (Dobson 1990: 2—emphasis in original).

For Dobson and FOTF one of the key issues threatening the family is homosexuality. Indeed, according to Dobson (2004), should traditional ideas of marriage and family be compromised, then there will “chaos such as the world has never seen before” (19). At the forefront of this battle are the “homosexual activist movement … working to implement a master plan that has had as its centerpiece the utter destruction of the family (Dobson 2004: 19).

Furthermore, Dobson argues, the threat is on such a large scale as to threaten the very existence of US society. He describes the attacks on marriage as being on the same magnitude as the attack on Pearl Harbor and the Nazi advance through Europe (Dobson 1990; 2004; 2006).

Clearly, then, homosexuality is a pivotal issue within FOTF and is positioned prominently throughout NCR activism. FOTF’s response to the “crisis” has been to try to delegitimate both the gay and lesbian movement, and gay and lesbian individuals, by launching an outreach ministry, named Love Won Out, that promotes the idea that homosexuality is both preventable and treatable. Central to this program is the idea that “change is possible” and that through finding Jesus, gays and lesbians can alter their sexuality and lifestyle.

Much NCR activism in general, and the LWO ministry more specifically, is designed to repudiate claims by LGBT social movements for increased acceptance and legal recognition of same sex relationships. The NCR counters claims that LGBT couples and individuals are entitled to legal protections similar to other protected minorities by arguing that homosexuality is both a choice and treatable. Racial and ethnic minorities, for example, deserve equal protection under law whereas sexual minorities choose what is argued to be their immoral lifestyle. Consequently
the *LWO* ministry can be perceived as speaking back to the identity politics of many LGBT social movements. To fully understand one of the central discourses of *LWO*, it is therefore necessary to trace the development of gay and lesbian sexual identity and the formation of sexual identity politics.

**The Development of Lesbian and Gay Sexual Identity**

One of the prerequisites for a social movement is “an identifiable social group with considerable political awareness” (Adam 1995:1). Prior to the late 19th century, however, there was little understanding of sexuality as a separate identity, as is presumed now (D’Emilio 1992; 1998; Halperin 1990; 2000; Weeks 1991; 2000). Consequently, it is critical to understand how the idea of “the homosexual” originated and was further developed into both a social and political identity.

Scholars disagree as to whether homosexuality existed in a recognizable form before the late 1800’s. Some, such as Halperin (1989; 1990; 2000), argue that there is no such thing as a history of, in this case male, homosexuality. Rather there are multiple discursive traditions that overlap to produce our contemporary understanding of homosexuality. Other historians (see Boswell 1980; 1989) take historical records of same-sex sexual activity as proof that homosexuality existed in familiar forms across time (Chauncey, Duberman & Vicinus 1989).

Despite the fact that there is evidence of same sex sexual activity throughout recorded history, it was not until the late 1800’s that sexual behavior, including homosexuality, was imagined as an entity separate to, and outside of the family unit and other social institutions (Adam 1995; Halperin 2000; Padgug 1989; Weeks 1991). “Sexuality” did not exist within the private realm: “intercourse, kinship and the family, and gender, did not form anything like a field of sexuality. Rather, each group of sexual acts was connected directly or indirectly [to] institutions and thought patterns which we tend to view as political, economic or social in nature.
…” (Padgug 1989: 62). Up until this point, appropriate sexual activity had been defined using traditional religious doctrine, such that sexual activity of any kind outside of the marital union was viewed as sinful (D’Emilio 1992; 1998).

Sexual practices were governed by laws that centered on non-reproductive relations (D’Emilio 1992; 1998; Weeks 1991). By way of illustration, the early 1800’s in England saw a spike in the number of prosecutions, and subsequent hangings, for sodomy—to the point that these outnumbered hangings for murder. Weeks (1991) attributes this to the fact that England was at war, and argues that prosecution of same-sex sexual activity is more generally linked to social turmoil and serves as a “funnel” for wider social anxiety. In other words, during times of social upheaval, such as Britain was experiencing in the early 18th century, there are normally far greater sanctions on inappropriate sexual expression, a pattern also seen in the US. It is important to note that at this point, sodomy did not refer to just male same-sex activity but was a term used to reference any sexual activity deemed non reproductive, including both heterosexual and homosexual oral and anal intercourse. Sodomy was defined in relation to individual sexual activity, not sexual inclination. In the words of John D’Emilio (1998); “men and women engaged in what we would describe as homosexual behavior, but neither they nor the society in which they lived defined persons as essentially different in kind from the majority because of their sexual expression … their behavior was interpreted as a discrete transgression, a misdeed comparable to other sins and crimes …” (4). Consequently, both adultery and homosexuality could be, and were, punished by death (Greenberg 1988).

The reconceptualization of sex as a distinguishing characteristic of a particular type of person was not evidenced until the mid to late 1800’s (Halperin 2000; Weeks 1991). Scholars have argued that this shift in focus was partly as a result of capitalist market forces (D’Emilio
1992; Greenberg 1988; Greenberg & Bystryn 1996). Under capitalism, individuals began to make a living selling their labor and earning wages, thus creating a completely different social structure (Adam 1985; 1995; D’Emilio 1992; Greenberg 1988; Greenberg & Bystryn 1996). The family had previously been a self sufficient economic unit of production with all members equally dependent upon one another (Adam 1985; D’Emilio 1992; Weeks 1991); a new social organization rendered this conceptualization of the family obsolete. In its place stood a unit still somewhat interdependent, but now with emotional and sexual bonds in place as opposed to purely economic ties (D’Emilio 1992; 1998). Individuals were free to pursue relationships outside of the confines of the family as a result of their new economic freedom, thus creating conditions a little more conducive to same-sex coupling. Moreover, the existence of individuals separate from the traditional family unit made it possible for same sex attraction to shift into homosexual identity (D’Emilio 1992; 1998).

These same social conditions also promoted the increased legal and social restriction of homosexual activity. Despite the fact that capitalism arguably weakened the nuclear family economically, it also “enshrined the family as the source of love, affection, and emotional security” (D’Emilio 1998: 473). The family then moved from being an economic mainstay, to being the centerpiece of social stability. In addition, D’Emilio (1998) argues that ideologically, capitalism drives people into heterosexual families … materially, capitalism weakened the bonds that once kept families together so that their members experience a growing instability in a place they have come to expect happiness and emotional security. Thus, while capitalism has knocked the material foundation away from family life, lesbians, gay men and heterosexual feminists have become the scapegoat for the social instability of the system. (473)

Accordingly, homosexuality comes to be viewed with increasing negativity, a social ill that needs to be diagnosed and then treated.
The combination of the stronger ideology of the nuclear family and the deepening sexual division of labor combined to create homosexuality as an aberrant behavior. Additionally, the later 1800’s also saw an increasing drive to categorize and explain behavior, especially deviant behavior, medically. The early medical explanations of same sex attraction sought to explain the behavior as a manifestation of inappropriate gender identity, such that the first terms used referred to gender “inversion” or sexual inversion. Having said that, however, sexual inversion was a far broader term than homosexuality, and referenced a wide range of gender deviant behaviors, including masculine behaviors in women such as an interest in politics and feminine behaviors in men, such as an effeminate appearance (Halperin 1989; 1990; 2000; Weeks 1985; 1991; 2000). Consequently, same sex attraction was viewed as a pathological expression of behavior at variance with what was deemed natural behavior for men and women (Halperin 2000).

These early sexologists formulated theories of behavior that argued for recognition of inverts as a third sex, therefore cementing the idea that such conduct was biological and innate (Marshall 1981). By way of illustration:

[Karl Heinrich] Ulrichs argues that homosexuality was congenital, resulting from an anomalous combination of male and female characteristics in a single biological body. The human embryo, he believed, is at first neither male nor female but develops these characteristics only after the first few months of life. In the male homosexual the genitals become male, but the same differentiation fails to occur in that part of the brain that determines the sex drive. The result is a ‘feminine soul in a male body.’ (Marshall 1981:142)

These ideas were of critical importance in the medicalization of homosexuality and formed the basis for much of the later work in sexology.

Although the medical profession started investigating sexual activity in the mid 1800’s, it wasn’t until 1868 that the term “homosexual” was first used. “Homosexual” was initially conceptualized by a writer, Karl Maria Kertbeny, in a political campaign to try and prevent the
criminalization of same-sex activity in Germany (D’Emilio 1992; Katz 1976; Weeks 1991). At the time, Kertbeny used “homosexual” to simply describe sexual attraction between members of the same sex, in opposition to the prevailing view of gender inversion. This initial usage was vague enough to allow for appropriation of the term by the medical profession for description of particular kinds of people (D’Emilio 1992; Katz 1976; Weeks 1991).

Despite the fact that some sexologists were arguing that since homosexuality was biological, and therefore should not be subject to criminal prosecution, most medical professionals viewed it as a disease and pathology (Adam 1985; 1995; D’Emilio 1992; Greenberg 1988; Greenberg & Bystryn 1996). They were embedded within an ideological system that viewed any extramarital intercourse as deviant, and their research reflected this. As D’Emilio (1998) reports,

> medical views bore a complex relation to the older perspectives of religion and law. In important ways they reinforced the cultural matrix that condemned and punished people that engaged in homosexual activity … Doctors did not ply their trade in a vacuum, moreover, and the language of the moralist permeated the scientific literature. It is difficult to imagine a physician describing pneumonia as ‘shocking to every sense of decency, disgusting and revolting,’ yet one did apply this phrase to a case of homosexuality. (8)

The medical discourse superseded religion and provided a scientific explanation of what is natural, thus effecting a shift from the view of homosexuality as sin to homosexuality as sick (D’Emilio 1998; Irvine 2003; Rahman 2000).

The early understanding of homosexuality as a biological congenital condition gave way to the conceptualization of homosexuality as a mental illness with the advent of psychology and psychoanalysis. The key figure here, of course, is Sigmund Freud. Freudian analysis posited that the important element in understanding sexuality is the psyche, not the body, such that sexuality is rooted in unconscious, instinctual drives. Although Freud himself did not talk much about homosexuality (D’Emilio 1995; Rahman 2000; Weeks 1985), he did advance theories of normal
sexuality and sexual development–heterosexuality–compared to the abnormal sexual object choice of the homosexual. Homosexuality, then, was viewed as “a failure of achieved normality” (Weeks 1985: 154). Freud’s successors in psychoanalysis built on his theories to formulate a detailed model of homosexuality as pathology, a mental illness or psychological malady to be diagnosed and cured.

The prevailing view of homosexuality as a sickness prompted the search for suitable treatments and cures. As a result, homosexual men and women were hospitalized by their families and subject to experimentation by doctors (Adam 1995; D’Emilio 1992). Some of the treatments were fairly gentle and included hypnosis and psychotherapy. On the other end of the spectrum were procedures such as castration, hysterectomy, lobotomy and electric shock therapy (D’Emilio1992). This perception of homosexuality as a disease and the severity of some of the suggested treatments also reflected societal perception of the threat posed by deviant sexuality.

Although notions of homosexuality as sickness were generally detrimental to the individual, the medical model prompted further development of homosexual identity. The isolation of sexual object choice from what Halperin (1989) calls secondary characteristics of masculinity and femininity by famed sexologist Havelock Ellis, and Freud’s analytical distinction between sexual object choice and sexual aim allowed for a new taxonomy of sexual behavior, and sexual psychology based on the biological sex of the individuals involved. From this, ideas of sexual identity began to develop from the labels these sexual actors were given. Despite being labeled “sick” for instance, those engaged in same sex sexual activity now had a name for themselves and their behaviors. There is some debate among historians as to the impact of medicine on the development of a gay and lesbian community (Irvin1994), what is clear, however, is that the medicalization of homosexuality promoted gay and lesbian identity since
erotic desire for the same sex became an inescapable part of one’s being (D’Emilio 1992; Irvine 1994; Rahman 2000; Seidman 1996). As Foucault (1990) explains, “homosexuality began to speak in its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or ‘naturality’ be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified” (101). Thus, by turning same sex attraction into a clinical entity, doctors provided the discourse necessary for the formation of identity based upon sexual expression.

Initial categorization and description of homosexuality was meant, in some cases, to spur the fight for civil rights and to argue against the criminalization of homosexuality. Although the homosexual identity discourse started appearing in the late 1800’s and early 1900’s, it was not until the 1950’s that the political identity necessary for social movement organization developed (Adam 1995; Engel 2001). The first major homosexual civil rights group¹, the Mattachine Society, was founded in April 1951 by an active member of the Communist Party, Harry Hay (Adam 1995; D’Emilio 1998; Engel 2001; Marotta 1981; Taylor, Kaminski & Dugan 2002). The neophyte group defined itself as a “homophile” organization, rather than a homosexual group, in an attempt to distance themselves from overtly sexual descriptors. Instead, the society hoped to portray homosexuality as an emotional attachment as well as a sexual one (Esterberg 1994; Marotta 1981). The goal of the Mattachine Society was initially to liberate homosexuals, and galvanize the gay community into militant political activity (D’Emilio 1998; Rimmerman 2002), as the following principles illustrate:

¹ A smaller organization, The Society for Human Rights, was founded in Chicago in 1925 (Adam 1995; Bullough 1979; Licata 1985; Marotta 1981; Taylor et al. 2002). This group was formulated primarily to fight for law reform in Illinois and purposely targeted prominent citizens such as birth control proponent Margaret Sanger for support, which failed (Licata 1985). The group never had more than ten members and was disbanded rather quickly after the wife of one of them filed charges against him for contributing to the delinquency of a minor in the person of their son (Bullough 1985; Licata 1985). The four active members were subsequently arrested, and one was fined (Adam 1995; Bullough 1989).
• ‘TO UNIFY’ those homosexuals isolated from their own kind

• ‘TO EDUCATE’ homosexuals and heterosexuals toward an ethical homosexuals culture … paralleling the emerging cultures of our fellow-minorities—the Negro, Mexican and Jewish peoples …

• ‘TO LEAD’: the more … socially conscious homosexuals [are to] provide leadership to the whole mass of social deviates and also

• “to assist ‘our people who are victimized daily as a result of our oppression.’” (Quoted in Adam 1995: 68)

A change in the leadership in 1953 resulted in a radical change of policy, however, and the Mattachine Society moved from a liberationist stance to one of accommodation and integration, insisting that homosexuality was a “minor characteristic that should not foster a rift with the heterosexual majority” (Engel 2001: 32). Consequently, movement strategies shifted to encompass a nonconfrontational stance designed to facilitate acceptance of homosexuality in the wider culture (D’Emilio 1983; Engel 2001; Taylor et al. 2002).

The 1950’s also saw the emergence of the first women’s homophile organization, the Daughters of Bilitis (DOB). It was founded by four couples in San Francisco in 1955, although Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon were the two women mostly responsible for its appearance (D’Emilio 1998; Marotta 1981). Much like the reformulation of the Mattachine Society, DOB adopted an integrationist stance, with a particular focus on educating the general public (Bernstein 1997; D’Emilio 1992; 1998; Engel 2001; Esterberg 1994; Marotta 1981). They sought to dispel “myths, misinformation and prejudice” (D’Emilio, 1998: 103) surrounding lesbian sexuality, participate in professional research projects, and work for legal change (D’Emilio 1998; Esterberg 1994).

The assimilationist discourse of the homophile movement stressed the similarity of homosexuals and heterosexuals in an attempt to reduce social hostility (D’Emilio 1998; Rimmerman 2002). As Rimmerman (2002) explains, “their strategy was to present themselves as
reasonable, well adjusted people, hoping these heterosexual arbiters of public opinion [the “professionals”] would rethink their assumptions regarding homosexuality” (22). In other words, they believed that they needed the support of experts to gain credibility in their campaign for equality (D’Emilio 1998). One of their key strategies was to de-emphasize the sexual aspect of homosexual relationships as it was this that was creating most social condemnation (Rimmerman 2002). This “quest for legitimacy” (D’Emilio 1998) was the prevalent strategy through the end of the 1950’s and into the 1960’s, up until the time of Stonewall, for both the Mattachine Society and DOB. Nevertheless, there were a few dissenting voices, including Franklin Kameny and Barbara Gittings, urging for a far more confrontational approach that included picketing (D’Emilio 1998; 2000; D’Emilio & Freedman 1988; Engel 2001; Rimmerman 2002). The more militant activists championed a far more active stance against antihomosexual ideals, including the first well-publicized gay rights pickets in Washington in 1965 to protest employment discrimination (Licata 1985; Vaid 1995). Interestingly, the protesters’ behavior and clothing was supervised by Kameny in order to challenge the stigmatizing stereotypes of lesbians and gay men (Licata 1985).

The 1960’s were a period of profound social unrest, highlighted by mass mobilization of both blacks and whites to end racial discrimination (Freeman & Johnson 1999; Rimmerman 2002). The move toward a proactive stance by the more radical members of the homophile movement embraced the politics and social movement activism of the civil rights movement, such that the mobilization strategies adopted by the two were often similar (Adam 1979; 1995; Button, Rienzo & Wald 1997; D’Emilio 1998; Licata 1985; Murray 1996; Rimmerman 2002). Activists protested discriminatory public policy, organized protests and boycotts, and even arranged a motorcade to protest the exclusion of homosexuals from the military (Altman 1993;
Engel 2001; Marotta 1981; Vaid 1995). The common thread was still the desire to assimilate into the wider society–only the movement strategies had changed (Altman 1993). According to Engel (2001), this was a primary reason for the failure to mobilize the same number of people evident in the civil rights movement: “by advocating that homosexuals should assimilate, and that the only difference between homosexuality and heterosexuality was fundamentally unimportant, [the homophile movement] destroyed any possibility of mass mobilization because it devastated the potential for collective identity formation” (38). Consequently, attempts to organize during this time period were ultimately unsuccessful.

The latter part of the 1960’s provided one of the most pivotal moments in the development of gay and lesbian civil rights movements–the Stonewall riots (Adam 1995; Button, Rienzo & Wald. 1997; Miller 1998; Rimmerman 2002). The evening of June 27th 1969 saw the police raid a gay bar in New York’s Greenwich Village, a not uncommon occurrence during this time period (Adam 1995; Bullough 1979; Carter 2004; D’Emilio & Freedman 1988; Marotta 1981; Miller 1998). What distinguished this particular night was that the bar patrons fought back, sparking a two day street battle (Adam 1979; D’Emilio 1998; Licata 1985; Marotta 1981). The following night saw graffiti bearing the legend “gay power” and the Mattachine Society in New York prepared special leaflets calling for organized resistance (Adam 1995; D’Emilio 1998). The Stonewall riots sparked demonstrations across the country and intense discussion of “the first gay riot in history” (D’Emilio 1998: 232). The aftermath of the disturbances intensified political mobilization and saw the rise of a new kind of homosexual activism, gay and lesbian liberation (Adam 1995; Button et al. 1997; D’Emilio 1998; Engel 2001; Rahman 2000; Rimmerman 2002; Weeks 2000).
The advent of the gay and lesbian liberation movement marked a profound shift in the political and social organizing of both gay men and lesbian women, including a change in terminology (Adam 1995; Altman 1993; D’Emilio 1992; Engel 2001). Similar to the manner in which the black civil rights movement rejected “Negro,” the fledgling gay liberation movement also argued for new descriptors (Licata 1985). The term “homosexual” was rejected as being too often associated with the medical establishment and imposed upon gays and lesbians to imply sickness (Engel 2001; Licata 1985; Marotta 1981). The ideals of the homophile movement were treated with disdain, and the word “homophile” abandoned for its association with an outmoded assimilationist ideology (Engel 2001; Licata 1985; Marotta 1981). These two terms were replaced by the word “gay,” an expression used by homosexuals to identify one another (Engel 2001; Licata 1985), and was a “recognition of internal power” (Engel 2002: 388). A member of the Gay Liberation Front explains it thus, “the artificial categories of ‘homosexual’ and ‘heterosexual’ have been laid on us by a sexist society” (Young 1970–quoted in D’Emilio & Freedman 1988: 322). For this Gay Liberation Front member, the term gay was embraced as it freed sexuality from its previous confines.

The gay liberation movement had its roots in the New Left principles of other social movements from the 1960’s, in particular black civil rights and women’s liberation (Adam 1995; D’Emilio 1992; Enge, 2001; Licata 1985; Rimmerman 2002). They did not see themselves as purely a gay and lesbian civil rights movement, but rather as a part of the wider radical movement to eradicate oppression (Adam 1995; Altman 1993). The liberationist ideology represented a total break with the homophile movement: the homophile movement emphasized assimilation and sameness whereas the gay liberation movement highlighted the need for radical social overhaul. The Gay Liberation Front (GLF), founded only a couple of months after the
Stonewall riots announced: “we are a revolutionary homosexual group of men and women formed with the realization that complete sexual liberation for all people cannot come about unless existing social institutions are abolished. We reject society’s attempt to impose sexual roles and definitions on our nature” (quoted in D’Emilio & Freedman 1988: 321). In other words, liberationists embraced their sexuality and difference, and urged social change to reflect this. They argued that homosexuality was a natural capacity for everyone, and that oppression stemmed from rigid enforcement of heterosexuality through the nuclear family (Adam 1995; Altman 1993; D’Emilio & Freedman 1988; Engel 2002; Terry 1999).

Two critical features of the gay liberation movement had a lasting impact on gay and lesbian politics: the notion of “coming out” and the mobilization of lesbians (Adam 1995; D’Emilio 1992; 2000; D’Emilio & Freedman 1988; Engel 2001; Miller 1998), women had constituted only a small fragment of the homophile movement. Before Stonewall (D’Emilio 1992) even DOB, an exclusively female organization, could not boast of a large membership. The emergence of gay liberation at about the same time as women’s liberation propelled large numbers of lesbian and heterosexual women into political activity (Adam 1995; D’Emilio 1992). Women’s issues had been largely ignored in the homophile movement, but the convergence of feminism and gay liberation provided a space for lesbian women to organize around issues important to both lesbian and heterosexual women.

The other feature of gay liberation with a profound impact on the future was the idea of “coming out” (Button et al. 1997; D’Emilio 1992; 1998; Engel 2001; 2002; Miller 1998; Vaid 1995). Before gay liberation, coming out had referred to the notion of individual gay men and lesbian women acknowledging one another’s sexual identity (D’Emilio 1998; Engel 2001; 2002). Liberationists took the term and recast it into a profoundly political move: “a critical step on the
road to freedom, coming out implied a rejection of negative social meaning attached to homosexuality in favor of pride and self acceptance … thus, the act became both a marker of liberation and an act of resistance against oppressive society” (D’Emilio & Freedman 1988: 322). As a result, homosexuals embraced coming out as crucial step in the process of affirming a positive sexual identity as either a gay man or a lesbian woman. It represented adoption of a unique sexual identity, self-affirmation in that identity, and came to encompass a wide range of activities and relationships that define a way of life (D’Emilio & Freedman 1988).

The assumption of a positive sexual identity provided the impetus necessary for mass political mobilization of gays and lesbians (D’Emilio 1992; Rahman 2000; Rimmerman 2002). The “out” gays and lesbians used their newly visible status to fight for civil rights in a manner impossible under the homophile movement, as that was characterized by secrecy. After coming out gay and lesbian political identity flourished as the sheer act of coming out meant an investment in the success of the gay and lesbian movement due to their visibility and resultant vulnerability to attack (D’Emilio 1998). Prior to Stonewall, and after nearly 20 years of activism, there were only about 50 homophile organizations, but by 1973 the liberation movement could boast more than 800 gay and lesbian groups with close to one thousand at the end of the 1970’s (D’Emilio 1992; 1998; Engel 2001; 2002). Moreover, the first anniversary of the Stonewall riots saw an astonishing 5000 (some estimates put the number as high as 10,000) people march in New York to commemorate the event (D’Emilio1992; 1998). Homosexuality, then, had morphed from a shameful stigma into an identity to be proud of.

The strong political mobilization of the 1970’s saw a number of breakthroughs for the gay and lesbian movement. Of critical importance was the removal of homosexuality by the American Psychiatric Association (APA) from the list of “sicknesses”–the Diagnostic and
Statistical Manual—in 1973 (Adam 1979; 1995; Brewer, Kaib & O’Connor 2000; D’Emilio 2000). The liberation movement frequently protested APA conventions where treatment of homosexuality was discussed, and vociferously rejected notions of homosexuality as a mental illness. The remarkable turnaround was not due to APA members changing their minds, but instead was the result of “an aggressive and sustained campaign by lesbian and gay activists” (Rimmerman 2002: 86). Activists also protested anti-homosexual laws and promoted legal reform. As a result, half the states repealed their sodomy laws during the 1970’s, the US Civil Service Commission lifted its ban on employing gays and lesbians, and a number of large cities incorporated sexual preference into civil rights laws (Adam 1995; Button et al.1997; D’Emilio & Freedman 1988; Rimmerman 2002).

The 1970’s, then, was a time of political gains and a period of community building and strengthening (Adam 1995; D’Emilio 1992; Seidman 1996). A number of gay and lesbian oriented media outlets appeared, including numerous books, magazines and newspapers, most notably the Advocate and Washington Blade (Engel 2001). These publications provided new and exciting opportunities for gay and lesbian self expression, and reinforced the sense of collective identity developed through political activism (Engel 2001; Rahman 2000). The burgeoning sense of community was further strengthened by the emergence of visibly gay residential areas, including the Castro district of San Francisco (D’Emilio 1992). Not only did these areas provide safe living spaces, but also additional opportunities for political activism and political power, to the point that an openly gay city supervisor was elected in San Francisco². By the end of the

² The supervisor, Harvey Milk, was assassinated in 1978, along with San Francisco mayor George Moscone (Adam 1995; D’Emilio 1992; Engel 2001). It is widely believed that the killer, Dan White, was politically motivated. He was the most conservative member in City Hall and believed he had been betrayed by liberals in the city (Adam 1995). A former policeman, White received the minimum possible sentence (a little under 8 years and he was out in 5), in spite of the fact that the murder of public officials was a capital crime (Adam 1995). The lenient sentence was greeted with outrage and sparked rioting in
1970’s, the gay and lesbian civil rights movements had a number of new national political organizations, gays and lesbians had become visible, and the notion of gay and lesbian political and social identity was firmly entrenched.

The move toward establishing gay and lesbian social and political identity is embedded in a discursive framework closely resembling that of the black civil rights movement (Bronski 1998; Button, Rienzo & Wald 2000; Epstein 1998). The “ethnic identity model” (Epstein 1998) allowed “lesbians and gay men [to claim] legitimacy as a deprived minority entitled to basic human rights” (Button et al. 2000: 270) in much the same ways as African Americans appealed for equal protection under law. In other words, gays and lesbians oriented themselves around their newly conceived sexual identities, used these identities to crystallize political mobilization, and put forward strong claims to the same civil rights as other minority groups (Bronski 1998; Button et al. 1997; 2000; Epstein 1998; Rimmerman 2002). Logically, “if one views gays and lesbians as similar to other disadvantaged minorities, the conventional liberal strategy is to extend to homosexuals the same legal protections granted to blacks, women and other minorities” (Button et al. 1997: 62). Furthermore, strategic use of the ethnic identity discourse promotes a sense of legitimacy within the gay and lesbian community as it creates a kind of public affirmation of sexual identity (Adam 1995; Button et al. 1997; 2000). Consequently, “a politics of identity is also a politics of social meaning. That is, because identity is a name, it is a signifier of social meaning (Bailey 1999: 27).

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The political mobilization of gays and lesbians not only led to the removal of sodomy statutes in over half the states, but also to a number of major cities adding sexual preference to their existing civil rights statutes (Adam 1995; D’Emilio 1998; D’Emilio & Freedman 1988). These cities included Boston, San Francisco and Washington D.C. Gay and lesbian activists also lobbied for including sexual orientation protection at the state level, and found sponsors to endorse a federal civil rights law (D’Emilio 1998; D’Emilio & Freedman 1988).

A burgeoning sense of collective identity within the gay and lesbian community, combined with a powerful and sometimes successful politics of identity, ignited a storm of protest from opponents, most notably the NCR (Bull & Gallagher 1996; Button, Rienzo & Wald 1997). Of particular interest is the 1977 Save Our Children campaign, spearheaded by Anita Bryant, to repeal a Dade County, FL, antidiscrimination ordinance including sexual orientation (Adam 1995; Bryant 1977; Bull & Gallagher 1996; D’Emilio 2000). This was the first time that the passage of any pro-gay legislation had met with organized resistance. Moreover, the fight was a key battleground between the competing ideologies of religious conservatism and sexual liberalism, and was the first of many such clashes (D’Emilio & Freedman 1993).

Bryant’s crusade hinged on two key arguments: that protection for gays and lesbians would be detrimental to children’s wellbeing, (as she argued, “… you would be discriminating against my children’s right to grow up in a healthy, decent community …” [Bryant 1977: 16]); second that civil rights legislation gave preferential treatment to gays and lesbians (Button et al.1997; Clendinen & Nagourney 1999; Rimmerman 2002). Bryant was chiefly responsible for the idea that gays and lesbians actively work to recruit children. She argued, “homosexuals cannot reproduce–so they must recruit. And to freshen their ranks, they must recruit the youth of America” (Bryant 1977: 62). Her campaign literature reinforced these arguments by including
references to newspaper articles detailing instances of pedophilia between adult men and younger boys and bearing the headline, “THERE IS NO ‘HUMAN RIGHT’ TO CORRUPT OUR CHILDREN” (Bryant 1977: 90–emphasis in original). These arguments played into entrenched fears regarding gays as child molesters, and resonated profoundly with voters in Miami both then and now (Adam 1995; Bronski 1998). Indeed, the conceptualization of the predatory homosexual is still a key factor in antigay rhetoric (Adam 1995; Bronski 1998; Herman 1997; Rimmerman 2002; Smith & Windes 2000).

Notwithstanding the potency of the pedophile argument, the second of Bryant’s arguments, that of preferential treatment, was perhaps the most critical (Bull & Gallagher 1996; Button et al. 1997; D’Emilio & Freedman 1993; Herman 1997; Rimmerman 2000; Stein 2001). Her opposition to the Dade County antidiscrimination ordinance stemmed from her belief that gays and lesbians are not deserving of legislative protection in the same manner as other minority groups: “we were not opposing an individual’s right to be treated with equality and fairness, but we did rise in opposition to the misleading demand of so-called civil rights for homosexuals who are not a legitimate oppressed minority with the same claims and rights as, say Chicanos or blacks” (Bryant 1977: 34). The challenge, therefore, was to any discussion of gays and lesbians as a minority group. As a result, any attempt to argue for civil rights would be vehemently opposed, since the gay and lesbian community was not perceived as having a genuine social and political identity.

The success of the Save Our Children campaign galvanized NCR opponents to the gay and lesbian civil rights movement across the country. By 1978, similar civil rights initiatives had been repealed in Eugene, St. Paul and Wichita (Clendinen & Nagourney 1999; Rimmerman 2002) and the NCR’s opposition to gay rights had gained momentum on the strength of the “no
special rights” platform (Button et al.1997; Green 2000; Rimmerman 2002). The core of the argument stems from an “antirights discourse” that repudiates claims to a legitimate gay and lesbian sexual identity, and denies the oppression of homosexuals and homosexuality (Herman 1997). According to Button et al (1997), the cooption of the rights discourse by the NCR goes through four steps: first, civil rights are defined as those rights specifically reserved for deserving minorities—those who have suffered discrimination; second, legal protections are defined as special rights that can be given or taken away by the majority, who have ordinary rights not special rights; third, these special rights are earned by those who qualify on the basis of various hardships and these special rights are deemed appropriate treatment for having endured; fourth, extending such rights imposes no cost on society. According to these premises, gay people do not deserve these special rights as they have not suffered discrimination like other “deserving minorities.” Furthermore, opponents argue that gays and lesbians have, in fact, more wealth and more political power than any other minority group, and are therefore even further removed from any justifiable claim to minority status (Button et al. 1997; Herman 1997).

The antirights discourse of the NCR remained a significant part of their antigay activism through the 1980’s and 1990’s (Herman 1997; Rimmerman 2002). Without a doubt, the continued adherence of the gay rights movement to a politics based on recognition of homosexuality as a genuine social and political identity structured much of the NCR rhetorical framing. Political campaigners in the gay and lesbian civil rights movement wedded to the ethnic identity model unwittingly aided NCR activism as it gave the NCR a proven discursive framework to structure their opposition (Green 2000).

Where Religion and Sexuality Meet: The Ex-Gays

Focus on the Family, as one of the major organizations in NCR activism, campaigned vigorously against any legal recognition of gays and lesbians. They argued against gay marriage,
calling it a threat to the very existence of society (Dobson 1990; 2004), and fought any legislation that included sexual orientation—including anti-discrimination laws and gay adoption laws (Diamond 1996; Dobson 2004; Gilgoff 2007; Hedges 1996). At the core of their arguments was still the “no special rights” platform started by Anita Bryant, and a cornerstone of NCR activist discourse. They stressed, time and again, that homosexuals were not a minority in the same way as racial and ethnic minorities (Dobson 2004; *Straight Answers*, 2003), and were therefore not in need of legislative protection.

In addition to the rights discourse, FOTF promoted the idea that homosexuality was preventable, treatable and changeable (Haley 2004; Nicolosi & Nicolosi 2002). Embedded within notions of sexual identity is the idea that it is immutable, unchangeable (Epstein 1999). In much the same way as African Americans are born black, homosexuals are born gay—and therefore deserving of equal protection under law since sexuality is a core part of their being. Any contradictory evidence would seriously undermine the bid by lesbians and gay men for legal recognition on the basis of sexual identity. By advancing the idea that homosexuality is treatable, and by challenging certain assumptions regarding immutable sexual identity, FOTF take direct aim at the heart of gay and lesbian identity politics.

Focus on the Family takes the position that there is in fact, an immutable sexual identity—everyone is born heterosexual (Haley 2004; Nicolosi & Nicolosi 2002). In the words of Mike Haley (2004), in charge of mobilization at FOF, former director of Gender Issues at FOTF and keynote speaker at *Love Won Out*: “There is no such thing as a homosexual … We are all

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3 Plaskow (2005) suggests that grounding the discussion of gay and lesbian civil rights in biological arguments is fundamentally flawed. Instead, she suggests that social constructionist arguments should be used to “place the issue of homosexuality in the larger context of the feminist critique of gender roles, compulsory heterosexuality, and traditional sexual ethics” (178).

4 Erzen (2006) argues this as a queer identity conversion as it necessitates the destabilization of sexual identity categories.
biological heterosexuals. To be sure, some heterosexuals find themselves dealing with a homosexual problem … . But to firmly identify oneself as a homosexual is to buy into the false idea that two distinct, valid, immutable orientations exist” (22). Therefore, since everyone is naturally heterosexual, the “homosexual problem” can be treated. Furthermore, the assumption that everyone is heterosexual negates arguments for gay civil rights. A booklet sold at the LWO conferences explains it thus:

If society was convinced that people were born gay, then some would feel there is a need to protect homosexuals by the government as a designated minority class status, such as African- or Native-Americans. Slowly but surely, it seems the government is embracing this view and granting special rights to the homosexual community for what is behaviorally based identity rather than a true genetic one. (Straight Answers 2003: 8)

FOTF use the language of special rights in concert with their promotion of the homosexuality-can-be-cured message to fight back against the gay and lesbian civil rights movement.

The idea that homosexuality can be cured is the central message of the Love Won Out conferences. The following extract comes from the Love Won Out website and details exactly what the conferences are about: “Focus on the Family is promoting the truth that change is possible for those who experience same-sex attractions … . We want people to know that individuals don't have to be gay and that a homosexual identity is something that can be overcome. That's why we've developed a one-day conference for those seeking answers on this often confusing and divisive issue” (www.lovewonout.com 2007). In other words, LWO is solely designed to promulgate the idea that homosexuality is treatable and that gays and lesbians can change.

The LWO conferences are part of the wider ex-gay movement that first appeared in the 1970’s, and is situated within evangelical religious doctrine as I just described it. The first ex-

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5 In particular, Focus on the Family’s reading of the Bible as inerrant.
gay ministry, New Hope (renamed Love in Action), was started by Frank Worthen in 1973 (Erzen 2006). Worthen spent 25 years as a homosexual himself, before reporting hearing God calling him back to his faith. Having done so, Worthen then began his “God-given mission” to counsel other gay individuals and bring them back to the Lord. Love in Action served as a template for later ex-gay organizations, most especially those following a religious affiliation with conservative Christian churches. Each ministry drew on a biblical understanding of sexuality that grounded heterosexuality as the only, true, God-given and natural sexual expression. These ex-gay ministries eventually came together under the umbrella organization of Exodus International (for a detailed history of the ex-gay movement and Love in Action see Erzen 2006).

Research into the ex-gay movement in social science had been virtually non-existent until about 2003. Sporadic articles about Exodus International appeared (Fetner 2005; Ponticelli 1996; 1999), but most research was in psychology and critiqued reparative therapy (see, for example, Drescher & Zucker 2006). Reparative therapy is used by many ex-gay programs to heal homosexuality, and I explain the approach in more detail in chapters 3 and 4. More recently, an in-depth ethnographic study examined identity transformation at New Hope Ministry (Erzen 2006), and a further study contrasted the pro-gay Christianity of the Metropolitan Community Church with the ex-gay Christianity of Exodus (Wolkomir 2001; 2006).

My study adds to this body of literature in some significant ways. Firstly, the research site has rarely been the object of academic investigation (one gay and lesbian civil rights organization, National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, has published three different studies through its Policy Institute). Most studies into the ex-gay movement have looked at ex-gay ministries under the umbrella of Exodus International (Erzen 2006; Ponticelli 1996; 1999; Wolkomir 2001;
2006) or looked at only textual material (Bennett 2003; Burack & Josephson 2005; Robinson & Spivey 2007). *Love Won Out* is a critical research venue since it brings the ex-gay message to a far larger audience than the residential ministries of Exodus or, indeed, the Exodus annual conference (*LWO* is allied with Exodus, however, and a number of the keynote speakers are on the board). Furthermore, *LWO* appeal explicitly to parents and friends of lesbians and gays, ministers, educators, and concerned citizens, in addition to the lesbians and gays themselves. Theoretically and methodologically, this dissertation also adds to the body of literature on the ex-gay movement, and the social psychological literature on the self, since the way in which Focus on the Family constructs particular selves in service of their organization through *Love Won Out* has not yet been studied.

In order to examine the manner in which Focus on the Family is redefining sexual identity in the *Love Won Out* conferences, I use the concept of the “institutional self” (Gubrium & Holstein 2001). In the following chapter, I explain the concept of the institutional self trace its theoretical development from the original conceptualization of the uniquely social self, into the postmodern world of multiple sites of discursive identity. Since the institutional self is a methodological as well as theoretical orientation, I also turn to a discussion of my methodological analysis in chapter 2. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 provide the empirical basis for my arguments. In chapter 6, I conclude by summarizing the key findings and conclusions of this research.
CHAPTER 2
ANALYZING INSTITUTIONAL SELVES: THEORY AND METHOD

The Development of the Social Self

The *Love Won Out* conferences promote a very specific conceptualization of sexual identity. Over the course of the day, the speakers take the audience on the very same journey that they themselves went through—from the troubled and desperate homosexual, to finding God, to the climax of healing and hopefully becoming a happy heterosexual. To fully understand the rhetorical construction of this self transition I use Gubrium & Holstein’s (2001) notion of the institutional self. Institutional self describes the manner in which different social institutions legitimate and promote the production of particular selves. This formulation of narrative identity has its roots in early symbolic interactionist understandings of the self. In this chapter, I first trace the development of the social self in order to make plain the complex theoretical origins of the self, and the subsequent move into a postmodern orientation toward self construction and narrative identity. In so doing, I situate my study within the larger body of literature surrounding narrative self identity.

Holstein and Gubrium’s (2000) narratively constructed self is an extension of the uniquely social self initially conceived by James, Cooley, Mead, Blumer and Goffman (Holstein & Gubrium 2000; Meltzer et al. 1975; Reynolds 1990; Reynolds & Herman-Kinney 2003; Stone & Farberman 1970). This newly social self signified a break with the way the self had traditionally been conceptualized in Western thought; it moved from an abstract, transcendental self to one empirically grounded in social reality (Holstein & Gubrium 2000; Meltzer, Petras & Reynolds 1975; Reynolds 1970).

William James was one of the first philosophers to conceive of a self outside of the metaphysical realm (Holstein & Gubrium 2000, Meltzer et al. 1975; Reynolds 2003). For James,
the self was empirically grounded in everyday life and experience. One of the key components in this empirical self was what James referred to as the social self. As he explains, “a man’s Social self is the recognition which he gets from his mates” (James 1983: 281). This social self is embedded within social interaction, and comes to be understood through communication with others. As James (1983) explains, “properly speaking a man has as many social selves as there are individuals who recognize him and carry an image of him in their mind” (281–emphasis in original). In other words, as we move through society and interact with different individuals, so each of those individuals come to have different views of our self. This conception of multiple selves came later to be viewed as the “multiple entity conception” (Reynolds 1970) and is still a popular idea in the symbolic interactionist tradition (Reynolds 2003).

James (1983) emphasizes his notions of his empirical self by his refusal to distinguish material elements of the self from more metaphysical elements:

In its widest possible sense, however, a man’s Me is the sum total of all that he CAN call his, not only his body and his psychic powers, but also his clothes, and his house, his wife and children, his ancestors and friends, his reputation and works, his lands and horses, and yacht and bank account (279–emphasis in original).

James’s empirical self also includes the pure ego, the material self (body, clothes, friends, family possessions etc.) and the spiritual self (inner or subjective beliefs) in addition to the social self.

James’s empirical self is also cast as reflexive as the self is both knower and known; both subject and object and, in more familiar terms both “I” and “me” (Stone & Farberman 1970). For James, there is a strong element of self awareness, hence the difference between the “I” and the “me”. As with later theorists of the self, James describes a difference between these two elements of the self. The “I” is the origin of our self awareness, the knower, whereas the “me” is the object of our self awareness, the known. As he describes;

Whatever I may be thinking of, I am always at the same time more or less aware of myself, of my personal existence. At the same time it is I who am aware; so that the total self of
me, being as it were duplex, partly known and partly knower, partly object and partly subject, must have two aspects discriminated in it, of which for shortness we may call one the me and the other the I. I call these “discriminated aspects,” and not separate things because the identity of I with me … must not be undermined by terminology. (James 1983: 373)

In other words, as I am sitting here in the library absorbed in thinking deep sociological thoughts, I am also aware of my personal existence—separate from those thoughts: my feet are cold from walking through the snow, I am hungry and I am going numb from sitting on a hard chair in a metal cage for hours. Yet these two aspects of my self, although differentiated, can never be, and should not be, separated. Each one is as much a part of me as the other.

Although James was one of the first to embed discussions of the self in the mundanity of everyday life, Charles Horton Cooley believed that James’s discussions of knower and known etc. were still too fundamentally abstract (Stone & Farberman 1970). Cooley’s goal was to further embed the self in everyday discourse. Indeed his theorizing was an advancement of James’s work: Cooley supposed that the self was not first a characteristic of the mind, and then afterwards becoming social, instead he presumed that the self arises with the mind through communication and social interaction (Holstein & Gubrium 2000; Stone & Farberman 1970; Mead 1930; Wood 1930). While James recognized the influence of the social environment, he was less interested in the development of the self through social interaction than in the spread of the self through the social landscape (Mead 1930).

In the introduction to Human Nature and the Social Order, Cooley (1956) clearly delineates the theoretical orientation he intends to follow for the entirety of his book; “the other [stream of life history] comes by way of language, intercourse and education … the social origin of his life comes by the pathway of intercourse with other persons” (4-5). Cooley’s emphasis on social interaction continues into his discussion of an empirical or social self. Similar to James, Cooley discusses the self in terms of the “I” and the “me”, yet he immediately tries to distance
himself from the more abstract discussions of his predecessors. He does not want to concern
himself with metaphysical discussions of self or of pure ego, and is far more interested in the self
in everyday interaction (Cooley 1956; Holstein & Gubrium 2000; Stone & Farberman 1970)—to
quote: “although the topic of the self is regarded as an abstruse one, this abstruseness belongs
chiefly, perhaps, to the metaphysical discussions of the ‘pure ego’—whatever that may be—while
the empirical self should not be very much more difficult to get hold of than other facts of the
mind” (Cooley 1956: 169).

Having dispensed with ego, Cooley turns his attention to his understandings of the social
self and one of his major contributions was the addition of feeling (Holstein & Gubrium 2000;
Perinbanayagam 1985; Stone & Farberman 1970)—or what he calls the “mineness” of the self. As
he explains, “the social self is simply any idea, or system of ideas, drawn from communication
that the mind cherishes as its own. Self feeling has its chief scope within the general life, not
outside of it; the special endeavor or tendency of which it is the emotional aspect finds its
principal field of exercise in a world of personal forces, reflected in the mind by a world of
personal impressions” (Cooley 1956: 179). In other words, the self is developed through
everyday social interaction (Holstein & Gubrium 2000; Perinbanayagam 1985; Stone &
Farberman 1970). Indeed by virtue of the fact that we each interact with a unique set of
individuals, so we draw upon a variety of experiences that form our own highly individual
feeling of “mineness”-or sense of self.

This seemingly instinctive appropriation of ideas was not Cooley’s entire view of the self,
however. The importance of both self feeling and social interaction in Cooley’s work was
indicative of his idea that we actually imagine how we appear to others, and adjust our self
accordingly—the now famous “looking glass self.” As Cooley (1956) describes;
[the self] takes the form of a somewhat definite imagination of how one’s self—that is, any idea he appropriates – appears in a particular mind, and the kind of self-feeling one has is determined by the attitude toward this attributed to the other mind. A social self of this sort might be called the reflected or looking-glass self. (151-152)

This looking-glass self has three key components: (1) our imagination of how we appear to others; (2) our imagination of how these others judge our appearance; and (3) our reaction to that imagination (Cooley 1956; Holstein & Gubrium 2000; Macionis 2003; Meltzer et al. 1974; Prus 1996; Reynolds 1990; Stone & Farberman 1970). For example, when I am preparing myself to face a new class for the first time, I find myself imagining how I would appear to these new students; if I wear a suit what will they think? If I carry my motorcycle helmet what will they think? If I am too soft on the first day of class, what will happen? Having imagined my appearance to these new students, I then, according to Cooley, imagine their judgment of my appearance. I cannot wear jeans as they may think me unprofessional, I already look too young to scare them into behaving—therefore I cannot be too soft on them. I decide to wear a suit, not carry my motorcycle helmet, and to be as strict as possible—my imagination tells me that such a combination creates the best impression of “competent, professional and scholarly instructor.” Thus, this view of my self is firmly embedded within the social realm, and not a product purely of my ego.

Although Cooley advanced understandings of the social self, it was Mead who made the concept far more comprehensive, and provided an account of the manner in which the self emerges and exists (Holstein & Gubrium 2000; Kuhn 1967; Meltzer et al. 1975; Perinbanayagam 1985; Reynolds 2003). Mead’s self is far less instinctive than Cooley’s; whereas Cooley’s self instinctively appropriated ideas from others, Mead’s self is more firmly embedded in society and is highly interactive (Holstein & Gubrium 2000; Meltzer et al. 1975). Mead is, in fact, rather
critical of Cooley’s notion of self-feeling as it leaves the self only nominally social (Holstein & Gubrium 2000; Mead 1967).

Mead’s general thesis is that the self is part of the process of social interaction. Indeed, one of Mead’s most important precepts is that our self-awareness is such that even our inner thoughts are a form of communication, “communication in the sense of significant symbols, communication which is not only directed to others, but also to the individual himself (Mead 1967: 139). This ability to be able to communicate with one’s self therefore “necessarily implies that one possesses a self. If you are capable of acting toward yourself as you do others, then you have a self” (Reynolds 1990: 58). In other words, for Mead, having a self meant that an individual could be an object to his or her self, and communicate accordingly (Blumer 1966; Charon 1998).

Mead describes the development of the social self in relation to play and organized games (see Charon 1979; Hewitt 1991; Mead 1967). The difference between the two is described thus, “in that early stage, he passes from one role to another just as whim takes him. But in a game, where a number of individuals are involved, then the child taking one role must be ready to take the role of everyone else...” (Mead, 1967: 151). This describes the development of one of Mead’s most famous concepts, the “generalized other.”

Through the form of the generalized other the community of which the individual is a part begins to exert influence. At this point there is awareness, within the individual selves, of a wider society. Prior to the game stage, the child can only take on the role of one other form at a time. During the game stage the self is constructed in reference to group attitudes and the child is able to imagine taking a variety of roles with many generalized others. Continued social interactions with generalized others forms patterns of interactions that create a certain consistency within the
self. For example, attending school every day for years and therefore interacting with the same
generalized other creates a “school self.” The society in the context of school is a set of
universally significant symbols that arouse in school children a particular set of responses.

Society is characterized by Mead as the social interaction of selves with varying
generalized others. As was seen in the school example, patterns of behavior aroused by the
generalized other become more consistent over time and with experience, and thus easier to predict. This is fundamental to the concept of society as it implies there are sets of common meanings that call out common responses for a wide number of people. In addition to the development of the generalized other in terms of group activities, Mead also describes “generalized social attitudes” (1967: 260). These he describes as institutions: representations of the common responses of all members of the community to a particular situation (Mead 1967).

The process of communication is as fundamental to the understanding of the larger social community as it is to the construction of individual selves. Society is as much embedded in social interaction as the self. Society is understood through the construction of generalized others that are, in turn, formulated through social interaction and communication. To illustrate, “The development of communication is not simply a matter of abstract ideas, but it is a process of putting one’s self in the place of the other person’s attitude, communicating through significant symbols” (Mead 1967: 327). Thus, society is constructed within the realm of human experience through the communication of significant symbols.

Mead also describes a relationship between the subjective and objective aspects of the self—the “I” and the “me” (Hewitt 1976; Holstein & Gubrium 2000; Mead 1967; Meltzer et al. 1975; Perinbanayagam 1985; Reynolds 1990; 2003). The “I” is that which is more immediate, spontaneous and impulsive, whereas the “me emphasizes the groups values, beliefs and, to a
certain extent, the internalization of the generalized other (Charon 1998; Hewitt 1976; Mead 1967; Perinbanayagam 1985; Reynolds 1990). Mead understood that the self is a continual process of interaction and negotiation between the “I” and the “me.” Furthermore, the presence of both aspects of the self ensures not only a level of social control and conformity, but also enables a level of novelt—even in ordinary, routine situations (Charon 1998; Hewitt 1976; Reynolds 1990).

Herbert Blumer was one of Mead’s students at the University of Chicago (Hewitt 1984; Holstein & Gubrium 2000). He acknowledges Mead’s influences, and tries to organize Mead’s concepts of mind, self and society into a coherent framework. It is Blumer (1969) who coined the term “symbolic interactionism” (in a footnote Blumer states that the term is a “barbaric neologism that I coined in an offhand way in an article. The term somehow caught on and is now in general use” (1969: 1). At the heart of Blumer’s (1969) work are, as he describes them, three simple premises:

The first premise is that human beings act toward such things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them … .The second premise is that the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one’s fellows. The third premise is that these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person dealing with the things he encounters. (2)

In other words, Blumer is concerned with the process of meaning-making through interactions among individuals. His notion of the social world is the world of meanings that actors construct and use for interaction. This process of meaning-making is continual. As Blumer (1969) reminds readers,

The actor selects, checks, suspends, regroups, and transforms the meanings in light of the situation in which he is placed and the direction of his action. Accordingly, interpretation should not be regarded as a mere automatic application of established meanings but as a formative process in which meanings are used and revised as instruments for the guidance and formation of action. (5–emphasis added)
Similar to Mead, then, Blumer argues that the self emerges in everyday social interaction—albeit in a far more coherent manner. In addition, Blumer adds the methodological reasoning for how to proceed with analysis of an interactional self via social science. Blumer uses Mead’s understanding of the interactional nature of the social world as a methodological call to study the “empirical” social world of the everyday. He writes, “The empirical social world, in short, is the world of everyday experience, the top layers of which we see in our lives and recognize in the lives of others (Blumer 1969: 35).” Empirical, in this sense, referring to the pragmatist’s conceptualization of experience (Holstein & Gubrium 2000).

In The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, Erving Goffman (1959) uses the notion of human interaction as theatre, dramaturgy, to describe social interaction. As suggested by the title of the manuscript, Goffman believes the self to be embedded in everyday life and presented to audiences through performance interaction. The goal of the performance is to convince observers of the legitimacy of the presentation, and thus achieve the desired response. As Goffman (1959) explains, “when an individual appears in the presence of others, there will usually be some reason for him to mobilize his activity so that it will convey an impression to others which it is in his interests to convey” (4).

Although Goffman is also concerned with the development of the self in social interaction, he differs from Mead and Blumer in his focus on social order and rituals of interaction (Gubrium & Holstein 1997; Holstein & Gubrium 2000; Katovich & Reese 1993). Indeed, Goffman wanted to know how the individual was implicit in maintaining social order—the self we present is observable, conforms to social standards and works to present believable performances. The audience is a vital component of the successful performance. Not only does the performer have a responsibility to them to be as s/he is claiming, but the audience is required to treat the performer
with respect. As Goffman (1959) explains, “Society is organized on the principle that any individual who possesses certain social characteristics has a moral right to expect that others will value and treat him in an appropriate manner” (13). Furthermore, at times when the performance breaks down, both the performer and the audience are expected to employ “defensive” and “protective” practices to maintain the continuity of the interaction (Goffman 1959). Herein lies one of the bases of the (now-classic) sociological term of impression management. Consequently, both audience and performer have a stake in producing and maintaining coherent selves. Furthermore, each individual has multiple selves that are pertinent to different performances (Gubrium & Holstein 2000a).

For all of these theorists, the self is an “interactional accomplishment” (Gagné & Tewkesbury 1999: 59) that is formulated through interaction with others, and is a reflexive, active agent in the circumstances of its own production (Weigert & Gecas 2003). In other words, the self is embedded within the discourse of everyday life: “self is here broadly understood to be an unfolding reflective awareness of being-in-the-world, including a sense of one’s past and future” (Ochs & Capps 1996: 21). Selves can therefore be understood through examination of the social situations in which each self is produced.

**From the social self to a narrative self**

The social self of James, Mead, Blumer and Goffman is interwoven with the multiplicity of selves exhibited as part of narrative identity in a postmodern world. As Gubrium & Holstein (2001) explain, “the self is a thoroughly social structure … the self unfolds within society … from this perspective if there is a personal self, it is not a private entity so much as it is a shared articulation of traits, roles, standpoints and behaviors that individuals acquire through social interaction” (6). This unfolding of self is essentially narrative in character, meaning that the self and narrative are inseparable as we talk our selves into being (Davis 2005; Gubrium & Holstein
Through our everyday conversations both with ourselves and others, we “tell” our lives and our stories (Davis 2005). As we do so, we learn who we are and can use that to comprehend our selves (Gubrium & Holstein 2000b). Therefore, we know ourselves through our use of narrative to give shape to our personal experiences and to format our relationships with others (Ochs & Capps 1996).

These selves do not appear abstractly, however, nor are they impromptu (Gubrium & Holstein 2000a). Rather they are constructed using available and identifiable cultural resources (Davis 2005; Gagné & Tewkesbury 1999; Holstein & Gubrium 2000): “self-construction is always accountable to the institutional preferences and the pertinent biographical particulars of one’s life” (Holstein & Gubrium 2000: 102). In other words, my own selves are always somewhat informed by my race, age, sex etc. in addition to the narrative models available to me in a particular social situation (Davis 2005; Gubrium & Holstein 2000a; Polletta 1998).

Any given social situation will have a particular set of narrative resources available for self construction (Gubrium & Holstein 1995; 2000a; 2000b). Individuals draw upon these resources to produce a recognizable entity that can be understood in context (Gubrium & Holstein 2000a; Gubrium 1991). The social context in which interaction occurs is then important for mediating who and what we are (Gubrium & Holstein 1996). These resources can be anything from personal experiences, to bodies, to the social location and social identity of the individual actors (Gubrium & Holstein 2000a; Crawley 2002; Gagne & Tewkesbury 1999). For example, as I interact with my mother, my self is partially drawn from pervious shared experiences, as well as my own social location as “daughter.” Consequently, that “Helena-as-daughter” self will look rather different from the “Helena-as-girlfriend” self or the “Helena-as-professor” selves, both of
which are constructed from a different set of experiences and performed from completely different social locations.

Analysis of social situations provides only limited understanding of the manner in which selves are produced, however. Although the self is embedded in everyday life and everyday interactions, this everyday life is interactionally produced within different social environments (Gubrium & Holstein 2000a; 2000b; Holstein & Gubrium 2000). In other words, the social environment, or local culture (Gubrium 1991; Gubrium & Holstein 1995, 2000a), is also implicated within narrative development of selves as it, too, provides a complex set of narrative resources from which the individual can construct a self. Our stories and our selves are only intelligible if we understand the wider institutional setting that may be influencing the available discourses (Broad 2002; Davis 2005; Gubrium 1991; Gubrium & Holstein 2000a; 2001; Holstein & Gubrium 2000; Loseke 2001; Polletta 1998).

Gubrium & Holstein (2000b) describe the various groups and organizations involved in production of selves as “going concerns” which are “relatively stable, routinized, ongoing patterns of action and interaction” (102). These going concerns are social institutions that also have an actively “discursive quality” (102) that affirms or denies certain stories (Gubrium 2005) and can range from large government organizations, to small informal gatherings and from multimillion dollar religious organizations to transsexual support groups. What each of these has in common is the production of numerous discourses that can be drawn upon to convey a certain type of self.

The influence of local culture upon self construction does not mean that the individual actor is completely at the mercy of institutional influence. She is not a puppet, rather she is a skilful, active participant in the ongoing negotiation between institutional demands and
individual biography; “the self the emanates from the interplay among institutional demands, restraints and resources on the one hand and biographically informed, self constituting social actions on the other” (Gubrium & Holstein 2000b: 102). This interplay is defined as interpretive practice, a process through which reality is “apprehended, understood, organized and represented” (Gubrium & Holstein 2000b: 103).

For Holstein & Gubrium (2000), interpretive practice consists of both ethnomethodological discursive practice, and Foucauldian discourses-in-practice. Discursive practice refers to the manner in which individuals “do” society or “do” the self. In terms of self production, discursive practice highlights the process of self actualization; consequently questions of what it is are secondary to questions of how the self is produced. Thus, through discursive practice, the process of self construction is analyzed.

In addition to discursive practice, Gubrium & Holstein (2000) also contend that Foucauldian notions of discourse in practice are critical when trying to understand the circumstances of self production. Where discursive practice examines the “hows” of social practice, discourse-in-practice is more concerned with the “whats” as these provide “the resources and interpretive possibilities for self designation” (Gubrium & Holstein 2000b: 103). These discourses-in-practice basically refer to the “conditions of possibility” or available cultural and historical narrative resources. For example, under the narrative auspices of Love Won Out, discourses-in-practice refer to those institutional resources that are available including evangelical religious doctrine.

The synthesis of discursive practice and discourse-in-practice is the foundation of interpretive practice. The two together allow for richly detailed examination of self production,
from the “artful procedures through which selves are constructed” to the narrative possibilities of particular social times and places. To quote:

interpretive practice comprises both the hows and whats of reality construction. It is a way of conceptualizing the entire technology of self construction, from the conversational machinery involved in interactionally storying the self, to the sorts of subjectivity that might possibly be conferred, to the settings and institutions within which selves are crafted. (Gubrium & Holstein 2000a: 94)

Interpretive practice, therefore, assumes the postmodern self is actively constructed within the different discursive realms of going concerns (Broad 2002). In the context of my dissertation, the going concern examined is the Love Won Out conference of Focus on the Family since it provides a unique discursive environment through which to understand the stories of self identity being told.

There are a myriad of entities in the business of self production, construction and reconstruction, including self help groups, churches, social movements, religious organizations, television talk shows etc. (Gubrium & Holstein 2001). Each of these going concerns provides a different discursive environment through which the self can be negotiated and understood using the narrative resources that each institution recognizes and promotes. Therefore, each going concern rhetorically constructs an institutional self, described by Loseke (2001) as “an image or type of self created by, and in service of, an organization” (348).

The notion of an institutional self has been used to describe how many going concerns provide rhetorical devices necessary for recognizing and dealing with personal troubles. Examples of such troubled selves include the battered woman, recovering alcoholic, divorcing, legal selves, and sexually marginalized selves. In each of these instances, the institution provides the narrative map for the construction and understanding of personal troubles. In the case of Focus on the Family, the Love Won Out conferences provide the discursive environment necessary to construct the troubled sexual self of the “gay man” or “lesbian woman.” In this way,
*LWO* sets the conditions of possibility for a homosexual self that is in line with institutional doctrine: it is a self deeply troubled and need of fixing. Not so coincidentally, *LWO* also creates narrative possibilities for reconstructing the troubled homosexual self into an untroubled heterosexual self.

These institutional selves are not automatically imprinted on the participants, however. Instead, the individual actor is engaged in interpretive activity designed to make the connection between the personal self and the troubled identity, which is conditioned by the discursive environment (Gubrium & Holstein 2001; Loseke 2001). The participant uses the institutional resources available to understand their own everyday lived experience in relation to the institutional self promoted. This identity work entails “framing lived experience in terms of being troubled,” or in the case of *LWO* from being “gay,” which is a problematic social and political identity that does not really exist to “homosexual,” which does—with the ultimate goal of reaching “ex-gay.”

“Institutional self” is a critical concept for understanding the ways in which going concerns legitimate certain narrative identities. Each discursive environment promotes a particular kind of self and a thorough investigation of both the narrative “whats” and “hows” can illuminate exactly what resources the organizations are privileging for these institutionally sanctioned identities.

The *LWO* conferences provide a distinct discursive environment for understanding the production of certain selves. *LWO* is actively engaged in the identity work necessary to formulate a specific social self—that of the ex-gay. In this study I examine the discursive production of this self, and other related selves. Through attendance at multiple *LWO* conferences and analysis of the textual material made available at them, I interrogate the
rhetorical production of the ex-gay self and highlight the resources used by FOTF to narrate such a controversial self.

**Data and Methods**

The *Love Won Out* conferences were started by Focus on the Family in 1998 as a means of promoting the message that homosexuality is preventable and treatable. The *LWO* ministry was first conceptualized by John Paulk who was then working at FOTF as the director of the Homosexuality and Gender Department as a means of “introducing homosexuals to Jesus Christ and to offer a way out of the lifestyle that ensnares them” (Paulk 2000). Paulk was featured on the cover of Newsweek in 1998, along with wife Anne, amidst a story titled “Can Gays Convert?” that highlighted conversion from gay to straight. The Paulk's also wrote a book called *Love Won Out* about their journey out of homosexuality—and this is how the conferences got their name.

*LWO* describes their mission in the conference guide in the following manner: “to provide a Christ centered comprehensive conference which will enlighten, empower and equip families, church and youth leaders, educators, counselors, policy-makers and the gay community on the truth about homosexuality and its impact on culture, families and youth.” This truth about homosexuality reads as follows: “Scripture is very clear in its condemnation of homosexual conduct … there is no established scientific evidence that sexual orientation is genetically determined…Focus on the Family has seen that by God’s grace … it is sometimes possible—although difficult—for a person to move from homosexual to a heterosexual orientation” (*Love Won Out Conference Guide* 2006: 7). *LWO*, then, is clearly focused on the particular development of an ex gay self, with development of this self embedded within narratives of change.
Since inception, FOTF have held over 40 of these one day conferences, and reached an audience estimated to be well over 30,000. The individual conferences draw an audience of between 700 and 1300 people each. LWO are held five times a year in major cities across the United States (they are also now developing international programs and have recently held conferences in Canada and Spain), generally in large churches willing to donate their space. The last conference, for example, was held at the Trinity Church in Omaha Nebraska.

Upon arrival at the conference venue such as, for example, the Coral Ridge Baptist Church in Fort Lauderdale, attendees are met by security provided by both a private security firm and the local police departments. Uniformed police officers were present in the church at both events I attended. Focus on the Family identify, both in the conference guide and on the Love Won Out website, the controversial nature of the material presented and, as such, expect significant protests. There were, incidentally, protests at the conferences I attended in both St Louis and Fort Lauderdale. I had to provide photographic identification, which was carefully checked, as I signed in for the day and received my conference packet. In addition, I underwent both hand frisking and bag searches by volunteers at the church door. Upon registering, I was handed a paper wristband which had to remain visible at all times. If the wristband was not in view, attendees were questioned and then promptly removed if they were shown to be imposters. I was also required to sign a waiver guaranteeing my good behavior. Should my behavior become disruptive, which it did not, signing the waiver would have assured my ejection from church grounds. An information sheet given out to all delegates explained the code of conduct:

While frank and open discussion is valuable, disruption of the conference is not acceptable, including: interrupting conference presenters or activities; distributing non-Focus on the Family literature; campaigning for alternative religions, philosophical or political views; seeking sexual contacts, abusing alcohol or narcotics during the conference; sharing registrations with other persons; or harassment of others in any form. Failure to abide by this code of conduct is grounds for dismissal from this conference.
Although the physical layout of the churches hosting the conference varied, the general environment of the *LWO* conferences did not. Conference goers were directed to the main sanctuary by a bevy of volunteers after registration. Inside the sanctuary, there was a lectern standing on the stage in front of the altar, with a *Love Won Out* banner draped over it. There was also a screen set up above the stage which played a PowerPoint slide show to greet the audience as they found their seats. The slides alternated between promotion of textual materials in the *LWO* bookstore and quotations from Scripture. Some of the biblical references included Psalm 91:14-16: “‘Because he loves me’ says the Lord, ‘I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name. He will call upon me and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble. I will deliver him and honor him’” and Hebrews 10:38-39, “But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back I will not be pleased with him. But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.”

All *LWO* conferences, including the two I attended follow the same format. They began promptly at 8 a.m. with a welcome and introduction from one of the FOTF spokespeople, including a videotaped introduction from the founder of Focus on the Family, James Dobson, and then moved into presentations to the entire audience until 11. These presentations included personal testimonies from an ex-gay man, Mike Haley, and an ex-lesbian, Melissa Fryrear. They were followed by a number of breakout sessions that audience members could choose to attend, including ones about responding to pro-gay theology and gay marriage. At each set of breakout sessions, audience members had a choice of four different topics. The period after lunch saw the audience converge again to listen to keynote speeches about the pro-gay agenda in schools, and one from Nancy Heche (mother of actress Anne Heche, the actress who was the partner of talk-show host Ellen DeGeneres before marrying a man). Two more sets of breakout sessions covered
such topics as prevention of male homosexuality and top ten questions loved ones ask, and then everyone gathered to hear the final plenary address. Here, the speaker gave the audience tips on how to respond to homosexuality in their lives, the workplace, schools and other public institutions. (For the full list of conference sessions, speakers and the chronology of the conference, see Appendix A).

Over the course of the conference, the speakers are actively engaged in the rhetorical production of a very specific self—that of the ex-gay. The day is formatted such that the audience is exposed to the narratives necessary not only to interpret what an ex gay self looks like, but also to narratively produce their own ex-gay self. For example, Mike Haley uses his time to take the audience on his own journey through homosexuality and into heterosexuality—using the rhetorical strategies provided by LWO and FOTF. LWO, then, provide a particular discursive environment for the production of troubled selves.

The data for my analysis of the ex-gay self come from attendance at LWO conferences held in the Evangelical Free Church in St. Louis and the Coral Ridge Baptist Church in Ft Lauderdale, both in 2006. Each conference was audiotaped and available for purchase once the conference was over. I obtained sound recordings of each conference and fully transcribed the material. Having carefully examined the sound recordings from the early LWO conferences, I discovered that there has been little change in institutional discourse from 1998 when the conferences began, to the present. As a result, I opted to only examine in detail those later conferences since I was able to attend these personally and therefore obtain a more nuanced understanding of the circumstances of self production. As a procedural note, although I transcribed and coded the material from both conferences, I opted to use extracts only from the Ft. Lauderdale event when
writing. *LWO* control what is being spoken over the course of the day very tightly, and as such the two conferences are almost identical bar a few idiosyncrasies in speech patterns.

Attendance at the conferences was critical for my analysis since my interest was in the manner in which the institutional self discourse was delivered. As such, I needed to examine the setting in which the conferences were held, as well as the transcriptions. While at the conferences, I paid particular attention to the arrangement of the space, the imagery used by the speakers, the audience reaction to the content, and my own visceral reaction to what was being performed. As Charmaz (2006) exclaims, “gathering ethnographic data means starting by engaging in the studied phenomena—get involved!” (24). My fieldnotes then became a part of my data and thus of my analysis.

In addition to the audio transcriptions and my fieldnotes, I also gathered textual material made available and the books recommended by the speakers. *LWO* produced a booklet series that mirrored the conference sessions and the conference goers were frequently urged to buy it since it would serve as an important reminder of the concepts covered. Consequently I bought a set of these as it was an illustration of the way the message of the *LWO* conferences is spread outside the narrative confines of the day. In addition, I purchased five other books that were often mentioned by the speakers, and four of which were written by those giving speeches. The book titles are: *God’s Grace and the Homosexual Next Door* by Alan Chambers and the Exodus International Leadership Team; *101 Frequently Asked Questions About Homosexuality* by Mike Haley; *A Parent’s Guide to Preventing Homosexuality* and *Healing Homosexuality* both by Joseph Nicolosi; and *Someone I Love is Gay* by Anita Worthen and Bob Davies. These, too formed an important part of my data as the *LWO* message was explained in far more detail than the conference structure allowed.
The LWO conferences are open to the public at a cost of $50. FOTF also encourages attendance from educators, researchers and gay activists, providing that the latter are not disruptive. With that in mind, I did not identify myself as a researcher when registering for the conferences. Indeed, I was not asked my reasons for attending when signing up. Once at the conferences, I made a conscious decision not to interact much with the other attendees. Following the model of Ponticelli (1996), who attended a week long ex-gay conference, I also did not identify myself as a researcher once at the conferences–thus rendering myself a covert researcher (Denzin 1968; Hilbert 1980). Like Ponticelli, I also disclosed my sexual orientation, lesbian, when I was asked and would explain that I was at LWO to learn.

It is interesting to note at this point that when other conference goers did speak to me, it was in very specific ways; I was either asked who the gay person in my life was, or if I had “accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as my own personal Lord and Savior.” If I answered “me” to the first question, then I was subsequently asked where I was on my journey (out of homosexuality), to which I would reply that I wasn’t on that particular journey. Invariably, the person approaching me would tell me about their gay or lesbian loved one, which I later came to think of as their “project gay,” and would explain how prayer would save us from damnation. In answer to the second question I would answer that no, I had not accepted Jesus into my life, which would inevitably lead to my having to politely but firmly decline the offer to say the sinners prayer at that time. Typically, the people who approached me would be in their 50’s and 60’s and would identify as parents with children approximately my age. I was one of the few people by myself and it was this that seemed to arouse the other attendee’s interest, or perhaps pity.
To interrogate the rhetorical production of the ex-gay self, I followed models of institutional ethnography of Broad (2002), Loseke (2001), Gubrium & Holstein (2000a; 2001); Holstein & Gubrium (2000) and others (Chase 2001; Crawley 2002; Pollner & Stein 2001). As Gubrium & Holstein (2001) explain institutional ethnography “document[s] the way social and discursive environments of particular going concerns provide for the construction of troubled selves” (16). In this sense, the focus is on how discourse structures identity. Traditionally, institutional ethnography typically locates the knower in the everyday world and forms a way of thinking that allows the ethnographer to see how the social world works (Campbell & Gregor 2004). Smith’s (2005; 2006) conceptualization of institutional ethnography is concerned with textually mediated relations of ruling, meaning that the focus is on how everyday individual experience is produced and then tied back into the institutional power structure by “documentary forms of knowledge” (DeVault & McCoy 2006: 19). In this approach the focus is more on how individuals are socially located, and then looks up at how individual experience is mediated and affected by institutional text. My approach to institutional ethnography follows more along the lines of Gubrium & Holstein (2001), in which the discursive environment of particular going concerns becomes key to understanding institutional production of self identity. In my dissertation, institutional ethnography allows me to interrogate how specific selves are produced by Focus on the Family under the narrative auspices of the Love Won Out conferences.

Institutional ethnography as defined by Gubrium & Holstein (2001) permits me as the researcher to examine the institutional discourse of the specific organization, in this case LWO, whilst still being attuned to the narrative “hows” of institutional self construction. By way of illustration, Broad (2002) utilizes the conceptualization of the institutional self to examine the production of social movement selves within one specific social movement organization. To do
this, she examined the dominant narrative resources present in the organizational discourse, and used this to explain the particular self produced within this discursive environment. In a similar manner, I examine the narrative resources used by LWO to construct the ex-gay self. What rhetorical strategies do they use? What discourses do they draw on? What narrative resources are privileged? How is the heterosexual self produced? How is the troubled ex-gay self constructed? How do FOTF use LWO to speak back to the lesbian and gay movement? In other words, what are the conditions of possibility for the ex-gay self?

I began my analysis with general understandings developed from my knowledge of the available literature (see Loseke & Cavendish 2001) and previous attendance at LWO conferences. Thematic analysis was undertaken using techniques adapted from interpretive grounded theory, in combination with the theoretical and methodological orientation of interpretive practice and analytic bracketing. Where interpretive practice provided me with a general set of questions to use to interrogate the data, the “how” and the “what” questions (Gubrium & Holstein 1997; 2000a; 2001; Holstein & Gubrium 2000; 2005), grounded theory gave a set of practical tools for data analysis that allowed the theory to develop from the data (Charmaz 1983; 2000; 2005; 2006; Dey 2004; Glaser & Strauss 1967; Strauss & Corbin 1990).

Grounded theory was developed by Glaser & Strauss in the late 1960’s to enable qualitative researchers to have as rigorous a methodology as quantitative, positivistic research, and also to codify existing qualitative practice (Charmaz 2006; Dey 2004). In particular, Glaser & Strauss advocated “discovery and theory development rather than logical deductive reasoning which relies on prior theoretical frameworks” (Charmaz 1983: 110), such that theoretical categories are allowed to emerge from the data itself. More specifically, they argued that data collection and analysis should be simultaneous, analytic codes should be constructed from the
data and not from previously developed hypotheses, the researcher should use a constant comparative method whereby comparisons are made during each analytic stage, theory development should happen during each step of data collection and analysis and that the researcher should engage in memo writing to help elaborate upon developing theoretical categories (Charmaz 2006). In other words, grounded theorists advocate methodological principles allowing analysis to proceed inductively from data to theory.

Charmaz (2000; 2005; 2006) took the basic idea of grounded theory and adapted it to incorporate a more interpretive orientation, thus allowing the researcher more freedom to integrate meaning construction into the analysis (Charmaz 2006). As she explains, “I assume that neither data nor theories are discovered. Rather, we are part of the world we study and the data we collect. We construct our grounded theories through our past and present involvements and interactions with people, perspectives and research practices” (Charmaz 2006: 10).

Consequently, constructivist grounded theory enables greater focus on meaning while not assuming one external version of reality; “data do not provide a window on reality. Rather, the ‘discovered’ reality arises from the interactive process and its temporal, cultural and structural contexts” (Charmaz 2000: 524). This means, therefore, that conceptual categories “arise though our interpretations of data rather than emanating from them “(Charmaz 2000: 505).

Charmaz also argues that it is impossible for a researcher such as myself to enter the field without having any orientating frame of reference. She stresses that what I see and hear and understand is going to be related to my own biography and prior exposure to the substantive material. Embracing an interpretive approach to grounded theory requires reflexive acknowledgement of my own frames of reference before, and during, the research endeavor. This being said, before I embarked on any initial coding, I had done a lot of background reading in
both evangelical religion and the development of sexual identity, and this consequently served to orient my thinking somewhat as I entered the field.

Constructivist grounded theory is firmly embedded within the social, local and historical context of the research project, such that the data and any theory produced are viewed as an interpretive rendering of the social world under consideration (Charmaz 2000; 2006; 2008). In this project, I have already described the historical and social context that led to the formation of the *Love Won Out* conferences. This enables my analysis to focus on how the *LWO* speakers draw upon particular historical, social and local discourses to create meaning.

To facilitate understanding of these interactive processes Charmaz suggests a two-stage coding process during which the data are categorized and labeled. As she explains, “coding is the pivotal link between collecting data and developing emergent theory to explain these data. Through coding you define what is happening in the data and begin to grapple with what it means” (Charmaz 2006: 46). The fundamental questions asked by grounded theorists when coding are: “What do I see going on here? What are people doing? What is happening? What kind of events are at issue here? How are they constructed? What do they mean?” (Charmaz 1983; Glaser 1978). In a grounded theory project, coding is defined by what is seen in the data, not by any preconceived theoretical ideas.

The first stage in the coding process, initial coding, merely investigates what is happening in the data and involves naming each line or section of data (Charmaz 2006). This process can be undertaken word by word, line by line, incident by incident, or some combination of three (Charmaz 2006; Glaser 1978). The breakdown and naming of the data in these small pieces makes it far easier to “remain open to the data and to see nuances in it” (Charmaz 2006: 50).
Consequently, initial codes help to categorize data, prompt an initial theoretical questioning of the data and lay clear any patterns or processes.

For this project, my initial coding involved examining the textual data line by line and then naming what I saw. For example, in the following line from Nicolosi (2006a) in his talk on “The Condition of Male Homosexuality,” I developed a number of initial codes. The line is “An informed disapproval does not mean homophobia. That word we get hit over our heads.” Here, the codes I initially developed were “debunking homophobia, reinterpretation of homophobia and use of the word by others.” These codes all emerged from my reading of the data and not from any preconceived ideas of what I expected to see in the data. Following Charmaz (2006), I limited my initial codes to words that reflected action, rather than forcing them to fit external theories. Furthermore, I followed her guidelines in terms of working quickly through the initial coding process. I decided upon line by line coding for the textual material since it enabled me to remain open-minded about the data. My fieldnotes evidenced a different kind of data so I used incident coding to document my findings as opposed to the line by line coding I used for the textual material. My fieldnotes are already in my own words so it made more sense to compare incidents and observations, than to label and name each line.

Once initial coding has highlighted particular themes or conceptual categories, focused coding begins to synthesize these ideas to allow for explanation of larger segments of data; “focused coding means using the most significant and/or frequent earlier codes to sift through large amounts of data. Focused coding requires decisions about which initial codes make the most analytic sense to categorize your data incisively and completely” (Charmaz 2006: 57). Focused coding, therefore, condenses the data into smaller, more manageable and analytically
important sections. Furthermore, focused coding is concerned with the development of conceptual categories rather than simply naming and labeling (Charmaz 1983).

Focused coding entails active engagement with the data and the codes developed in the initial stage. As I examined the codes I had initially developed, I explored which ones had the most explanatory power and from there came up with the focused codes. I then used these same codes to go back through my data and interrogate their utility. For example, careful examination of my data led me to the idea of “turning points” as the following two extracts from the transcription of Mike Haley’s (2006b) testimony show,

Well finally I built up the courage and I sat down with a female counselor the public school that I was at and I shared with her what I was thinking and what I was feeling. But because she had bought into the world’s idea about homosexuality she said Mike from what everything I understand about this issue you were born this way and this is how God has made you so to live a healthy productive life you are going to need to embrace that. Well to a 16 year old boy that hadn’t heard anything different you know what? That made sense. … and I figured well if this is who I am and this is how God has made me and I need to experience that community. And for those of you that are not familiar with Southern California I grew up very close to an area known as Laguna Beach and Laguna Beach is very much like the San Francisco of Southern California probably a lot like the Fort Lauderdale of Southern California. And so it was very easy and very accessible to for me and so for the very first time at the age of 16 I walked into a gay bar. And let me tell you I thought I had come home

So I began to go to the library and I began to do the research I began to look at these studies, these studies that I had heard talked about in the gay community that we would talk about in the gay bars. And I began to look at these studies. The LeVay hypothalamus study, the Bailey-Pillard twin studies, the Dean Hamer gene study and you know what folks? The very foundation upon which my entire life was based absolutely began to crumble when I realized what these researchers themselves had said about their studies. That they didn’t find a genetic link, that some in society like to say they do and my world crumbled. And I came to the end of myself. And as you can only imagine, one of my favorite stories in scripture is the story of the prodigal son. Of course I don’t like that we call it the story of the prodigal son? Because I don’t believe that story is about a son at all. I believe instead that that story is about a father about a godly father that waits on his knees in prayer daily for his one that’s lost. And so when I came to the end of myself, I did what the prodigal son did and I came home.

The two extracts both indicate what I described as turning points in Mike Haley’s life. One he identifies as pushing him toward the gay community, and one back toward his faith, but both
serve as markers in his life story. I then went back thorough all my data to identify the myriad ways in which the speakers used the concept of “turning point”. For example, in this extract speaker Joe Dallas (2006a) is talking about his own involvement with what LWO call pro-gay theology:

And when I was first exposed to the teaching there I wanted very much to believe what I was hearing. And so based on that desire I embraced it, eventually joined both the church and the staff and even promoted many of the pro-gay theological arguments we’ll be discussing this morning. Until January of 1984 when I realized I could no longer keep telling myself what I wanted to believe just because I wanted to believe it. What the Scripture plainly said was too difficult for me to keep getting around and that was when I repented and began my own journey of recovery.

Focused codes develop more into conceptual categories that have analytic importance. “Turning points,” for example, became an important section in my explanation of the way in which the ex-gay self is narratively developed by LWO.

The link between coding and the completion of analysis occurs through memo writing or the writing of analytic notes (Charmaz 2000; 2006). Memos are designed to enable the researcher to examine the focused codes for any patterns or links between them, to start to flesh out conceptual categories, makes comparisons between codes, and to link analytic interpretation with empirical reality. In other words, memo writing elaborates on ideas about data and codes and through this process, “fosters a theoretical rendering of the data” (Charmaz 1983: 121).

According to Charmaz (2000), memo writing helps researchers:

a. Grapple with ideas about the data
b. To set an analytic course
c. To refine categories
d. To define the relationships among various categories
e. To gain a sense of confidence and competence in their ability to analyze data
These memos are then sorted by category and integrated, thus revealing relationships and links between conceptual categories (Charmaz 1983). Analytic note writing occurs at all stages of the research process and forms the core of the grounded theory process.

Memo writing is a key part of the constructivist grounded theory process. As I moved through the coding process, I would write frequent analytic notes to myself that would explain what I thought I was seeing in the data. My earliest memos, for instance, started to examine the relationship between the different focused codes I had drawn up, and provided me with a space to discuss conceptual links between these ideas. In one analytic note, I started to explore the idea of mutable sexual identity, as this short extract illustrates, “to be ex-gay means that sexual identity has to have changed. To sell this idea, the speakers have to prove that sexuality can change. It seems like they do this by referring to the Bible and show how to do it by talking about reparative therapy.” I then used this brief memo to question how the speakers characterize these ideas and to interrogate how the mutability of sexuality identity is defined and “proven” by LWO. This process facilitates a more abstract analysis of conceptual categories. Memo writing continues throughout the research process, and much of it focuses on the constant comparative methods stressed by Glaser and Strauss in their original conceptualization of grounded theory (Charmaz 2006). New codes, memos and analytical categories are continually compared with one another and with the data to ensure that the data remains in the analysis.

By using constructivist grounded theory in combination with analytic bracketing, I had a specific set of methodological tools that were used to structure my data analysis. Analytic bracketing is a term developed by Gubrium & Holstein (1997; 2000b; 2005) to explain the manner in which the researcher can “capture the interplay between discursive practice and discourses-in-practice” (Gubrium & Holstein 2000b: 499). As they explain in more detail:
This procedure amounts to alternately bracketing the whats, then the hows, in order to assemble a more complete picture of practice. The objective is to move back and forth between constitutive activity and substantive resources, alternately describing each, making informative references to the other in the process. Either the activity or the substantive context becomes the provisional phenomenon, while interest in the other is temporarily deferred but not forgotten (Gubrium & Holstein 1997: 119).

In terms of my specific project, this entailed shifting my analytic lens from what substantively the LWO conferences are saying, to what narrative resources were drawn upon to say it. As a result, I alternately coded for both the “hows” and “whats” in the data.

In this study, I describe the specific narrative resources used by LWO to construct the institutional self. The upcoming chapters detail the rhetorical production of the different kinds of selves produced by Love Won Out in service of the Focus on the Family message. These include the production of the troubled gay self in need of healing, which I document in the next chapter, and the pivotal ex-gay self which I cover in chapter 4. The final empirical chapter details the manner in which Focus on the Family encourage the audience to become active agents of change themselves and in so doing, spread the message more widely. This dissertation documents the way in which a specific going concern provides the social and discursive environment necessary for production of a troubled self (Gubrium & Holstein 2001). In so doing, it answers the following charge from Gubrium & Holstein (2001), “if we are to understand the self and identity in a postmodern world, we can’t limit our attention to personal life; we must turn directly to the environments in which selves are constructed” (16).
Troubled selves are constructed in a number of different ways across the identity landscape. Different going concerns provide different conditions of possibility through which to understand self identity. Therefore, it is necessary to focus on the specific discursive environments in which these selves are constructed. The Love Won Out conferences of Focus on the Family are designed to promote the message that homosexuality is both “preventable and treatable” (www.lovewonout.com). For this message to be successful, FOTF must first provide a discursive framework through which gays and lesbians can recognize themselves as troubled, and, therefore, in need of treatment (Gubrium & Holstein 2001). In other words, to have an ex-gay self, there must first be a troubled gay self.

This chapter examines the manner in which LWO first assembles the troubled gay self in order to produce the ultimate goal of the oppositional ex-gay self. More specifically, I argue that the conference speakers must accomplish two key narrative goals: a rhetorical framework describing how gays and lesbians can change; and a rhetorical framework describing how gays and lesbians must change. In addition, as I argue in chapter 1, I indicate that LWO uses the rhetorical strategies associated with countermovements to fight against gay and lesbian civil rights and I show how these are woven throughout the production of the troubled gay self.

Coding for the LWO rhetoric involved several steps to understand the major themes as they developed over the conferences. As I explained in the previous chapter, I used interpretive grounded theory to interrogate the manner in which the troubled gay or lesbian self is produced by LWO.

First, to facilitate investigation of the gay self, I utilize Gubrium & Holstein’s (1997; 2000a; 2001; Holstein & Gubrium 2000) conceptualization of analytic bracketing which allows
me to isolate first the substantive themes (the “whats”) and then the narrative strategies used to produce such a self (the “hows). Therefore, I start the chapter with a discussion of how *LWO* constructs a gay and lesbian self that can change since this the most pivotal issue. Without the ability to change sexual identity, an ex-gay self would not exist. Second, I demonstrate how FOTF constructs the idea that gays and lesbians must change because they are argued to be a threat to themselves, their community and broader society. Finally I offer an analysis of how mobilization of a typical gay or lesbian self is used as justification for the radical sexual identity transformation from gay to ex-gay.

**Gays and Lesbians Can Change**

**The “Whats” of Change**

Focus on the Family, through the *Love Won Out* conferences, are describing to the audience a very specific self identity “ex-gay,” that first requires radical identity transformation. To accomplish this sexual identity transformation, the speakers at *Love Won Out* must first assemble a set of narrative resources that allow gays and lesbians to recognize themselves as troubled and as having the ability to change. Narrative production of a mutable gay self, therefore, becomes of paramount importance over the course of the day. If “change is possible” (Dobson 2001) then the audience must be equipped to “discover how” (*Love Won Out* billboard).

The message is of such critical importance that it is immediately referenced in the first speech of the day. Indeed, initial exposure to the troubled, mutable gay self comes within a minute and a half in the first keynote address of the day given by Dr. Joseph Nicolosi. Nicolosi is a licensed psychologist specializing in the treatment of homosexuality and the related gender identity disorder. In this first extract, the ability of the gay self to change is discursively produced both directly and indirectly. Towards the beginning of his speech on “The Condition of Male Homosexuality,” Nicolosi acknowledges his role in helping people to reach their ultimate goal of
heterosexuality, and therefore implicates the ability to change, and the privileging of heterosexual sexuality. To quote:

I have the opportunity to work with men and women fulfill their goal of heterosexual life …. Now while our treatment may not work for everyone, I could say our basic cure rate is a third a third a third. A third, no change a third significant improvement, and a third cure… And that the important thing I want to convey to you this morning, homosexual attraction is a symptom of something else. And that’s what the person learns in the course of therapy. That when they have a homosexual attraction something just happened interrelationally. Something that threw them off, something that took away their power, something that disoriented them and that the symptom of homosexuality is a reparative … a reparation of something that was just taken away from them (Nicolosi 2006a)

Immediately, Nicolosi makes it clear to the audience that a heterosexual life is possible, that a heterosexual life is desirable, and that treatment and a successful cure achievable. This is so, he argues, because causal factors are associated with homosexuality and since those causal factors are recognizable, they can be understood and dealt with accordingly.

Thematic development of these causal factors continues over the course of the day. Specifically, understanding of the development of homosexuality is embedded within a psychological discourse reminiscent of earlier gender inversion theories. In brief, gender inversion theories assumed that homosexuals had “bodies, conduct, attitudes, tastes and personalities characteristic of the opposite sex” (Terry 1999: 36) and this is what enabled same-sex attraction. Accordingly, men desiring men would appear effeminate and women desiring women would appear masculine—what Krafft-Ebing called the “mannish lesbian” (Erzen 2006; Seidman 1996; Terry 1999). Here, for example, is Nicolosi’s (2006a) explanation of homosexuality in the first session of the day. He explains to participants that: “homosexuality is not a sexual problem. We see it primarily as a gender identity problem.”

Diagnosis of homosexuality as a gender identity problem has its etiological roots in a particular psychological discursive framework, that of reparative therapy. Reparative therapy advanced gender inversion theories and placed them firmly in the realm of psychoanalysis. Now,
rather than being a biological, congenital condition, and hence incurable, homosexuality comes to be seen as a pathological state related to developmental mental disorders that can be treated (Erzen 2006; Nicolosi 1991; 1993; Terry 1999). A booklet produced by LWO (2004) explains it thus: “male homosexuality is a developmental problem that is almost always the result of a problem in family relations, particularly between father and son” (The Roots and Causes of Male Homosexuality: 10).

Reparative therapy produces a very distinct narrative structure through which the gay self can be understood. More specifically, reparative therapy argues that homosexuality is the result of traumatic early life experiences, including childhood sexual abuse, and problematic parent-child bonding. As Nicolosi states:

Same sex behavior is an attempt to repair childhood emotional hurts. And it’s really such good news. It good news for our clients that come to us because it’s basically saying you’re not a sinful degenerate perverted weirdo, your homosexual behavior is your attempt to make that male bonding connection that you needed. (2006a)

One third of our homosexual clients were sexually abused by older boys or men. (Nicolosi, 2006a)

Of most concern to the speakers at LWO is the effect of inadequate parent-child bonding on gender identity and gender expression. Importantly, the speakers consistently narrate gay or lesbian selves that have been inappropriately socialized and are in active violation of normative masculinity or femininity, as I will demonstrate. This gender transgression is traced back to the parents and, depending on whether the discussion concerns a gay man or lesbian woman, troubled relations with either the same sex or opposite sex parent.

Construction of the gay male self within the framework of reparative therapy is typically understood as a problem within the father-son relationship, with limited discussion of the mother-son dynamic. The father of the gay man is seen as the primary factor in the successful
psychosexual development of the son. As Nicolosi (2006a), one of the most active proponents of reparative therapy explains:

We know that men who have homosexual problems do not have good relationships with their fathers. We know this. And so the boy reaches out to the father. If he’s warmly embraced and encouraged then he’ll get that masculine identification. If he reaches out to the father and experiences father as an emotionally distant, emotionally unexpressive, critical, hostile, aloof, the boy will reach out and experience what we call a narcissistic hurt and he will shut down and he will abandon his masculine strivings.

To become appropriately masculine, the boy must have a good, strong relationship with his father. If that relationship fails, the boy will therefore reject masculinity and embrace femininity and be at risk of a “sexual identity struggle” (Fryrear 2006a).

The lack of identification with the father creates a gender identity crisis which, for reparative therapists, is the root of homosexuality. More specifically, the boy feels insecure with his own masculinity which is a source of “humiliation and shame” (Haley 2006a) and reaches out to other men for the affirmation and attention that should have come from the father:

Gender identity which is to say our internal sense of ourselves as male or female determines sexual orientation. We romanticize the mysterious, the other than me qualities which we do not possess i.e. what we do not identify within ourselves. So the man with the homosexual problem does not feel sufficient in his masculine identity and he wants to connect with that masculinity in the other man.” (Nicolosi 2006b).

The implication, here, is that the gay man recognizes his own need for masculinity and rather than finding it in himself, he reaches out to other men to provide it for him. In other words, the gay self is now constructed as one that is insufficiently masculine, yet still searching for that elusive masculinity through eroticization of the other. In the words of Mike Haley (2006b), an ex-gay man; “for the prehomosexual boy like myself, I feared the world of masculinity. I was much more comfortable in the world of women so when puberty kicked in I was drawn to the object of difference or to the object of curiosity.” Male homosexuality is then seen as a
reparative drive that sexualizes the need for same sex intimacy and male bonding (Robinson & Spivey 2007).

The mother is also implicated in the development of male homosexuality. For a boy to understand and embrace normative masculinity, he is expected to disidentify with his mother and bond with his father (Nicolosi 1991). If the mother does not allow this to happen, or remains too forcefully involved in the son’s life, this can adversely affect his psychosexual development. This conceptualization, then, is reminiscent of the now-classic “over bearing mother and weak father” causal explanation of male homosexuality; “Between mother and son we have over emotionally involved mother, dominant, a strong personality” (Nicolosi 2006a). The mother of a gay son may have devalued masculinity more generally, criticized her husband and made him seem weak and ineffectual and emphasized feminine identification. To quote: “homosexuals have long been thought to have mothers who are overly close, protective or domineering. The mother’s influence does seem to be a factor that can undermine the father-son relationship and sabotage the boy’s autonomy” (Nicolosi 1991: 77). A more personal example of this is given by Nicolosi as he recounts the story of one of his patients,

I remember a client saying to me I said what was the relationship with your father? He said oh I loved my father; my father was wonderful he was a saint. And I didn’t usually hear that kind of report. So I was curious. I said tell me more about your father. Saying to myself if your father was saint, how come you didn’t bond with him? What happened? So he’s talking, he’s wonderful he would entertain us, he was a clown, he would make us laugh at the dinner table and then my mother would scold him and make him stand in the corner throughout the rest of the dinner. (Nicolosi 1991: 77)

Here there is a clear identification of the mother emasculating the father, portraying the father as weak and not encouraging the father-son bonding.

Reparative therapy also provides a framework for understanding the production of the lesbian self. Similar to the formulation of the gay male self, the lesbian self is also understood in terms of parent-child bonding and traumatic life events, again sexual abuse being prevalent. A
booklet produced by \emph{LWO} and entitled \emph{The Roots and Causes of Female Homosexuality} explains the effect of these life events: “traumatic events interfere with a person’s very sense of being … when the emotional, verbal or sexual abuser is male, which is the majority of cases, the girl may fear involvement with, or hate all men” (2004: 18). The trauma of sexual abuse, it is argued, can be enough to turn the traumatized girl away from men entirely, and push her into relations with women. The question and answer session on lesbianism also highlights this;

a woman sharing that she’s been involved in lesbianism for 15 years tried to leave lesbianism through pastoral counseling, had childhood sexual abuse in her own life. Regrettably the pastor raped her, she got pregnant as a result, had a forced abortion, and asking how can she turn back to her faith that has failed her so miserably. (Fryrear 2006c)

This is the very first question of the session and in answering it, the speakers underscore the presence and effects of sexual abuse in lesbian life.

It is important to note here that each time lesbianism is discussed in detail it is consistently linked with sexual trauma and an inability to trust men. Fryrear (2006a) provides the following example,

as a result of being sexually violated, [a woman] vowed: I will never trust a man, I’ll never let a man touch me, I’ll never be emotionally vulnerable with a man, I’ll never get married, I’ll never be a wife, I’ll never be a mother. What’s left? I mean, what’s left? When you close that many doors, make that many judgments, make—make that many inner vows, it’s like almost, “what’s left?” but a vulnerability to same-sex relationships.

The speaker here is emphasizing the fact that women turn to other women only if there has been abuse in their past. The lesbian self being constructed is one that is so severely damaged that the only available outlet is another woman. In other words, lesbians are constructed as victims seeking solace as opposed to women actively and passionately seeking other women.

In addition to the perceived lack of trust in men, the presence of sexual trauma also affects how women understand femininity. The \emph{LWO} speakers repeatedly construct the lesbian
self as one that has abandoned feminine ideals as these are seen as a source of pain. In a session on “The Condition of Female Homosexuality,” Melissa Fryrear (2006a) explains how this works:

In the years, again, of having ministered to hundreds of women it came as no surprise to me of women who had been sexually violated, there was a rejection of her feminine identity, a rejection of her womanhood because it was a liability to be a woman <anger>. Because it meant that you would be hurt if you were a woman. And so you rejected the feminine identity, rejected womanhood much less, men, they’re not safe, they’re not trustworthy, so rejection, or closing of relationship with men and then a turning exclusively instead to relationships with women.

Again, lesbians are being narratively defined as women who have been traumatized by men and are looking for “safe” companionship with women.

Over the course of the conference, the lesbian self is never defined as being explicitly sexual. Instead, it seen as a troubled self that is searching for emotional bonding, not sexual fulfillment. Lesbians, therefore, are still seen as ‘proper’ women insofar as the fact that women are perceived to not have sexual desire. Rather, women are understood to have a craving for emotional attachment, as the following quote, from the session on lesbianism referenced above, illustrates;

At its core, lesbianism is not about sex, because women are more often than not relationally wired, emotionally wired. lesbianism is more about connecting and because we’re emotionally, relationally wired.” This need for emotional bonding is “what we would call a yearning in her heart to find a sense of completion, or a sense of wholeness within this real, or imagined, relationship with another woman. It’s an inner-driving need for nurture, for love, for acceptance, affirmation. (Fryrear 2006a)

This emotional desire is due, again, to a fractured parent-daughter bond. More specifically, a weak bond between mother and daughter is cited as a causal factor in the development of a lesbian self.

Mothers of lesbian daughters are described in two main ways; 1) a “doormat” relationship whereby the mother is perceived as downtrodden or ineffective and subject to the whims of men; (2) a “my best friend” relationship in which the daughter provides for the
emotional needs of the mothers, but the daughter’s emotional needs are not met. In both of these cases, the daughter perceives rejection from the mother and begins to emotionally withdraw. As a result, she is seen to be “vulnerable to a sexual identity struggle” since the withdrawal from the mother also implies a rejection of femininity. This is also understood to be a rejection of wifehood and motherhood which are discussed as the keys to normative femininity.

Fathers are also seen as critical in the adoption of an appropriately feminine gender identity, as the following quote from “The Condition of Female Homosexuality” demonstrates, because they have the power to shape their daughters perception of men in general,

Well daddies are very important in little girl’s lives too, for a few additional reasons. There are four things imperative for a father to convey to his daughter. Those are protection, attention, adoration and support … oftentimes three important things happen as a result. One, that little girl begins to grow up and develop and mature, into a sense of worth as a person. Because of the attention, and the affirmation and support her father gives her, she begins to grow up in a sense of worth as a person. Because father is the opposite gender, as she grows up, she also begins to develop a sense of value in the fact specifically that she’s female. She’ll begin to grow into a sense of value that she’s a young woman, a little girl, a female. And then third, fathers, at least for a season, represent the entire world of masculinity to her, they represent; he represents the universal world of men. And so in her life involved in her life, he begins to help show her and teach her how to relate to the opposite sex, in a healthy way. (Fryrear 2006a)

Fathers, then, bear the primary responsibility for helping their daughters understand the importance of the female role, specifically the relationship of femininity to masculinity. Female worth, therefore, is defined in direct relation to the masculine. If the girl is not encouraged by her father, the result could be a repudiation of femininity as she may not have learned the value and honor of being female. Melissa Fryrear describes a scenario in which a teenager was heading off to the prom and decided to wear a dress and makeup. She presented herself to her father who asked her “who hit you in the eyes?” with the following consequences:

Susan remembered that in her life, that moment in her life, because it was a risk for her to step out into the world of femininity, into the world of womanhood. Regardless of how well she did it or thought she did it, taking that risk of stepping out into that world and desperately needed the affirmation of her father, to affirm her in that. Susan said she ran up
to the bathroom with tears streaming down her face, ran into the sink with a washcloth and rubbed her face until it was raw and she vowed: “I will never ever ever do that again.” And 15 years later when she told this story she had never worn a dress again in her life, and had never worn makeup, had never taken that risk again into the world of femininity or womanhood. (Fryrear 2006a)

The father in this anecdote failed to affirm his daughter’s budding femininity. As a result, she turned away from womanhood and embraced a lesbian identity that enabled her to feel safe and secure.

Consequently, use of reparative therapy as a discursive framework privileges a narrative strategy clearly indicative of the idea that gays and lesbians can change because their homosexuality is framed as a coping mechanism for past traumas and neglect. Having identified the source of homosexual feelings, the speakers at Love Won Out then describe the conditions necessary for identity transformation, which I will discuss in more detail in the next chapter. What is apparent, however, is that these root causes are utilized to fight same-sex attraction;

the contributing factors add up to this: you have sexualized unmet needs. So the healing process includes finding appropriate ways to meet these legitimate needs through healthy activities and relationships. As you do so, you will notice the longing for inappropriate activities and relationships melts away” (Haley 2004: 130).

Reparative therapy, therefore, provides the narrative resources necessary for gays and lesbians to identify themselves as troubled, and start to realize how they may be able to undergo a radical sexual identity transformation.

**The “Hows” of Change**

The speakers at LWO use a number of different discursive strategies to produce a troubled gay or lesbian self. Bracketing the substantive themes, identified above, allows me to interrogate the process by which these themes are produced—what Gubrium & Holstein (1997; 2000; 2001) call the “hows” of interpretive practice.
Narrative production of a changeable gay self is legitimized by an appeal to both scientific and divine authority. In this first example, Nicolosi (2006a) immediately tells the audience that he has both the professional expertise and scientific knowledge to be able to story the gay self:

I have had the privilege of working as Mike said over the last 15 years with over a 1000 men who have wanted to change. Besides that we have worked with families, 100’s of families who are concerned about their GID gender identity disordered daughter or erm child. We are talking very young ages. Many in my own profession do not want to touch this topic of homosexuality and I think they are missing out on very gratifying occupation

It is also important to point out that Nicolosi is the first speaker of the day, consequently setting the tone for the rest of the conference. In his introduction from Mike Haley, both his qualifications and his clinical expertise are referred to. In addition he is always named as “Dr Nicolosi” whereas the other speakers are called by their first names.

The use of a scientist as the introductory speaker gives the conference an aura of credibility and scientific authority that is referenced throughout the day. The keynote address after lunch, which is also a critical time of day since it sets up the afternoon sessions, is also given by man with a doctoral degree. His credentials are also emphasized, both by the person introducing him and throughout the speech. Furthermore, his biography, which is available in both the conference guide and the LWO website stresses, “as a veteran and award winning teaching, principal, public policy analyst and college professor … Dr Carpenter currently serves as an assistant professor … at a major research university system” (Love Won Out Conference Guide 2006:8). He is given an authoritative voice through both his professional experience within the educational system and his current position as a university professor–with the emphasis on “major research” establishment.

I argue that the privileging of scientific discourse allows Love Won Out to persuasively argue that gays and lesbians can change and also to be able to claim they are the ones speaking the “truth” about homosexuality. This first quote highlights the importance of scientific
knowledge, “let's face it: science is fact … not theory” (Straight Answers: Exposing the Myths and Facts About Homosexuality 2003:10). Innumerable times over the course of the conference, the speakers refer to what the “facts” are or they reference scientific studies to validate a point. For instance, “the facts are that there is a connection between boyhood sexual abuse by an older male and homosexuality” (Nicolosi 2006a) and “there are thousands and thousands of different academic studies demonstrating that kids do better on every measure of well being when they are raised by their married, biological parents” (Maier 2006) or “many studies show there is a high correlation between gender non conformity and adult homosexuality.” (Nicolosi 2006b). Once scientific authority is established, the following claims can be made; “a future heterosexual life. The evidence is clear. When parents affirm a child’s sex appropriate gender identity … the child is much more likely to be heterosexual” (Nicolosi 2006b).

Scientific authority is also used to refute truth claims from the lesbian and gay civil rights movement, specifically those naming a biological basis for homosexuality. Repeatedly, the audience is told “there is no credible scientific evidence” (Carpenter 2006a) supporting a genetic basis for homosexuality. In more detail, “all the findings combined from the study of twins, gene “linkage” studies or brain dissections cannot prove that homosexuality is genetic. What is clear is that the scientific attempts to demonstrate that homosexual attraction is biologically determined have failed” (Straight Answers 2003: 9). In other words, LWO provides factual support for their discursive claims against being born gay. As Gubrium & Holstein (1997) note “to claim something as a fact, one must show that proper procedures have been followed to establish it as “objectively” known” (137). LWO accomplish this through their repeated scientific documentation, this allowing them to argue; “so to answer the question “are homosexuals
attractions biological?” The conclusive answer is that there is No support in scientific research for the conclusion that homosexuality is biological determined” (Straight Answers 2003: 10)

Discursive formulation of a gay self that can change also draws upon divine authority, with specific reference to biblical conceptualizations of sexuality. With a belief system embedded in wider evangelical discourse, including a belief in the Bible as the actual word of God and which I explained in chapter 1, this is a particularly powerful rhetorical strategy. The possibility of sexual identity transformation is first discussed in relation to the perceived immutability of homosexuality: “we do not believe it is genetic, Christian worldview, the Bible proves homosexuality is not genetic” (Fryrear 2006a). If the Bible asserts this, and the Bible is the literal word of God, then clearly sexuality can be changed.

The idea of biblical sexuality contradicting the idea of being born gay is also underscored in relation to what is characterized as the reality of God’s perspective, “from God’s perspective, there’s one orientation, we were all created heterosexual … God created heterosexual people” (Haley 2006b). This is neatly summarized by Haley (2004) in his book 101 Frequently Asked Questions About Homosexuality in answering the question can a homosexual really change?

If you believe in an all powerful God the answer is the loudest possible Yes! First Corinthians 6 spells this out gloriously when it proclaims that true freedom for homosexuals can be found in that one four-letter, life-giving word found in the first phase of verse 11: “and that is why some of you were.” After listing a number of vices that focus our need for Christ’s forgiveness, Paul proclaims this truth for all mankind—regardless of what sin has beset them – the true change is possible through the provision of Christ. (127)

The message is clear, homosexuals have the option of changing their sexual identity once religious faith is embraced and the underlying causes of homosexuality understood.

Gays and lesbians must change
The rhetorical production of a gay and lesbian self that can change only takes *Love Won Out* so far in their desire for sexual identity transformation and the eventual construction of an ex-gay self. Once gays and lesbians have been provided with a narrative framework for storying their troubled selves, they must also have incentive to undergo painful self reconstruction. In this next section, I discuss how *LWO* present interpretive resources necessary to hold those same troubled selves accountable for undergoing that change.

As I suggest in chapter 1, defining the obligation to change within an evangelical religious organization is obviously going to underscore the importance of biblical constructions of appropriate sexuality. Speakers consistently draw upon a discursive standard that describes homosexuality as sinful. Although I will cover this in greater detail in the upcoming chapter, there are some key points that need to be addressed here. In concert with the idea that homosexuality is sin is the fact that individuals must repent in order to get to heaven. Hence, gays and lesbians must repent of sin in order to be saved, “God is clear about the consequences of unrighteousness such as homosexual behavior. Yet, as with other sinful lifestyles, homosexuality is forgiven if the person repents his or her actions and turns to God” (*Straight Answers* 2003: 25).

Gays and lesbians are seen to be under divine mandate to change when their sexual conduct is viewed through the religious framework that *LWO* present. Speakers draw upon a traditional religious discourse that constructs homosexuality in relation to what is called God’s created intent. As the following suggests, human sexuality is storied as relations only between male and female within the marital union, “… from the beginning God made the male and female. For this cause will a man leave his father and cleave to his wife and the two shall become one … this was the created intention for the human marital and sexual experience … that it be
monogamous … that it be heterosexual” (Dallas 2006a). In this extract, Dallas is drawing the boundaries of appropriate sexuality. Moreover, homosexuality is seen as particularly egregious as it violates God’s original design for men and women.

The primary narrative resource drawn upon relates back to the ideas of reparative therapy discussed earlier. Reparative therapy constructs a mutable sexual identity and gives a clear indication of the root causes of homosexuality. These root causes are explained as a psychosexual developmental disorder related to inappropriate bonding between parents and children and exposure to traumatic life events. This discursive framework produces a self that is suffering from a serious identity disorder, and is seeking to repair childhood emotional hurts through same-sex expression. In general, the psychological profile presented is one in which homosexuals are depicted as “pathetic and unfulfilled; gay men and lesbians constantly seek parental substitutes as love objects—a doomed and tragic quest” (Herman 1997: 71).

This depiction of homosexuality as a developmental mental disorder frequently characterizes selves that are empty, lonely and emotionally crippled, as these excerpts indicate, homosexuality is always prompted, ALWAYS PROMPTED, by an inner sense of emptiness. (Nicolosi 2006a)

And so if there’s a breakdown in a same sex relationship with the mother, a same-sex love deficit can occur. (Fryrear 2006a)

The signs are … loneliness, anxiety, depression, maladaptation. (Nicolosi 2006b)

What is notable in all of these quotes is the stress placed on selves that are empty and emotionally deficient. In other words, selves that are psychologically unhealthy. The underlying thread suggests that to become healthy there must be a radical identity change.

Emotional immaturity is also referenced as a consequence of inadequate parent-child bonding. Gays and lesbians are often infantilized and depicted as acting out against straight society. Haley describes an incident with his Christian mentor that sets the two selves against one
another. Here, Haley, in an attempt to provoke his mentor had been talking about his sexual activities the previous weekend and his mentor respectfully declined to listen, then the following exchange takes place,

But I want to let you know that there’s not going to be anything that you’re going to be able to do or say that’s going to push me away so let’s just stop that game right now. And I was like, okay. And it would take the wind out of my sails and I would have to go on to the next game. Until he figured that one out (Haley 2006b)

The self being storied is one that is immature and playing games, especially when read against the sensible adult mentor. Nicolosi (2006a) also refers to gay men as emotionally immature and likens them to children who have never grown up, “Have you ever seen a gay pride parade? These are like a bunch of little boys.” Infantilizing gay men is a powerful discursive tool, and again implicates these troubled selves in a need to change.

Conceptualization of homosexuality as unhealthy is a consistent theme throughout the conference. Speakers routinely draw on interpretive resources that frame homosexuality as pathological. Nicolosi even gives a detailed definition of pathology to ensure the audience is clear on how damaging homosexuality is: “pathology is defined as maladaptive, self defeating, self destructive behavior”. Directly linking sexuality and pathology makes the need for a cure imperative.

Portrayal of the physical consequences of engaging in homosexual sex also highlights the need for sexual identity transformation. The following quotes from two different conference sessions detail the myriad ways in which gay and lesbian selves are sick, and provide compelling reasons for change:

For example the 1991 study in the Archives of General Psychiatry found that there were substantially higher levels of mental health problems including suicide attempts, anxiety disorders, major depression, eating disorders, substance abuse. And that’s just one study. Many, many studies support this. (Nicolosi 2006b)
And frankly I believe we should also be grieved by the consequences of homosexual behavior. Um, as many of you know, it’s linked to some, some very tragic health consequences, elevated rates of psychiatric illness, drug and alcohol abuse and suicide. And research suggests that the life expectancy of a gay man is about 7 to 20 years shorter than that of a heterosexual man. (Maier 2006)

Haley (2004) also details studies in which both gay men and lesbians are said to smoke and drink more, have greater levels of mental illness, be more at risk from domestic violence and be far more promiscuous than heterosexuals. Accordingly the onus is on homosexuals to take responsibility for their actions.

The theme of pathology and mental illness is furthered with a depiction of gay men as disease carriers. More specifically, gay men are portrayed as being far more sexually promiscuous and therefore at risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases. Of primary importance here is, of course, the association between gay male promiscuity and AIDS, the chances of a heterosexual contracting the HIV virus from one episode of unprotected sexual intercourse is one in a hundred and seventy five thousand. Do you know what that statistic is for a gay man that engages in one episode of unprotected homosexual intercourse? It’s one in 165. Not 165,000, 165 (Haley 2006b)

Haley (2004) is also careful to note in his book that AIDS infection rates are rising fastest amongst the gay male population. Moreover, in terms of promiscuity, he references a study in which 28% of gay men were said to have had 1000 or more sexual partners, which far exceeds the numbers in the heterosexual community. Linking promiscuity with homosexuality and disease is achieved thus:

Solid irrefutable evidence proves that there are lethal consequences to engaging in the defining features of male homosexuality—that is promiscuity. According to one report, the risk of anal cancer rises an astounding 4000% for those engaging in homosexual intercourse and doubles again for those who are HIV positive. (Straight Answers 2003: 12)

Lesbian women are not immune from depiction as promiscuous and diseased, despite construction of lesbianism as emotional, not sexual. A booklet produced by LWO to detail the myths and facts about homosexuality deals with the perception that “lesbian relationships are
healthier than gay male relationships” by responding “lesbian relationships are equally unhealthy, and just as life-threatening as gay male relationships” (Straight Answers 2003: 21). In particular, “it’s important that women know the consequences of their choices. Lesbians are not excluded from the realities of promiscuity, like the HIV virus” (Straight Answers 2003: 22). Both gay men and lesbians, then, run the risk of contracting life-threatening diseases if they do not change their sexual identity.

The substantive themes I have detailed above all deal with the individual consequences of homosexuality, and therefore the need to change on a personal level. Love Won Out also draw on wider cultural narratives to stress the importance of identity transformation, which I will describe in detail in chapter 5. One thing that is critical, however, is the connection drawn between homosexuality and pedophilia. Such a potent narrative resource makes it absolutely imperative for gays and lesbians to change their sexuality and accordingly be less of a threat to children. This association is indirectly referenced by Nicolosi (2006a), “1/3 of our homosexual clients at our clinic were sexually abused by older boys or men. And the personal histories of gay men often report same sex abuse, and we know that those who were abused become abusers. Besides that in addition, gay activists are more likely to lobby for lowering the sexual age of consent.” Fryrear (2006c) expresses the relationship more frankly “within the male population there are a disproportionate number of gay identified men who are involved in pedophilia.” Undoubtedly, the pressure is on homosexuals to accept that their selves are troubled and to work on healing. If they do not, not only are they a danger to themselves, but also a danger to others–most especially children.

To accomplish sexual identity transformation, gay men and lesbians must first learn what thought, behaviors and emotions are consistent with inappropriate sexual expression (Wolkomir
This necessitates discursive formulation of a gay self that is troubled and in need of healing. Narrative production of such a self draws upon interpretive resources suggesting that gays and lesbians can, with specific reference to reparative therapy, and gays and lesbians must change, with specific reference to pathological behavior.

Production of this gay self is accomplished through a process of typification, described by Gubrium & Holstein (1997) as a means of categorizing and understanding “typical” behavior: “experience makes no sense until it has been categorized as evidently an instance of some known type” (138). This enables people to make sense of a particular discursive account and subsequently ascribe “other characteristics, activities, motives to objects and actions” (Gubrium & Holstein 1997: 138). In terms of a gay or lesbian self production, typification allows audience members to assign a range of meanings to what “gay” entails.

Over the course of the conference, the speakers assemble a range of discursive resources to mobilize the typical gay or lesbian self. Gays are constructed as mentally ill, pathological, promiscuous, traumatized, emotionally immature and sinful. Typification in this manner has radical consequences for self identity and self construction since it also provides justification for particular courses of action—sexual identity transformation from gay to ex-gay. In the next chapter I detail how this self transformation is achieved.
CHAPTER 4  
BECOMING EX-GAY

Mobilization of the typical gay or lesbian self draws on narrative resources that signify a certain kind of sexual identity. The gay and lesbian selves constructed are a critical component of the institutional selves produced by *Love Won Out* for the evangelical religious organization, Focus on the Family. Narrative production of the troubled gay or lesbian self implicates one that can sexual identity and must change it. Gays and lesbians are depicted as a danger to themselves and to others, sinful, and psychologically damaged. Consequently, with this worldview, *Love Won Out* must develop a rhetorical framework that fosters development of ex-gay and ex-lesbian selves that can be healed from the trials and tribulations of their former lives. This framework draws upon discourses of religion, psychotherapy, and self-help movements, as I will explain in this chapter.

The most critical aspect of the ex-gay self is that it develops primarily through a process of religious identity transformation, which subsequently directs the sexual identity transformation. Over the course of this chapter, I describe the story of a self that has come to recognize itself as troubled, as I explained in the previous chapter, one that embarks on a “healing journey” using the discursive frameworks provided by evangelical religion and reparative therapy. The ex-gay self produced is one that can only be understood in relation to specific constructions of biblical sexuality, that is that the only true God-given sexual identity is heterosexual. Therefore I begin this chapter with a discussion of the narrative resources *Love Won Out* draws upon to produce the religious self. I also describe the discursive production of sexual identity transformation, and the strategies used to maintain the ex-gay self. I conclude by examining the narrative tension inherent in an ex-gay self that is described as both immutable and changeable written on the body and socially constructed.
The narrative resources used by *Love Won Out* to mobilize the typical ex-gay self are predominantly those associated with biblical constructions of acceptable behavior within the specific religious doctrine associated with Focus on the Family. As I described in chapter 1, FOTF is an evangelical religious organization and, as such, stories an institutional self that reflects those ideals. More specifically, narrative construction of an ex-gay self is confined within the biblical conditions of possibility for gender and sexuality.

**Sin and Salvation**

To successfully perform the radical identity transformation from gay to ex-gay, there must first have been a *self* realization of the problematic nature of homosexuality. The speakers at *LWO* routinely draw upon biblical constructions of the sinful nature of homosexuality to detail their initially reluctant acceptance of these truth claims. Having said that, however, acceptance of the idea that homosexuality is sinful is preceded by fervent denial of religion. During the testimonies of Mike Haley and Melissa Fryrear, the ex-gay and ex-lesbian respectively, each recounts significant episodes in which they symbolically shut religion out of their lives in order to embrace a homosexual identity. In this upcoming extract, Haley (2006a) describes his initial confusion surrounding the negotiation of his religious identity and his burgeoning homosexuality,

I’m growing up in the church. As a matter of fact I’m the kid in the youth group that every youth pastor would have wanted. If there was a mission trip I had five of my unsaved friends going on that trip that I’d pray for. I was there early to set up chairs I was very, very involved. But I began to become very confused as you can only imagine. I remember at the age of 15 going to a large Christian camp. I went forward and rededicated my life and I felt at that point the Lord put a call on my life to full time Christian service specifically as it pertained to dealing with youth. But I was like ok God wait a minute I’m very confused and part of my confusion stemmed from the attitude of the pulpit that I was receiving from the Church that I was growing up in. The church that I was raised in said there was a hotter place in hell for gays and lesbians or that Jesus had to hang a little longer on the cross for people that were like that.
Here, Haley clearly identifies his own strong religious orientation and the difficulty he had reconciling that with his sexual feelings, and that Jesus had to suffer more for it. He continues, “That’s what explained all of those feelings as I was growing up. Some of those developmental processes Dr. Nicolosi just talked about. I misinterpreted them because I believed at that point that I was born gay and I figured well if this is who I am and this is how God has made me then I need to go and I need to experience that community” (Haley 2006a).

Haley makes it a point to stress that he was under the impression that his homosexuality was God-given, due to “misperception” of developmental processes and the influence of misguided cultural ideology. Further on in his testimony, he describes his last attempt to reconcile his faith with his sexuality. In this excerpt, Haley (2006a) is having a discussion about his homosexuality with his youth pastor who subsequently suggests that he needs to pray more to rid himself of his unwanted sexual feelings,

So what do you think I did as a 17-year-old junior in high school that didn’t want to be gay? I read my Bible and I read my Bible and I read my Bible and I prayed and I prayed and I prayed. I remember one night kneeling next to my bed and saying Lord I’m not going to stop praying until I feel different only to fall asleep and waking up feeling just as different as I had when I started to pray …. But I was told to put God in a box to pray to him and to read his word and he owed it to me to change me. Well how many of you have been Christians long enough to know you don’t tell God what to do. So when God didn’t do what I told him he should do I got angry at my faith, I got angry at the church, I denied that God existed, I became hateful towards the Christian community. I hated God, denied that he existed and I lived the next 12 years involved in the gay community.

Haley’s testimony, which is the second speech of the day, provides a clear narrative grounding for an ex-gay self that undergoes a primarily religious transformation, whereas the troubled gay self is one that has rejected religion and turned its back on faith.

The storying of the troubled gay self in terms of the rejection of religion is a consistent theme over the course of the conference. Fryrear (2006b) explains her own experiences,

There’s a Sunday morning that stands out to me, I can see it as clearly as yesterday. I was 13-years-old at the time, I was sitting in the sanctuary with my parents, waiting for that
service to begin and I picked up a Bible that was resting on the back of the pew in front of me, and I began to very casually flip through the Bible that morning. Well it fell open to the book of Leviticus. And the 18th chapter of Leviticus. And I began to read through and I got to verse 22, that a man should not lie with another man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable...I only read the verse twice, but it had a very decisive effect on me that Sunday morning, because after I read it again, I made the decision to close that Bible, I placed it on the back of the pew in front of me, and just as I had done with the Bible, I made the decision to close my heart to God, because basically I misread the verse.

When I read the verse, I read, “Melissa is detestable.” I was 13; I was already questioning whether I might be gay. I was already questioning my sexual identity. And so when I read that verse, I thought that that’s what God was saying about me, that I was detestable. And so I made a conscious decision to close my heart to Him.

In this excerpt, Fryrear constructs gay and lesbian selves as irreligious, having made a conscious decision to renounce faith, because their faith has no room for them.

Despite initial rejection of religion, gays and lesbians can come to a gradual acceptance of biblical teachings on sexuality through the evangelism of an outside mentor. In fact, evangelical religious doctrine suggests that church members should be involved in actively recruiting new members or converts, including troubled gays or lesbians that can be healed once brought back into the fold (Marsden 2006; Smith 1998; Utter & Storey 2007). Evangelism, or sharing of the gospel, is regularly cited by the speakers as a critical component for religious awakening. Haley, describes his moment of transformation through evangelism that he experienced just as he was about to engage in anonymous sex with a man he picked up at a gay gym. The man suddenly said “I am sorry to have led you on, but I’m a Christian and I am trying to walk away from this.” This man then went on to ask if he could tell Haley his story. Haley (2006a) then chronicles what happened next,
quarter after midnight we’re sitting in his car, he’s going on and on about these things that he’s been learning. Some of these things are ringing true of my own life. He’s going on and on about his counselor, this man named Jeff. Jeff is telling me this and Jeff this and Jeff that and all of a sudden his eyes got big, bigger than I’ve ever seen anybody/s eyes get in my entire life. And he said you are never going to believe this but there’s Jeff right now <laughter>. So I got what I now know was the holy spirit goose bumps <laughter> and the Lord brought back to my mind a verse that I had memorized as a young boy in vacation Bible school: ‘was my arm too short to rescue you?’

In this excerpt, Haley clearly identifies the moment that he began what he later calls his walk out of homosexuality. The self being constructed is one that is being led toward to the realization of its own troubled nature and the need for radical identity transformation through religious conversion.

Evangelical religious doctrine is also used to construct the sinful nature of homosexuality and the subsequent need for repentance, as I briefly described in the previous chapter. In a book written by Alan Chambers (2006), one of the speakers at the conferences, and other influential figures at the leading ex-gay organization–Exodus International–homosexuality is described as “abominable to God” (30). However, he also stresses that humanity’s fallen nature is such that all are sinners, with homosexuality being no worse a sin than anything else. Later in the same book, one of the authors offers the following, “the church was correct in calling homosexuality a sin, but as with all sins, God offers forgiveness, restoration and transformation” (Goeke 2006: 109). Accordingly, homosexuals can be “saved” from their sin if they repent and offer themselves to God. Indeed, repentance is mandated within this discursive formulation for any and all sinners as one speaker notes, “the Bible says, though, that God doesn’t want anyone to perish but everyone to come to repentance” (Fryrear 2006b).

Intertwined with notion of sin and repentance is the key concept of change. In keeping with other aspects of the narrative formulation of the ex-gay self, change is conceptualized within a biblical framework. Importantly, all of the speakers describe hearing the message of sin,
repentance and change through the evangelism of an outside source. This from Haley’s (2006a) testimony,

This man named Jeff Konrad that would not leave me alone. I would move, I wouldn’t give him my forwarding address he’d track me down, he’d send me birthday cards. He would say I don’t even know if you live at this address but I wanted to let you know that I love you and that God loves you and that change is possible. I’d write him back the nastiest ugly letters about his god about his faith. I was born this way, leave me alone. He’d write me back, Mike you said in your last letter that you were born this way I want you to go to the library, I want you to find me a study that will prove to me that you were born gay and if you can do that I will change the way that I believe and I thought yes there’s one more stupid Christian that I am going to get to change their mind <laughter>. … .The very foundation upon which my entire life was based absolutely began to crumble when I realized what these researchers themselves had said about their studies. That they didn’t find a genetic link, that some in society like to say they do and my world crumbled.

The evangelist, Konrad, is described not only as a tireless crusader, but also as instrumental in helping Haley realize that his sexuality was not, in fact God-given, and could be changed if his faith is once more embraced.

Melissa Fryrear, too, describes her transformation from a lesbian self to an ex-lesbian in terms of the evangelism of others. In her case, however, she was introduced to religion before she committed herself to change. For example,

Bill was a Christian. And Bill knew that I was living homosexually … Bill was a very wise and mature man as well and that he knew I first needed a savior, that I first needed Jesus Christ in my life and so he put homosexuality on the back-burner … and with that sense of trust that built I began to ask him questions about his faith and about Christianity. Is Jesus real? Is Heaven and Hell real? And what happens when you die and what about this sin thing? … and so something spiritually began to stir in my heart. (Fryrear 2006b)

Once she started to feel the pull of her religion, she began to tentatively return to church. In the following two selections from her testimony, Fryrear describes her first ventures back into religious life and uses them to emphasize the fact that as a lesbian what she lacked most was religious faith. In fact, homosexuality and religion are constructed as mutually exclusive:

And so one Saturday night I asked my live-in lesbian partner if she wanted to go to church the next morning. And I don’t know if I was more shocked that I asked her or if I was-I was I was more shocked that she agreed to go … .So you can imagine that scene two
lesbian women sitting in the middle of this church, small congregation of predominantly older couples, to say we stood out is an understatement. (Fryrear 2006b)

Fryrear (2006b) continues,

My live-in lesbian partner actually gave me my first Bible. Not sure where that lines up with your theology.

Lesbian self identity is repeatedly portrayed as incompatible with religious identity. Moreover, there is an unmistakable incredulity expressed at the idea that homosexuality and faith can be reconciled: after both of these statements the audience laughed loudly and at length.

The possibility of change is presented to the troubled gay or lesbian self in the form of specific biblical truth claims regarding the nature of sin, sexuality and salvation. From Chambers’ book “inherent in the message of the gospel is the idea that through Jesus we all become new creatures. The gospel is about changed lives. It should follow that, through Jesus Christ, the homosexual can likewise experience change” (Goeke 2006: 127). What is being explained here is one of the most critical ideas addressed over the course of the conference and undergirds the construction of the ex-gay self: sexual identity transformation can occur through religious identity transformation and the acceptance of faith. The discursive formulation of change is repeated over the course of the conference and throughout the related textual material: “true change is possible through the provision of Christ” (Haley 2004: 127). In other words, the pivotal part of transformation from gay to ex-gay is defined by the acceptance of religion into the individual’s life. As an example, “I was led to make the most important decision of my life. And saying that prayer that I know so many of you have prayed and hopeful and prayerful that those who haven’t one day will: Jesus would you come and be the savior and Lord of my life” (Fryrear 2006b).

Yet the speakers are careful to explain that embracing religious identity does not necessarily lead to instantaneous self transformation. Rather, formerly gay selves are storied as
struggling to accept narratives of change whilst still holding true to evangelical doctrinal truths.

Fryrear (2006b) explains her struggle in her testimony,

I look back and it felt like a wrestling match started. Of going around and round and round in circles with the Lord. And very honest conversations with Him at that time, “I didn’t ask for these feelings Lord, I don’t know where’ve they’ve come from, I don’t know why they’re in my life, I don’t want them here, but I don’t know how to get rid of em, this is all I’ve ever known, it’s the only way I’ve ever lived, these are the only people that I know. There’s this Christian community, but I’m scared of them, I don’t know if they’ll reject me or accept me, I don’t know if I can change, I don’t know if my feelings will ever change, I don’t know if you can get me out of this. I’ve come to believe in you now though and your word says it’s wrong. Help.

Haley (2006a) expresses the difficulty of the transition more directly:

So like I said I left homosexuality and I’d love to tell you that from there it’s this incredible god pleasing story but that’s just not the case at all. The year of 1990 was the closest thing to hell I believe I will ever experience in my life. I had left the gay community I had known all those years, I was coming back to the Christian community that I didn’t like and frankly I didn’t think they liked me very much. I was going to good Godly Christian counseling, I was dealing with some of my sexual abuse issues, I was dealing with some of my dad issues and I began for the first time in my life to have feelings that I didn’t know what to do with … I was failing miserably

In both of these extracts, the selves produced are in a state of confusion. On the one hand, they have accepted a set of interpretive resources allowing them to believe in the idea of leaving homosexuality, yet they are still understood in terms of a sexual identity incompatible with the new religious self.

Evangelical religion provides the discursive standard against which gay and lesbian selves can measure their identity transformation from gay to ex-gay. What it does not provide, however, are the interpretive tools necessary for the sexual identity transformation. Nevertheless it is important to note that Love Won Out consistently stresses that religious identity transformation will almost automatically result in sexual identity change. By way of illustration:

To say that someone has had a change in his (or her) identity means, essentially, that he no longer identifies himself as gay. His identity is not based on his feelings, and certainly not on his sexual desires or his struggles with sin. He becomes what he knows to be true from the word of God … these changes people gladly accept the identity bestowed on them by
their God–new creatures designed for the purpose of glorifying their God, fully male or female, and fully righteous based on the blood of Jesus for their sins” (Goeke 2006: 70)

Notice that the emphasis is on the centrality of religious identity for the self, and this is what produces the marked shift from self conceptualization as “gay.”

**Reparative Therapy**

Religious discourse suggests the possibility of change and provides the incentive to change, while secular discourse provides the conditions of possibility to accomplish that change. More specifically, production of the ex-gay self is embedded within the framework of reparative therapy. Reparative therapy, as I described in the previous chapter, portrays homosexuality as primarily a gender identity disorder caused by inadequate parent-child bonding. Furthermore, reparative therapy proposes a number of causal factors associated with the development of homosexuality which can be addressed in order to affect the sexual identity shift that religious conversion requires.

Reparative therapists depict homosexuality as “a symptom of something else. And that’s what the person learns in the course of therapy. That when they have a homosexual attraction something happened interrelationally” (Nicolosi 2006a). The ‘something else’ mentioned here by Nicolosi is first triggered by poor parent child relations. To reach the perceived goal of becoming ex-gay, the self has to understand these triggers, and either reform parental bonds or compensate for them. Failure of parental socialization leave the child “vulnerable to sexual identity struggle” (Fryrear 2006a) since that self lacks adequate gender role models. Consequently, gay men and lesbian women are constructed as violating normative masculinity or femininity respectively. In this first excerpt, Fryrear (2006b) illustrates how these issues played out in her own life,

Let me say without question that today I know how desperately my parents love me. Um, how sweetly they love me, that they would have given me, would have sacrificed anything to have provided for me and cared for me. And that’s taken a lot of years to come to know because I misperceived them growing up, I misperceived the depth and the enormity of
their love. That they have loved me unconditionally the entire way … I know in retrospect I sought to fill that search for love in relationships with other women.

Here she stories her formerly lesbian self as one in line with the precepts of reparative therapy. She describes herself as mistakenly feeling unloved by her parents, which then led to her ensuing homosexuality as she looked to other women for comfort and love. Reparation of this misperception and broken bond is the primary component in successful sexual identity transformation.

For the male desiring sexual identity transformation, reparative therapists stress the need to recognize the failure of the father-son bond and provide strategies to help negotiate this. In one of his books, therapist Nicolosi (1993) describes the following scenario from a session with one of his clients:

Dan began to recognize the anger that he felt towards the very persons from whom he sought sexual gratification. This sadomasochistic characteristic often found in homosexuality traces back to the unattainable father whom the boy desires, yet despises. Dan spent many months in therapy working through his feelings for his mother and father. It was those core feelings of love and painful dependency that he sought to feel again in order to heal. Uncovering these feelings in a safe and understanding relationship offered the only hope of relief from the sense of hollowness he lived with. (101)

Here, then, failure of the father-son bond led Dan not only to homosexuality, but to seek sadomasochistic sexual fulfillment with other men. The therapist in this situation urges Dan to reconnect with his feelings for his parents so that he would no longer seek sexual gratification with men.

Male homosexuality, therefore, is portrayed as a struggle to find masculine affirmation and male bonding missing due to the fractured father-son bond. Haley (2006a) refers directly to this when narrating the story of his own self transformation;

Dr Nicolosi said we all have what are known as those homoemotional needs that need to be met. And I longed to find acceptance from my father. In fact one of the phrases I heard most out of my father was that I was going to be worthless and I was never going to
amount to anything and so it was very difficult for me and I was always looking for value and I was always looking for worth.

Within this discursive framework, gay men are described as seeking a sense of masculine self-esteem through eroticization of another’s masculinity. Accordingly, successful self transformation for men demands replacements for these masculine bonds improperly formed through same sex sexual activity.

Resocializing the ex-gay self into correct masculine expression and appropriate gender identity involves building what LWO consistently refers to as “healthy same sex friendships” (Haley 2006b) as the upcoming quotes illustrate:

So what I need now is healthy Godly men to invest in my life this was the initial part of my healing process and I needed great wonderful godly men that were able and willing to bond with me heterosexually just be my buddy know my struggles and that’s one of the things I tell people that struggle with homosexuality is look you need positive same sex relationships that are non sexually intimate and that’s where your healing is going to come from.

One man said to me, my healing of homosexuality was being seen as a man by a man. So much of homosexual activity is really wanting to be seen and valued and appreciated and excited which unfortunately becomes erotic excitement by a man …. What are the emotional barriers, the psychological obstacles that prevent you from connecting with other men? When you develop that connection with men when you feel like a guy, you’re not going to sexualize other guys.

In the first extract, the speaker emphasizes the importance of appropriate male friendships to reaffirm his own masculinity. Moreover, these friendships are described as a key part of the healing process, as the second excerpt highlights. Reparative therapy, therefore, assumes that homosocial bonding reaffirms men in their own masculinity and this will subsequently remove the sexual desire for another man. The following selection summarizes how this works; “as the roots of the attractions are uncovered, and as the true relational need is exposed and met by healthy relationships with the same sex, men and women find themselves less desirous of sexual
intimacy with the same sex” (Goeke 2006: 74). In other words, narrative production of the male ex-gay self is now almost complete.

Discursive production of the female ex-gay self follows many of the patterns outlined above for the male self. Lesbian selves are portrayed as having fractured parent-child bonds that result in non normative gender presentation. The women are storied as overly masculine and out of touch with their innate femininity. Fryrear (2006b) describes her own experiences,

because of how I perceive the world around me, or rather, better said, misperceived the world, I thought that being a woman was second best to—second class and, so I rejected femininity, rejected womanhood, and to the extreme even so of wishing that I could’ve been a little boy or a man and tried to emulate what I thought was manhood.

Understood within the framework of reparative therapy, this is the story of a self seeking to fulfill the void created by an absence of parental love by engaging in same-sex sexual activity and rebelling against normative femininity. A vignette entitled “Feeling Safe as a Woman” from one of the LWO booklet series presents a similar story: “Growing up, my alcoholic father had a violent temper and would often hit my mother. Because my mom was a victim, I rejected anything to do with femininity and wanted no part of being a girl. Instead I looked up to my older brother and wanted to be just like him” (Sneeringer 2005: 30).

Discursive production of the female ex-gay self often involves negotiating the consequences of violence, including sexual abuse. As I mentioned in chapter 3, lesbians are frequently portrayed as victims of rape and other forms of molestation that force them to renounce their femininity:

My parents divorced when I was 12 and sent me away to live with relatives, where I was molested by an older cousin. Like most children who have been sexually abused, somehow I thought I was to blame. If only men wouldn’t find me attractive then things like this wouldn’t happen to me, I reasoned. From then on I wanted to conceal whatever shred of femininity I had left (Sneeringer 2005: 30-31).
Such trauma creates a distrust of men, rejection of femininity and embracement of masculinity. Consequently, successful self transformation for women demands interpretive strategies allowing rape trauma survivors to relearn trust for men, and to understand and value normative femininity.

*Love Won Out* utilizes the question and answer session on lesbianism to explicate how women can heal their damaged selves. In answer to a question “will my hate in men ever go away?” the speakers give a number of potential strategies. The first involves an exercise in which women are urged to write down words like men, women, sexuality and then write down everything they can to fill in the categories. Fryrear (2006c) demonstrates the importance of such an exercise that she herself performed at God’s urging,

So I wrote men on one page, women on the other; marriage female, sexuality, wrote all these major categories and [the Lord] said now write down everything that you think about that so I had hundreds of pages, dozens of pages of what I thought for example about men. Well as I went through those, well no surprise, they were not true, they were all lies and they weren’t scripturally based and so the next step was why do I think that way? Where did that come from?... Some of that was confession, it was sin on my part that I had to repent of; some were very deep woundings of traumatic events that had happened in my life … So that can be very insightful.

In this excerpt, Fryrear instructs women on how to overcome their fear of men by looking more closely at where the fear comes from. Furthermore, she stresses examining biblical constructions of appropriate maleness, thereby ensuring the manner in which masculinity will be read and understood. The other strategies also revolved around scriptural understandings of masculinity and the use of prayer. For example, in this selection, Fryrear (2006c) implicates these two strategies in combination with exposure to godly men:

And then to pray that God would bring godly men into your life who will exemplify what does it mean to be a godly man and you can see that lived out before you and that was one of the most significant ways the Lord helped to dispel the myths and what I believed about men by bringing good Godly men into my life... And to encourage you that yes absolutely he can change your thoughts and feelings about that.
It is interesting to note that the speakers never fully explain what constitutes being a “godly man.” To a certain extent, this leaves the audience free to reconstruct the men in their lives as either godly or ungodly depending on their own interpretations of the *Love Won Out* discourse.

Having said that, however, the construction of godly masculinity is frequently undertaken using a discursive framework that understands masculinity in stereotypical ways. The man should be stronger, assertive and domineering, while still adhering to Christ-like qualities.

Healing the wounds from sexual trauma is not the only requirement for women to complete radical sexual identity transformation since there must also be acceptance of normative femininity. Typically, this involves mending the parent-child bond and the realization that homosexuality results from unmet emotional needs. As is the case for men, women undergoing sexual identity transformation are compelled to seek out female friends to fill emotional voids.

One woman describes her transformation,

> When I returned to my church in Tampa, I asked all my friends to start calling me “Christine.”… I wanted to embrace my femininity. In the church I met godly, strong women who helped me see that being female wasn’t a liability … the key to my healing was developing healthy same-sex friendships. With God’s help and the support of caring people, homosexuality no longer casts a shadow on my life. (Sneeringer 2005: 33)

Christine stories herself transformation through the impact of her female friends and the eventual acceptance, and even embracing, of her femininity. This also impacted how she viewed men: “I also saw men in a different light. They were true friends, and they were interested in me, not sex. For the first time, I felt safe as a woman” (Sneeringer 2005: 33). Female friendships are, therefore, thought to free women from unwanted same sex sexual attraction and allow them to finalize the transformation from gay to ex-gay.

The final step in producing the ex-gay self for both men and women involves emphasizing the discursive link between sex, gender and sexuality. As I have already explained, *LWO* typically understand sexuality in terms of a biblical proscription against homosexuality.
backed up with a belief that everyone is born heterosexual. In addition, they understand appropriate sexuality and normative gender expression to be situated on the body, such that biological sex determines both. In this quote from Nicolosi’s (2006a) explanation of male homosexuality, one of his clients expresses all of these ideas, “One man said to me my body gets in the way of my happiness. I said what? My body, your body gets in the way of your happiness? He says yeah because a real man wants a woman’s body, he doesn’t want my body. And he’s absolutely right … .” The client expresses his sexual desire for other men, the fact that he is not gratified in his desire and his conceptualization of gender and sex through his discussion of what real men want. In terms of production of the ex-gay self, this conflation of sex, gender and sexuality determines the importance of healing and also the manner in which the healing process is understood. Of primary importance is the fact that men and women are expected to behave in manners appropriate to their biological sex, including in their partner choice. As a result, the ex-gay self is one that is perceived to be returning to its “natural state” of heterosexuality. I will revisit this issue when I address the maintenance of the ex-gay self, since it reveals a fundamental contradiction between the elements of the *Love Won Out* belief system and the institutional self under construction.

**The “Hows” of Being Ex-Gay**

Production of the ex-gay self draws upon a number of narrative practices. Substantively, the ex-gay self is embedded within notions of religious and psychological discursive practice. Putting these aside, bracketing them facilitates interrogation of the manner in which these themes are produced—the “hows” of interpretive practice (Gubrium & Holstein 1997).

As already noted, the ex-gay self has its discursive origin within a troubled gay self. To be ex-gay, there first has to be gay. In keeping with many other organizations in the business of reconfiguring personal identity by fixing troubled selves, *LWO* frequently draw upon a “self-
help” framework, typically that developed by Alcoholics Anonymous. Here, then, selves become ex-gay, and start to understand themselves as being ex-gay, in a similar manner as AA participants may become “recovering alcoholics” (Gubrium & Holstein 2001). This new ‘recovering self’ identity is then used by participants to “make sense of their lives, circumstances and personal travails that led to their troubles” (Gubrium & Holstein 2001: 11).

Becoming ex-gay in *LWO* involves profound self transformation comparable to that of the recovering alcoholic. As Denzin (1987) explains,

> Not only does he or she become sober, but a new language of self is acquired, as are a new set of meanings concerning alcohol, alcoholism and the drinking act. By becoming a part of the lived history of AA, the individual is transformed into a “recovering alcoholic” within a society of fellow alcoholics … by no longer drinking, the alcoholic can pass as normal within society. But this is a duplicitous normalcy, for the recovering alcoholic carries the previous label of having been alcoholic … she desired to be a recovering alcoholic with all the meaning AA gives to that identity. (168)

*Love Won Out* envisage the ex-gay self in much the same way as Denzin explicates the recovering alcoholic. Over the course of the day, participants learn new ways to identify themselves, learn how to reinterpret homosexuality and heterosexuality, become part of a fellowship of ex-gays and still retain part of the gay label. Moreover, they frequently use many of the phrases that characterize AA to narrate the ex-gay self and thus provide interpretive resources necessary to undergo the fundamental transformation of self referred to.

Production of the ex-gay self employs one of the discursive strategies that exemplifies Alcoholics Anonymous, that of the public testimony–often called drunkalogues (Denzin 1987; Holstein & Gubrium 2000; Pollner & Stein 1996; 2001). Since AA can trace its own origins to evangelical religion, this is perhaps unsurprising (Erzen 2006). Testimony is a major component of evangelical Christian experience and traces participants experience from sinner to saved (Erzen 2006; Marsden 2006). The significance of this is illustrated by Mike Haley (2006b) in the introduction to his own testimony;
Revelation 12:11 says they overcame him, speaking of Satan, by the blood of the lamb and the word of their testimony and they did not love their lives so much as to shrink back. And I believe that in that verse is a recipe for us as Christians. First of all the focus on Jesus and secondly to tell our stories. How did you come to know the Lord? And as you share your story as I will be doing this morning, I believe that what happens in the midst of that, as we’re promised in the verse, that we overcome the evil one, but also we give the world that needs some hope the very thing that they’re looking for …

These public pronouncements allow the audience to position and locate their own stories within the approved ex-gay narrative framework (Denzin 1987; Erzen 2006). In addition, the testimonies provide a narrative template through which audience members can respecify and restory themselves and their behaviors. Under the narrative auspices of the Love Won Out conferences, two specific kinds of stories are presented, one ex-gay and one ex-lesbian, ensuring that male and female participants are represented. In the next chapter, I will explain in more detail how ex-gay personal testimonies provide potent narrative resources for the New Christian Right in their battle against lesbian and gay civil rights.

Reliance on personal transformation stories legitimizes the production of the ex-gay self in terms of “establishing the voice of experience” (Pollner & Stein 1996: 207). In much the same way as AA stresses the importance of experience, so LWO presents a series of testimonies from those already transformed. In other words, authority comes from being one (Crawley & Broad 2004). Billboards surrounding the Love Won Out conferences sites routinely feature photographs of ex-gays and contain such messages as “I Questioned Homosexuality. Change is Possible. Discover How.” Moreover, the specific stories presented at the conference are used as exemplars of what the ex-gay and ex-lesbian experience looks like, and are thought to provide representation for the wider ex-gay and ex-lesbian community. Most notably, the featured speakers are employed by Focus on the Family in their explicit capacity as ex-gay and ex-lesbian. In some senses, then, Melissa Fryrear and Mike Haley are professional ex-gays purely for their ability to privilege their own transformative experiences.
In the first speech of the day, Nicolosi (2006a) uses the existence of the ex-gay stories to refute what he refers to as one of the homosexual myths, once gay always gay:

And we’re going to be hearing testimonies from men and women who have come out of homosexuality, who have come out of lesbianism and you’ll get to hear their ex-gay stories that we’re hearing more and more. Because we’re encouraging them, because we as a culture are respecting their testimonies we’re going to hearing more and more of these individuals.

What is notable here is that testimonials from ex-gays and ex-lesbians are routinely privileged even, in some cases, over the voices of the psychological experts. In this selection, Nicolosi does not emphasize scientific authority to renounce gay and lesbian truth claims, instead referring to the very existence of ex-gay testimonials as the ultimate proof. In addition, he highlights the strategic importance of testimony and the wider cultural impact that support for these narratives may have.

The identity work undertaken to story the biography of an ex-gay self follows a similar narrative map to the drunkalogues of Alcoholics Anonymous (Denzin 1987; Gubrium & Holstein 2001; Holstein & Gubrium 2000; Pollner & Stein 1996). The accounts typically begin with recitations of childhood troubles, including difficulties bonding with parents and recognition of perceived gender irregularity, and they generally conform to the discursive framework presented by reparative therapy. This accomplished, the narrators take the audience on a journey to the point that they recognize their acceptance of a gay or lesbian self identity—typically coupled with explicit rejection of religion. These are what Denzin (1987) calls before-stories and are characterized by details of the troubles involved with being gay or lesbian, including alcohol abuse and promiscuity. Before-stories end with the ex-gay equivalent of “hitting bottom” in which there is a dramatic fall and realization that they must surrender to God in order to begin the healing process. As Haley (2006a) describes, “I came to the end of myself.” In the same way as alcoholic selves are depicted as more hopeful after hitting bottom (Denzin 1987; Holstein &
Gubrium 2000), so too are ex-gays selves portrayed as hopeful of lasting change. These after-stories center around the role of faith in “leaving” homosexuality and maintaining a sexual identity in keeping with their newfound religion as the following extract demonstrates:

And so what happened was God and his Holy Spirit, it was four months and it was eight months and it was twelve months and God’s spirit kept working those truths deeper and deeper and deeper down into my heart where you come to that point where you know that you know that you know what you’re doing is wrong … how gentle He was, how intentional He was, to continue to come after me and after me and after me and woo me and woo me with that gentle, sweet love, administering that gift of repentance. 1992, being able to repent by His grace and lay down so many years of sexual sin (Fryrear 2006b).

Fryrear’s after-story constructs God as being central to her transformation, to the point that she renounced her homosexuality and can relate exactly when that happened.

In addition to embedding production of the ex-gay self within a discursive framework similar to those of other self-help organizations, Love Won Out also provide their own narrative template against which to measure successful identity transformation. As Haley (2004) writes, “… the Lord reminded me of what I had so desperately wanted at the beginning of my process … something that would help me evaluate my status and progress” (131). What he came up with was a way for fledgling ex-gay selves to measure their own progression and evaluate their chance of success. In his book, he speaks directly to those desiring change when he presents what he identified as the five characteristics proven successful for those who “succeed in permanently leaving homosexuality” (Haley 2004: 133). These characteristics include the right motivation, a new goal, changed relationships, commitment to action, and a different passion. Taken together, they define exactly how ex-gay selves are produced and understood. Moreover, the discursive strategies he details in his book underpin much of what is spoken at the conferences.

The first two characteristics describe how the gay and lesbian selves being restored should understand not only their desire for change, but also what appropriate expectations are.
First, motivation is defined as an absolute “devotion to leaving the gay lifestyle” (Haley 2004: 133). In addressing his readers more directly, Haley (2004) emphasizes this, “You must be desperate for change … Have you realized your desperation? Are you willing to endure public ridicule from the gay community?” (133-134). Here, the audience is given a standard against which to measure their commitment to change. What are they willing to endure in order to begin the transformation process? Randy Thomas (2006a) provides one idea in the session designed explicitly for those struggling with homosexuality: “the Lord asked me through someone who I was teaching, if I don’t take this struggle away from you, will you still obey me, will you still serve me? If every ex-gay in the world falls, will you? I said: “No, Lord, I won’t.””

Second, the goal of identity transformation is explained as holiness, not heterosexuality (Chambers 2006; Haley 2004). This selection details how this works:

The only true goal that sustains the type of perseverance needed for this journey is summed up in one word–obedience. If you focus on obtaining heterosexuality, not achieving obedience, your chances of failure are enormous. That’s because the opposite of homosexuality is not heterosexuality–it’s holiness. And when we strive toward holiness in a quest to become more Christ-like, the desires of the flesh fall away and we begin to obtain freedom like never before. (Haley 2004: 134)

Selves in this excerpt are being given instruction in how to think about their ultimate objective, which is to remain true to their faith. Here, then ex-gay selves are being redefined in terms religious goals, not sexual goals. Haley further demonstrates this during one of the conference sessions, “we have to remember from God’s perspective the opposite of homosexuality is not heterosexuality the opposite of homosexuality from God’s perspective is holiness.” Not only is religious conversion stressed, but he also draws upon divine authority to support his pronouncements.

Over the course the conference, there is repeated emphasis on the purpose of becoming ex-gay. Fryrear (2006b) explains to the audience how this should look, “And so we think the
journey out of homosexuality is the same journey that every person who is sincerely seeking to follow Christ, it’s that same type of journey. It’s a journey of wanting to live your life repentantly and obediently. It’s a pursuit of holiness. It’s a lifestyle of worship.” She underlines the role of faith, and the idea that repentance, worship and holiness are of paramount importance. Notice that she does not refer to the sexual transformation, just religious conversion.

The final three characteristics described by Haley (2004) as crucial to successful change focus more explicitly on the behaviors and attitudes that bring about healing. He describes selves that have formed strong bonds with others, are committed to proactively seeking change, and a passion for Christ. These become the foundation for the practical approaches to maintaining the ex-gay self which I will outline the next section.

Narrative production of change details sexual identity transformation as a process that begins with faith, the subsequent religious conversion and acceptance of homosexuality as sin. Although Love Won Out believe in the possibility of the instantaneous eradication of homosexual desire (Goeke 2006; Haley 2004), for the most part, progression from gay to ex-gay is portrayed as “painful, long and arduous” (Haley 2004: 131). Maintenance of the ex-gay self, therefore, becomes as important as the initial narrative production.

Production of the ex-gay self is a complex mix of religion, psychology and self-help, all of which combine to influence how it must be further maintained. In keeping with evangelical doctrine, all selves are defined as being inherently sinful—the ex-gay self obviously being no exception. Fryrear (2006a), for example, explicates this view and embeds it in the conference message more generally: “at the “Love Won Out” conference … we come already with that understanding as Bible-believing, faith-based Christians, that we understand, inherently, being in a fallen world and that there is an enemy of our souls … .” What this means in terms of
maintaining appropriate sexual and gender behavior is the acknowledgement of the temptations that may lead to “sexual falls”. The question and answer session on lesbianism deals with this explicitly when the speaker references her own experiences, “it doesn’t mean that I may never have a temptation and I believe that’s not anything unusual. Christ himself was tempted. So being tempted is not a sin. I believe it’s what we do with that temptation. How do we respond to that? How do we react to that?” (Fryrear 2006a). Here, there is a clear acceptance of the possibility of sexual sin on the part of the healing self. Moreover, description of this sexual sin has its discursive origins more widely in the narrative of biblical sin and the temptations of Satan.

Sexual falls are explained by LWO as something to be expected. What is important, however, is how these are reinterpreted over the course of the conference in order to maintain the perception of sexually healed selves. Each speaker who identified as ex-gay or ex-lesbian storied selves that continued to fight same-sex sexual attraction, or as Mike Haley (2006b) describes it, “I will never be as though I never was.” Repeatedly, LWO provide the interpretive resources necessary for audience members to reconstruct their sexual struggles despite a discursive framework that dismisses homosexuality and compels change. As one speaker explains,

just like the alcoholic who has been sober for 10 15 years and suddenly everything falls apart in their life, divorce, loss of a job or loss of a loved one and suddenly they’re thinking I’d like to have a drink right now. Does that mean they’re not healed? No. It just means that old ting is beckoning them and they can either listen to that voice or they can say you know what I’m going to make the right choice here cause I don’t want that in my life. So I’ve learned how to look that in the face and make a right choice. (Sneeringer 2006)

In this extract, sexual temptation is likened to an alcoholic wanting a drink in times of stress. They still have the desire for a drink, or in the case of an ex-gay same-sex intimacy, yet this does nothing to diminish the healing process. In his book, Haley (2004) takes the issue of his own former homosexuality and explains how his struggles look at present:
While temptations still come my way, I liken them to a pesky fly. They pass my way and bother me for a minute, I shoo them away, and then they’re gone. I must frequently remind myself of the truth that I am a new creation in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17) in the spiritual realm—but in the physical one I will continue to deal with temptation. However, this does not negate the fact that I live in complete victory. (140)

The story here is of a self that has to constantly battle, yet still considers itself to have been healed and declares victory over unwanted sexual desire. Clearly, then, what is being suggested here is that healing should be read in terms of physical behavior and spiritual conversion, not complete removal of homosexual attraction.

Maintenance of the ex-gay self over the course of the Love Won Out conferences involves active negotiation with the audience. This is particularly noticeable in terms of leading the participants toward an understanding of how LWO understands the change process and what appropriate behavioral expectations should be. In a session specifically designed for neophyte ex-gays and ex-lesbians, the leader asks the audience to identify what it is they expect from their ex-gay selves. Each and everyone that spoke identified surprise at their continued homosexuality and most expected that these attractions would have ceased some time ago. For instance,

I am married and have children and I still struggle with attraction and I expect those attractions will end.

After 15 years of working on my marriage and working on my issue, it didn’t work out in the marriage. It led to 15 more years of sanctification and trials and things of that nature and my expectation now is to continue to press into the Lord and walk it out.

My expectation is that my attractions will be gone immediately and my thoughts will be pure

Yeah, I just wanted to be clear I have been married now for twenty years, my marriage is working great. And my wife and I are very much in love and I’m a good dad to my kids but, my confusion, is that after all of this stuff, working on it, and following the Lord. all the time, I still struggle

In each of these, the narrators describe selves that have obviously not managed to escape their unwanted sexual attractions, despite assurances to the contrary and expectations that “change is
possible.” The session leader, therefore, has to help these struggling selves to renegotiate their identities within the discursive framework provided by *Love Won Out*.

Maintenance of the ex-gay self becomes a continual redefinition of self using language that rephrases sexual attraction in terms of sin and sanctification, not failure or incomplete healing. Randy Thomas, the session leader just mentioned, responds to the audience’s concerns by helping them reevaluate their expectations:

Now, some realistic goal or expectations, you can expect a life of obedience. It’s not always gonna work out to your liking … And there are gonna be times when it’s hard and the Lord’s gonna ask you to obey... You can expect a lifetime of obedience. You will have a life of struggle with sin. You can expect that you’re going to struggle with sin until you meet Him in glory. (Thomas 2006a)

In this excerpt, Thomas provides participants with a way to rethink their sexual attraction—in terms of sin and not homosexuality. He continues by blaming persistent difficulty on the influence of Satan, “I don’t know where everybody gets this idea that, you know, once you’re down the road it’s completely gone. The Lord knows, or your flesh remembers what happened, Satan certainly does, but can you withstand that? That is the true change” (Thomas 2006a). He encourages those listening not to think that healing means complete removal of homosexual attractions, and instead reframes change in terms of the ability of the self to continually fight temptation and maintain acceptable biblical standards of behavior.

Sustaining the ex-gay or ex-lesbian self despite continued temptation is also framed through referral to psychological discourse. Goeke (2006) writes, “the temptations are dealt with for what they are: a sign of some other problem that must be addressed with the Lord” (74). One of the questions in the session on lesbianism asked “Do you continue to struggle with lesbian inclinations if so what and how do you overcome temptation?” to which the speaker replied,

Years ago I learned an acronym that really helped me a lot. HALT. Hungry, angry, lonely, tired. And I learned to ask myself when I’m feeling homosexually tempted because I knew it wasn’t a sexual need that had and so I learned to ask myself what is it that I’m
really feeling? Am I hungry? Am I angry? Am I lonely? Or am I tired? … So the question then is if I am some of those things I can do something about that if I’m lonely I can call a friend. If I’m tired I can take a nap, if I’m hungry I can go out to eat … that was the general thing that I learned to ask myself and then began to address those needs that I may be having. (Sneeringer 2006)

Notice that Sneeringer, the speaker, immediately discounts her sexual feelings, instead she identifies them as symptomatic of something else, and in so doing grounds her identity back in a reparative therapy framework. In terms of maintenance of her ex-lesbian self, she can use this to ensure she does not suffer from any “sexual falls” due to misinterpretation of her needs. Moreover, this description equips the audience with another set of narrative tools that can be used to reinterpret their own sexual selves.

The ex-gay self is one that requires constant policing due to the ever-present danger of temptation and, as such, public testimony becomes of paramount importance in ensuring acceptable standards of behavior. Public recounting of private troubles provides an opportunity to reinforce the message that homosexuality is mutable. In this excerpt, for instance, the speaker explains how reaching out to other people helped her sustain her ex-lesbian identity:

I need to go talk to someone especially in leadership because I need to I’m too I have a kind of sober reality of sin that I don’t want to keep secrets from Satan so if I’m tempted and I don’t tell anyone because of my shame then I feel like I’m setting myself up for something where I may get in trouble. So I’ll go tell somebody. I’ll ask for prayer and that’s hard to do when you’re in a position of leadership and people look to you as an example. But I believe it’s the only reason I’m standing before you today after seven years of ministry because I’ve been willing to make those kinds of proclamations and ask for that kind of help and have that kind of humility otherwise I would have blown it because life is hard and there’s lots of disappointments and reasons for me to maybe want to go back to my old life to medicate and to feel comfort. (Sneeringer 2006)

The ex-lesbian self storied here is one that required open acknowledgement and admission of her difficulties to help maintain appropriate behavioral norms. In this sense, maintaining an ex-gay or lesbian self becomes more of a public performance than a sexual self would generally entail.
Typically, public testimony of sexual struggle occurs within the church community, as would be expected within an evangelical organization. Having said that, however, *Love Won Out* persistently stress the importance of attending support groups and ex-gay conferences where public testimonials are the mainstays of the events. These occasions demonstrate not only successful identity conversions to fledgling ex-gay and lesbian selves, but also endow attendees with a feeling of belonging that strengthens their resolve to maintain their sexual fidelity. Haley (2006a) expounds on the benefit of these conferences during his testimony,

There were about 800 other people there that were in the same shoes that I was that were desperate for a relationship with Christ, that had the issues of homosexuality in their lives that were looking for realness and it was incredible. I met men and women who had been out of homosexuality, 5, 10, 15, 20 years and they had gone on with their lives. And I thought wow maybe this is possible for me. I mean I really met these people they weren’t just people that I had heard about I met them I talked with them and it was an incredible experience.

He mentions not only finding other people like him, but also role models and people to talk to about his experiences. The presence of other ex-gays and ex-lesbians facilitates maintenance of the new self identity since they understand the nature of the struggle and can point out any potential pitfalls. In addition, these conferences provide a set of potential same-sex friends that can also aid in maintaining the ex-gay self. This becomes key since ex-gays and ex-lesbians are strongly discouraged from keeping friendships with those in the gay community, as;

often [participants] will report that their gay friends will make fun of them or say that you’re never going to make it; it’s not like they’re very supportive, “Oh I think it’s wonderful that you want to leave homosexuality.” they’re not standing by cheering and you need that. you need people that are on the same page with you that will encourage you because this is a tough road. … it’s hard because at the point that you’re walking away you may be leaving a lover and a community and then you’re coming into a church that’s not necessarily welcoming you with open arms (Sneeringer 2006)

Public performance of the ex-gay or ex-lesbian self also allows others to monitor the boundaries of acceptable gender expression. The impact of healthy same-sex friendships is such
that, according to *Love Won Out*, it can be a cornerstone in maintaining an ex-gay self. Fryrear (2006e) writes about this issue,

I did join that women’s Bible study… just being around them, laughing with them, crying with them, and praying with them healed so many wounds in my heart. In essence my womanhood and femininity began to blossom … If those who are dealing with same-sex attraction embrace female friendships and find their place in the world of women, she will find greater commonality with women and, as a result, feel more secure and content to be “just another woman.” (193)

Relating to men and women in what is deemed an appropriate manner underpins maintenance of ex-gay and ex-lesbian selves since it is thought to strengthen the new self in its own masculinity or femininity. The book *Someone I Love is Gay*, one of the textual resources frequently referenced and promoted by *LWO*, explains how same-sex friends help, “you have a special opportunity to build confidence in your friend’s life through your acceptance of him as another man. You can help him by being vulnerable about your own life … .This openness helps him realize that many of his problems are the same as any man’s” (Worthen & Davis 1996:173). Formerly gay men are therefore encouraged to think of themselves as being part of the wider male community. Their issues are not gay issues, rather the same as those other men are dealing with.

Emphasis on maintaining an ex-gay or ex-lesbian self through policing gender boundaries highlights what I argue is the inherent narrative tension in production and maintenance of such a self—the contradiction between biological determination of sexuality and the social construction of gender. *Love Won Out* contend that everyone is born heterosexual, and that homosexuality is purely a sign of a psychologically troubled self. Discursive production of the ex-gay self is rooted within biblical understandings of sexuality depicting a self that is reclaiming its God-given life. Sexuality, therefore, is reported as a natural consequence of a particular body.
The difficulty arises when equating physiological bodies with social practice, in other words, assuming that biology determines behavior. For evangelical organizations like Focus on the Family, sex, gender, and sexuality are fused whereby the first determines the other two in what Crawley, Foley & Shehan (2008) call a gender box structure. As they explain, “if we believe we know the sex of the person, we also believe we know the gender and sexual orientation of the person” (Crawley et al. 2008: 16). A male-bodied person will have a masculine gender identity and a female partner. Disruptions of this upset the natural order of the world and the ex-gay self is depicted as redressing the balance.

In spite of the fact that sexuality, sex, and gender are constructed as biologically determined, *LWO* frequently contradict these ideas by drawing upon a discourse of the social to explain the transformation process. Ex-gay and ex-lesbian selves are produced using a discursive framework that implies a certain flexibility in both gender expression and sexual desire. In this upcoming example, Fryrear (2006b) explains her own movement from being a butch lesbian (itself a social construction) to a feminine woman:

*Papa began to try to teach me and show me about this thing called womanhood.*

*Oh my gosh! Who knew? Who knew? Who knew!? Who knew there was so much to learn? Who knew how expensive it is to be a woman?...I didn’t know there were so many gadgets to being a woman, to help you be beautiful! My co-worker, true story, has a heated eyelash curler. She’s like, “Melissa, you ought to get one ‘o these!”*

In this excerpt, Fryrear relates her understanding of femininity in terms of her physical appearance, and her expectations of being beautiful. This is a theme that is further explained by another ex-lesbian when she writes,

*I also attended the annual Exodus conference that year … I participated in a “makeover” session that had a deep impact on me. For the first time since I had been sexually abused, I wanted to be pretty, just like the other women at church. As I walked back to the dorm room after the makeover, a thought hit me and stopped me in my tracks … all my life I struggled with intense feelings of inadequacy about being a girl, and suddenly I saw myself just like them.* (Sneeringer 2005: 32)
For this woman, perception of normative femininity is equated with make-up, beauty and being pretty. Both of these quotes implicate feminine selves that are socially produced since there is an expectation that female bodies need to look and act a certain way—and to do this there is a need to rely on technology such as makeup and eyelash curlers. In other words, real women are constructed as being pretty and must actively maintain public performance appropriate femininity. Bodies, therefore, become the objects of social practice in which gendered expectations are inscribed upon them and subsequently become read as “natural” (Crawley et al. 2008).

For the ex-gay and ex-lesbian self to be understood within the boundaries of normative masculinity or normative femininity, they must follow certain behavioral standards, in addition to looking a particular way. This means they must subscribe to what are seen as typically masculine or feminine activities such as engaging in sports or desiring to be a wife or mother. Without these, they may be misinterpreted as still engaging in what are seen as gay or lesbian behaviors. Production and maintenance of the ex-gay self, therefore, relies on a religious discursive framework that mandates appropriate behavior for men and women.

In the next chapter, I explain how Focus on the Family, through the *Love Won Out* conferences, empowers the audience to be active agents of change themselves. For the institutional selves to be truly successful, the message must be carried by the audience beyond the discursive realm of the conferences.
CHAPTER 5
BEYOND LOVE WON OUT: EXPANDING THE DISCOURSE

Throughout this project, institutional selves are described as those that are produced in the service of a particular organization (Gubrium & Holstein 2001; Loseke & Cavendish 2001). In the previous two chapters, I have described how *Love Won Out* narratively produce troubled gay and lesbian selves, and then detailed the way in which these can be healed, thereby producing ex-gay and ex-lesbian selves. The interpretive demands of producing a distinctly troubled gay self and a uniquely healed ex-gay self are not limited to the day of the conference alone, however. The selves produced are also empowered to be active agents of change themselves once they leave the confines of the conference. The audience is provided with the interpretive resources necessary not only to recognize their own troubles, but also the troubles of others. They are consistently urged to put what they have learned into action and share the truth about homosexuality as they have been taught to see it. The prevailing identity discourse of *LWO* is one that can be diffused through culture more widely once the audience is provided with the narrative tools to accomplish this.

*LWO* routinely draw upon a threat narrative that necessitates action on the part of those listening. In so doing, they provide a discursive framework that reinterprets homosexuality as a direct threat to normative heterosexuality, and to culture more widely. In chapter 3 I explained how *LWO* perceive individual troubled gay and lesbian selves and provide a discursive framework that compels them to change. In this chapter, I will detail how *Love Won Out* describe the menace of homosexuality to more than just individuals and impose upon the audience a mandate to affect change across different social institutions—including education, the church and politics. In closing, I also explain how *LWO* seem to construct their ultimate goal as the
eradication of the ex-gay self. They believe that homosexuality can be healed once present, but more importantly, can be prevented from appearing in the first place.

Focus on the Family more widely, and *Love Won Out* specifically, draws upon a traditional family values discourse that is characteristic of the New Christian Right. As I outlined in chapter 1, at the forefront of this pro-family agenda is the notion that homosexuality poses a threat to society of such magnitude that culture as we know and understand it would be destroyed. This therefore necessitates urgent action on the part of the conference attendees and means that *LWO* speakers must provide a coherent discursive framework through which such action can be read and understood.

At the heart of this discourse are narrative resources that construct the lesbian and gay movement as having such power and potency (Herman 1997) that they could easily achieve their desired goal of overthrowing normative heterosexual society, as the following two quotes illustrate. In the first, the speaker, Dick Carpenter (2006a), explains how he perceives the danger of homosexuality:

Number one it’s the radical transformation of society … By “social transformation” I’m talking about changing a culture by changing what people believe about something, by changing what they value, by changing the way they talk about it and how they talk about it by changing what they except as “normal.” And as a result we change the very foundation and fabric of society.

First and foremost, Carpenter portrays the lesbian and gay movement as having not only the power, but also the desire, to completely alter the nature of society. Furthermore, he assumes that there is a unitary cultural ideology that is under threat. It is also important to note here, that this speech is given as part of the keynote address immediately following lunch. Consequently, it has top billing and sets the tone for the remainder of the afternoon. In this next extract, the writer is explaining the effect of gay activism:
This small militant crowd is very clever and powerful. They have moved beyond the days of simply wanting people to tolerate what they may not personally accept. They want to force acceptance of homosexuality and punish anyone who will not adopt their pro-homosexual ideology. (Thomas 2006b: 128)

To emphasize the threat posed by homosexuality, the speakers consistently depict gay activists as forcing others to accept values and behaviors they fundamentally disagree with, as the previous quote illustrates. Allied with this construction are interpretive resources that paint the lesbian and gay civil rights movement tactics as deceitful and underhanded. In one session, the speaker explains exactly how deceitful the gay rights movement is: “Focus on the Family, The Family Research Council, The Alliance Defense Fund; we documented the fact that gay activist organizations have used deception, manipulation, and strong armed tactics to achieve their political goals” (Maier 2006). As a result, “gay groups have also done a marvelous job at propagating several myths about homosexuality and because of that we find misinformation about homosexuality everywhere. We find it in the media; we find it in the academic world, even in the more liberal elements of the church” (Maier 2006). The deception and manipulation referred to here is often related to the myths about homosexuality referenced over the course of the conference, and reportedly promoted by gay activists. Primarily, this alludes to arguments that locate homosexuality in biology, specifically genetics, which the speakers debunk repeatedly over the course of the day. Another of these myths refers to the notion that gay activists are perceived as frequently lying about the actual numbers of gays and lesbians in the population in order to further their political agenda. For example, in the booklet *Straight Answers: Exposing the Myths and Facts About Homosexuality*, the first myth mentioned is “ten percent of the population is homosexual” which is derived from the famous investigation into human sexuality conducted by Alfred Kinsey (2003: 5). *Love Won Out* refute this in the following manner:

homosexual activist groups now admit that the ten percent myth is false and that they exploited the inflated Kinsey figures for political reasons. “We used that figure … to try to
create an impression of our numbers” says Tom Stoddard, former member of the Lambda Legal Defense Fund … regarding the facts of how many people are gay or straight, maybe you’re asking, “What’s the big deal?” Well, here's the deal: By saying that one out of 10 people is homosexual, gay activists are knowingly promoting a lie. (Straight Answers 2003: 6)

Here, then, is a depiction of the underhanded tactics used by gay and lesbian activists to further their political agenda. This particular example is used by virtually every speaker, and referenced in the textual material, as exemplifying the deception generally undertaken by homosexual activists.

LWO reinterpret the political activism of the gay and lesbian civil rights movement as the more sinister-sounding pushing of the homosexual (or gay) agenda. This agenda is described thus,

there are those within the homosexual population who are what I would call, “militant” in that they have a twofold agenda: the normalization of homosexuality combined with intolerance for any opposing viewpoint. That is the dark side of the gay rights movement. Not its attempt to normalize homosexuality, but its intolerance for opposing viewpoints and its commitment to silencing opposing viewpoints. (Dallas 2006b)

In this selection, the speaker explains exactly how to understand the central ideas of the gay agenda. Militant homosexuals are described as trying to force through the normalization of homosexual behavior, while also forcefully resisting any opposition. Normalization, in this sense, refers to the manner in which culture desensitizes people to the issue of homosexuality through repeated exposure. In the first speech of the day, Nicolosi (2006a) goes a little further. After mentioning the four gay myths, (“once gay always gay”, “ten percent of the population is homosexual”, “born gay”, “homosexuality is as normal as heterosexuality”) he says, “if you believe 1, 2, 3, 4, then the conclusion is total acceptance and that’s exactly what the gay agenda is about–total acceptance.” Not only are gay and lesbian activists depicted as promulgating
numerous falsehoods, they are also perceived as using them to force an unsuspecting public to accept their sinful behavior.

**Society Under Threat**

The “infection” (*Teaching Captivity* 2002: 3) caused by the homosexual agenda is portrayed as spreading through all the major social institutions. The *Love Won Out* (2006) conference guide details the extent of the problem,

Today, the homosexual issue surrounds our culture on all sides. We cannot escape the onslaught of gay propaganda that seeks to influence our churches, schools, businesses and neighborhoods. There is a great deal of misinformation being spread that homosexuality is a biological imperative and that change and freedom are not possible. Children—as young as 5 years old—are being taught that homosexuality is simply another alternative lifestyle option equivalent to heterosexuality. Increasingly, churches across the nation are embracing and affirming homosexual unions and blessing gay partnerships. Some scientists tell us that genetics determine sexuality and that those who question this assertion are homophobic and intolerant. (6)

The message here is clear; the threat caused by homosexuality is widespread and homosexuality has already caused disruption and damage. Such is the fear of the gay agenda that *Love Won Out* devote sessions exclusively to detailing the extent of the problem in education, the church and in politics (with specific reference to the issue of same-sex marriage).

Dick Carpenter gives the critical plenary session after the lunch break, titled “Why is What They’re Teaching So Dangerous?” The title suggests that the audience have a right to be concerned with the impact of homosexuality on schools. The session description in the conference guide reinforces this impression:

The goal of gay activists is to “overhaul” America with the message that homosexuality is normal and healthy. Popular television shows and elementary school classrooms are the breeding ground for a dramatic shift in how homosexuality is portrayed. This … presentation poignantly reveals the motives behind gay activists’ influential impact on America. (*Love Won Out Conference Guide* 2006:10)
Schools, then, are portrayed as an important arena where gay activists are trying to assert control in their goal to overthrow normative heterosexuality (Smith & Windes 2000). Dobson (1994), founder of Focus on the Family, emphasizes the centrality of schools in the battle over homosexuality:

children are the great prize to the winners of the second great civil war. Those who control what young people are taught and what they experience will determine the future course for the nation. Given that influence, the predominant value system of an entire culture can be overhauled in one generation, or certainly in two, by those with unlimited access to children. (38)

Schools and teachers, therefore, are at the forefront of the debate over homosexuality.

Over the course of his plenary address, Carpenter carefully dissects what he argues is the gay agenda regarding schools and education—normalization through desensitization. The primary narrative resource he draws upon again embeds discussion of homosexuality within a wider cultural understanding of threat through exposure. If children become acquainted with homosexuality too early, they are subsequently in danger of thinking themselves to be gay, since they are too young to understand notions of sexual deviancy (Herman 1997). In this extract, Carpenter (2006a) is explaining a movie clip that was shown to a grade-school class, in which the teacher has been introducing the topic of homosexuality to his elementary school class; because of the developmental age of these children, his message can be easily misunderstood. So, for example, let’s picture one of the children we just saw on this video, perhaps the young boy near the end with the blonde hair, and he hears this message from the teacher, he goes home and he asks his mom or his dad, “What does gay mean?” and they might respond with, “Well you know, that’s uh, a different kind of love” or something like that. Well what’s a young boy of eight or nine-years-old to think when he hears from his mom if his mom or his dad were to say, “That’s when a boy likes a boy and doesn’t like a girl.” And vice-versa. What is that young boy to think? “Well, I like boys, and I certainly don’t like girls, I guess that means I’m gay.” Now, you may scoff at that and say, “Oh please, that doesn’t happen.” I can’t tell you the number of times that people have come up to me and said, “You know what? That has happened, with my child.” Or “With my grandchild.” Or some other relative.
Such is the potency of the homosexual message, that the boy in this quote is perceived to be in danger of adopting a gay identity simply by being exposed to the terminology (Herman 1997; Smith & Windes 2000). Exposure to such pro-gay themes does not only come from the teacher. Carpenter also details how the homosexual agenda can infect schools through books such as Heather Has Two Mommies, student support organizations such as Gay-Straight Alliances and support for openly gay teachers and principals.

In addition to describing the mission of homosexual activists in schools, Carpenter also provides the discursive tools necessary for the audience to recognize the presence of a pro-gay agenda in their own school districts. In his breakout session, he explains why this is important:

So we’re going to talk next turn our attention to different strategies that are typically used within school communities [to promote the homosexual agenda] and the reason I do this is because often I hear from parents or other folks who will say I don’t know what I’m looking for or I don’t understand until it’s too late what’s going on in the school. How do I know what to look for? So that’s why I want to cover strategies so that people can kind of keep an eye out and understand what’s going on in the school and what it will typically look like. (Carpenter 2006b)

The audience is taught to use the discursive framework provided by Love Won Out to reinterpret their school curricula and look for the hidden homosexual agenda. The booklet published to mirror the breakout session, Teaching Captivity: How the Pro-Gay Agenda is Affecting Our Schools ... And How You Can Make a Difference, provides a checklist for assessing schools’ “risk for encouraging homosexuality” (2002: 39). The checklist and explanation reads as follows:

The activities and policies below may sound nice, but in reality they protect and promote homosexuality and sexual promiscuity, putting students directly in harm’s way instead of cautioning them about risky behavior.

1. A safe schools harassment program
2. A homosexual student club
3. Non-discrimination policy based on “sexual orientation”
4. Programs to stop “homophobia,” “hate,” or “bias”

5. Pro-homosexual literature added to curricula and libraries; pro-family material bypassed or discarded

6. AIDS and “safe-sex” education programs

Other red flags for community concern:

7. Teachers who are openly homosexual

8. Involvement in your school of pro-homosexual groups like GLSEN, PFLAG and Lambda Legal Defense Fund

9. Celebrating “gay pride” month, “day of silence” or “coming out” day

10. Exhibits/films on families headed by homosexuals

11. Students and parents with concerns being silenced

12. Teacher in-service meetings promoting diversity and complaining about “homophobia” (Teaching Captivity 2002: 39-44)

For each of these programs, the booklet proceeds to explain what the assumptions, problems and end results are. For example, the result of incorporating programs to stop hate within the school curriculum is described as: “Supporters of traditional values are accused of “hate.” Instances of harassment are linked to those who would never commit such acts. Students are not warned about homosexuality, so more will experiment with this high risk behavior” (Teaching Captivity 2002: 41). The “red flags” are described purely in terms of their problematic nature. Celebrating gay pride month, for instance, is opposed because, “there is nothing to celebrate about encouraging kids to adopt dangerous sexual practices” (Teaching Captivity 2002: 44). This list, therefore, gives a clear set of indicators that readers can use to identify the impact of the gay agenda within their own school districts.

Once the audience have gone through and identified the programs in existence in their own schools, the booklet offers a score card that interprets the results. If 8-12 indicators are marked off, then this
is a signal that corruption is widespread and entrenched within the system. Look for heavy influence of radical homosexual groups, using attention-hungry teens, parents and teachers to front their issues. Sexual promiscuity is undoubtedly rising among students and teachers, and academics are likely to be suffering. Get the kids you care about out of this school now. (*Teaching Captivity* 2002: 45)

The underlying message here is that gay activist groups are again using underhanded and deceptive tactics to push their agenda into unsuspecting schools. In addition, there is a clear link drawn between support for homosexuality and homosexual activity, and rise in sexual promiscuity. As I detailed in an earlier chapter, homosexuality is thought to be characterized by promiscuity, such that engaging in these kinds of behaviors increases the risk of contracting disease. Pro-gay teaching is also paired with falling academic standards, since the focus is no longer on education, but instead on promoting a corruptive political agenda. A school with this approach is designated a danger to children, and parents are urged to remove their own children as soon as possible.

The final part of the discursive framework *Love Won Out* use to highlight the problem of the hidden gay agenda in schools involves reinterpretation of language, since language is a key component in the public debate over social change (Smith & Windes 2000). As the *Teaching Captivity* booklet explains, “many positive terms have been corrupted, and negative terminology about those disagreeing with the normality and practice of homosexuality has been trumpeted” (2002: 15). A list of these corrupted words includes diversity, multicultural, tolerance, safety, respect, freedom, and inclusive (*Teaching Captivity* 2002). For each of these, *LWO* describes the dictionary definition and then explains the manner in which language has been tainted by gay activism. For example, diversity is defined as “a point of respect in which things differ” yet redefined by the homosexual agenda to “include the normality of various sexual behaviors” (*Teaching Captivity* 2002: 15). This point is further illustrated by Carpenter with the following case study. He describes how the school in question was going to have a diversity week panel,
including a session on homosexuality and religion where the speakers would all be clergy members. One student asked for her own clergyman to be on the panel and was refused:

The school handed it over to the GSA [Gay Straight Alliance] to organize this panel so they’re all pro gay clergy … They said but we’ll let you give a speech at an open mike panel on What Diversity Means To Me. So she went home, she wrote the speech, and she had to submit the speech ahead of time because they wanted to make sure she didn’t have inflammatory words or etc., etc. So she submitted it, she received a phone call at home on a Sunday afternoon from a school assistant principal. That person said you need to remove the following sentences and she was told which ones to remove, and she was told to remove the sentences that referenced her faith’s belief system on the issue of homosexuality. She did not use offensive words, they were not overly negative or inflammatory; they just had the wrong message about homosexuality so she was censored. So she sued her school and she won. (Carpenter 2006b)

In this extract, Carpenter emphasizes how diversity only works one way: in favor of homosexuality. The strength and success of the gay agenda is perceived as such that any message deemed antigay, especially if it is religious in tone, is censored and differing opinions repressed. So, if “diversity” or any other of the red-flag words feature prominently in educational programs, it is taken as evidence that the school district in question has been corrupted by gay activists.

The goal of the homosexual agenda to normalize homosexuality is also described as increasingly influential within the theological and religious community. In a session on “Responding to Pro-Gay Theology,” Joe Dallas (2006a) explains the relationship between the secular and religious gay agenda:

In essence, let’s define pro-gay theology as this: ‘It is the religious counter-part to pro-gay ideology.’ Now ideology is a set of arguments based on a belief. Pro-gay ideology has the goal of normalizing sexuality. That is in essence the goal of the gay-rights movement, to normalize homosexuality and in doing so pro-gay ideology relies largely on secular disciplines, psychology, sociology, philosophy. Now pro-gay theology has the same goal as pro-gay ideology. That is, pro-gay theology seeks to normalize homosexuality, but on religious principle, not secular principle.

So where as pro-gay ideology states, ‘Homosexuality is normal, therefore we should consider it on par with heterosexuality.’ Pro-gay theology takes it a step further and says, “Homosexuality is God ordained.” God created some people to be homosexual as he created some people to be heterosexual.
Both in religious and secular discourse, the pro-gay agenda are described as one that intends the normalization of homosexuality. Within religion, however, acceptance of homosexuality is defined using the conceptualization of sexuality as God ordained, to the extent that, “gays and lesbians have twisted the biblical narrative on sexuality. In doing so, they have sought to present an image of a God who not only accepts their sexuality, but has offered it to them as a gift” (Responding to Pro-gay Theology: What Does the Bible Really Say? 2004: 7).

The impact of the gay agenda within the church community is defined as problematic as it is thought to signify a momentous revision of Scripture and a move away from biblical teaching on appropriate sexuality. Reinterpretation of Scripture is of particular concern to Love Won Out since it is viewed as “discounting biblical truth” (Responding to Pro-gay Theology 2004:13). The booklet called Responding to Pro-gay Theology: What Does the Bible Really Say? explains why readers should be troubled: “homosexuality is particularly egregious at this level because it rejects God’s design at its deepest point … Despite hearty attempts to redefine and reinterpret particular Scriptures, the true intent of the biblical narrative … cannot be denied or twisted to fit any particular agenda” (2004: 12). Since Focus on the Family believes in biblical inerrancy, the gay agenda in religion is depicted as distorting and misrepresenting the true Word of God—a particularly appalling sin.

Love Won Out also ensure that their audience is clear on just how outrageous misrepresenting biblical truth is. In the following booklet extract, the writer explains the consequences of these mistruths:

… these distortions have caused grief and hardship to so many. We know from the Bible that those who practice homosexual acts receive in ‘themselves the due penalty for their perversion.’ Alan Chambers knows the eternity altering affects that not knowing and/or not abiding by the truth can have on an entire civilization … ‘Today culture is moving farther and farther away from biblical teachings about sexuality and gender … Because of the downward spiral that has become our way of life, it is not surprising that people are
questioning what is right and wrong regarding sex when wrong is now considered normal. Our actions—good and bad—have consequences that impact us, our society and every single living person that comes after us until eternity.' (Straight Answers 2003: 20)

In this selection, the author outlines not only the individual impact of engaging in homosexual activity, but also the subsequent effects on society of allowing the gay agenda to spread. Gay men and lesbian women are constructed as in line for their “due penalty,” which is later described as burning in hell. Holding to biblical misrepresentation is depicted as a far more serious problem, however. Here, the booklet stresses the fact that revision of Scripture will irreversibly alter an “entire civilization” for eternity.

In addition to describing the effect of pursuing a pro-homosexual agenda on society, LWO also detail the extent of the problem. Adherence to a gay-affirmative belief system has become so widespread, according to Joe Dallas (2006a), that:

Today, [pro-gay theology] has become popularized to the point where many of our mainline denominations are on the verge of splitting over it. As we speak this morning, the Presbyterian Church USA, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, of course the Episcopal Church, the United Methodist Church, several sections of the American Baptist Church and several other denominations and independent groups are debating whether or not they should revise their position on homosexuality and in each of these denominations there are large groups of people believing the pro-gay interpretation of the scripture.

Dallas emphasizes the power and reach of the gay agenda by identifying the ideological crisis in all of the major Protestant denominations.

The political arena is also shown to have been strongly affected by the gay agenda. LWO describe public policy as having been subjected to an unrelenting assault from an illegitimate minority seeking special rights. From the LWO conference guide: “Focus does take strong exception to the activist movement that seeks to gain special privileges and protected minority status for the homosexual community … homosexuals have far higher average incomes and educations than most Americans, along with significant political influence” (2006: 7). This quote illustrates how LWO construct the political debate surrounding homosexuality as a fight over the
reinterpretation of the discourse such that homosexuals are perceived as wanting special protection for their immoral behavior, as I explained in chapter 1. As Herman (1997) explains, “in order to represent one group as ‘counterfeit,’ others must be constructed as authentic” (112). The extract form the conference guide shows LWO constructing the civil rights claims of the lesbian and gay movement in this way. Furthermore, Love Won Out also bolster the strength of their opposition by referencing the supposed power of the lesbian and gay movement. Not only are the pro-gay movement perceived as falsely drawing upon a civil right discourse to which they have no right, they are also depicted as having enough political power to force through their agenda.

Construction of an undeserving minority serves to delegitimize the rights discourse of the lesbian and gay movement activists, as I describe in chapter 1. Herman (1997) explains the importance of such a move,

The primary theme of Christian Right pragmatists is that, while rights may be due to the ‘truly disadvantaged,’ the gay movement does not fit this description. Their argument contains two fused limbs: first gays are immensely wealthy; second, the gay movement is not only one of the most politically powerful in the country, but lesbians and gay men as individuals actually hold vast amounts of political power and unfairly wield it over others. As a result, civil rights protections will simply extend and entrench the extraordinary privileges of this elite and deceitful) because they portray themselves as oppressed) group. (116)

LWO draw on these narrative techniques to demonstrate how gays and lesbians use their political power to unfairly portray themselves as oppressed. The following extract is from Haley’s (2004) book, in response to the question, “a friend of mine thinks that Christians are hateful when we don’t think homosexuals should be granted equal rights protection or ‘civil rights’ status. How should I respond?”

This question shows the success of homosexual activists to ride on the coattails of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which was implemented to grant minority class status to those in our country who were not treated equitably … it's all too painfully easy to see the reality of discrimination against African Americans in this regard, but there has never been any
noteworthy proof afforded the courts of this same discrimination being experienced by the
gay community. Consider these findings: Factoring in comparative household sizes, gays
average an annual individual income of $36800 compared with $12287 for the average
American and a mere $3041 for disadvantaged African Americans. This means that
homosexuals make, on average, more than 300 percent more than the typical straight
American and 1200 percent more than a disadvantaged African-American … more than
three times as many gays as average Americans are college graduates….More than three
times as many gays as average Americans hold professional or managerial positions,
making gays outrageously more advantaged than true minorities in the job market … (180-
182)

In this extract, Haley (2004) is drawing a clear delineation between deserving minorities, such as
African Americans, and the undeserving gays and lesbians seeking to appropriate the minority
discourse. In this way, he formulates both authentic and counterfeit minorities in much the same
way as Herman (1997) describes.

After describing the numerous advantages that gays and lesbians have over the average
American, Haley (2004) continues,

the power of the gay lobby is impossible to miss. Public schools, federal, state, and local
legislation … many mainline church denominations … have all seemingly felt the push of
this powerful force–a record of success made all the more remarkable by the fact that the
overall population has far fewer homosexuals than there are concentrations of any other
politically aware “minority” group. It’s ludicrous, to say the least, for anyone to argue that
this criterion [political powerlessness] applies to gays. (182)

In this extract, Haley refers directly to the potency of the gay and lesbian civil rights movement,
and the absurdity of their claims to minority status. It is also important to note here that part of
his dismissal of minority status for gays and lesbians rests on comparing their power in relation
to their numbers in the population. In this writing, and in various speeches over the conference,
Love Won Out refute claims that put homosexuals as ten percent of the population. As Nicolosi
(2006a) describes, “people actually believe it’s 10% it’s really not … It’s really 1.5 to 2%.” This
is a critical point because it highlights a major contradiction in the discursive framework Love
Won Out draw upon over the course of the day: that everyone is born heterosexual, yet there is a
clearly identifiable number of homosexuals in the population. There is a fundamental
inconsistency within this narrative formulation since homosexuality cannot be both mutable and immutable at the same time. Nevertheless, both the fallaciousness of the ten percent argument and the “actual” gay population of two percent are drawn upon to demonstrate the power of the pro-gay agenda.

The menace of homosexuality to public policy is typically defined around the issue of gay marriage. As I explained in earlier chapters, the battle over same-sex marriage is one of the core issues for the New Christian Right and has been described in the most powerful terms, including as the Second Great Civil War (Dobson & Bauer 1994). The founder of Focus on the Family, James Dobson (1994), declares it a war on values and “the hottest and most dangerous confrontation to date (46). He draws on the words of Winston Churchill to describe the battle as a “clash upon which the fate of Christian civilization [is] riding” (Dobson 1994: xiii).

The push for same-sex marriage by gay and lesbian activists is described by LWO as “the most radical social experiment ever proposed in our country” (Maier 2006). The message here is that the drive toward gay marriage is a most extreme form of social experimentation. In the session called “Straight Thinking on Gay Marriage,” the speaker, Bill Maier, explains this in more detail, by referring to his view of marriage in human history:

Now, when we talk about this whole same-sex marriage debate, I think it’s important for us to remember what we’re talking about here is an eradicable, redefinition of human family. Up until the last few milliseconds of human history, no society anywhere in the world at any time in recorded history has ever affirmed homosexual marriage. Homosexual unions have never been considered a normal, morally equal part of any society.

Notably, Maier first tells the audience how to understand the extent of the problem, total reinterpretation of family, before moving into a metaphorical description of the presence of gay marriage in human history. If history is conceptualized in terms of time, gay marriage has only been in existence for milliseconds, yet still poses a potent threat to human society. Maier (2006) continues his portrayal of the danger of gay marriage by drawing a more global picture:
If you were to spin that globe and you were to stop it and stab your finger down on any inhabited land mass, anywhere in the world, what you would find is that marriage is and marriage has always been, the bringing together of men and women to cooperatively raise the next generation. And it doesn’t matter whether you’re talking about the remotest part of Siberia, the tiniest little Polynesian island. You will not find any culture or society where the basic family union is headed up by two men or two women. But in the last few years there have been a few western countries and a few state judges in Massachusetts that um have been arrogant enough to believe that we can take marriage and we can dismantle it, dismember it, disfigure it and not suffer any negative consequences. As Dr. Thomson often says: “We tinker with marriage at our own peril.”

In this extract, Maier locates the discussion of same-sex marriage within the context of global norms. The emphasis is again on the prevalence of, and preference for, heterosexual marriage. Those pushing the gay agenda are constructed as being in a very small, yet very powerful and very dangerous minority.

To ensure that the audience understand the true extent of the problem, the last keynote address of the day, titled “How Should We Respond?” draws together all of the substantive themes I outlined above. The speaker, Joe Dallas, uses the opportunity of having the whole audience together one last time to get them fired up about the issue of homosexuality and exhorts them to be active agents of change themselves. Towards the end of his speech, Dallas concentrates on the menace to society presented by the gay and lesbian movement, and on the wide-ranging consequences of giving into their demands. He draws on the words of Martin Luther King Jr., in which King describes the church as being the conscience of the state, to paint a chilling picture of the repercussions felt in society due to the incursion of the gay agenda:

Now a man without a conscience is that scariest of all horror movie figures, the sociopath. The sociopath feels nothing. If it suits his purposes, he’ll be nice to you, if it suits his purposes he’ll murder you … Perhaps the only thing more frightening than a sociopath individual is a sociopath culture. A culture whose church has been intimidated into silence, cannot help but become a sociopath culture. A culture without its moral bearings, that will murder the inconvenient unborn, euthanize the inconvenient elderly, redefine the family unit to suit whatever prevailing political trends are happening. And should the conscience of the state, [the church], allow itself to be intimidated into silence, there is no hope for the state but to become sociopath. And God will require the blood of the state at the hands of the conscience of the state that allowed itself to be intimidated into silence. It is not a
stretch to say that as we speak, there are elements of the gay rights movement that seek to silence the conscience of the state. (Dallas 2006b)

This extract comes from the same speech in which Dallas describes the goal of the gay agenda as being to silence opposing viewpoints, and which I mentioned earlier in this chapter. Put together, this means that successful promotion of a pro-homosexual agenda is constructed as being the final downfall of society, whereby society will become sociopathic once the voice of the church is silenced. Subsequently, God is portrayed as demanding retribution from the church for allowing such things as abortion, gay marriage and euthanasia to happen.

Dallas continues his powerful denouncement of homosexuality by expanding on his conceptualization of the gay agenda silencing critics. As he describes,

I would suggest that where you see the normalization of homosexuality you will also see growing restrictions on freedom of speech, freedom of conscience, and freedom of religion. Check any institution, state, or nation that has legitimized homosexuality and you will find not only the normalization of homosexuality, but the silencing of people who oppose that normalization. A lot of people think that same-sex marriage is going to be the last great battle in America over gay rights. Not so. The last battle will be over freedom of speech, freedom of conscience and freedom of religion. And it is that battle I fear more than any of the other battles we’re currently fighting. (Dallas 2006b)

Once again, Dallas is condemning the seemingly all-powerful gay and lesbian civil rights movement. In this excerpt, Dallas furthers his argument by telling the audience where the battles over gay rights are going to end up. It is not just a battle over on substantive public policy; instead, it is a fight over the core cultural values of American society. He continues this line of thinking by providing the audience with comprehensive examples of how opposition to gay rights has already been silenced. More specifically, Dallas (2006b) refers to the way in which religious opposition is being oppressed in places where homosexuality is conceivably normal:

In our neighboring Canada the shoe has already dropped, laws are now on the books that make it illegal to make statements publicly, anywhere, including in church that could quote, unquote: “Incite hatred against homosexual people.”… Do they mean threatening someone? Calling someone an awful name? Quoting Leviticus? Nobody’s saying. They might ask Pastor Green from Sweden who was arrested last year for violating the Swedish
law that made it illegal even from the pulpit to criticize homosexuality. And what was especially frightening in his trial were the words of the public prosecutor who said, and I quote: “Collecting Bible verses on this topic makes this hate speech.” Collecting Bible verses on this topic makes this hate speech.

The threat to freedom of speech, freedom of conscience and freedom of religion is clearly demonstrated in the passage above: once homosexuality is normalized, religious oppression follows. From Dallas again: “if we allow ourselves to be silenced on social issues, it is only a matter of time before we are silenced on the very preaching of the Gospel. And if we can’t do that, what are we even here for?”

**Saving Society**

The threat to society posed by homosexuality is portrayed as so powerful that *Love Won Out* describe how audience members are under a divine mandate to work against such destructive social forces. At the start of the session “How Should We Respond?”, Dallas explains the importance of this: “You can’t take a position on homosexuality without causing some controversy … To be controversial just for the sake of making noise, oh that’s childish. But there are times the body of Christ has a divine mandate to be controversial for the sake of the truth. And this is one of those times.” The audience, as members of the body of Christ and evangelical Christians, are required to confront the issue of homosexuality head-on and to promote the truth claims about homosexuality as described by *Love Won Out*.

As the title of the address indicates, this session provides the discursive framework through which the audience can understand the appropriate responses to homosexuality. Important, here, is the notion *LWO* portrays that they, through churches following similar doctrine, are the only ones with the truth about homosexuality. Not only that, they construct themselves as knowing exactly God’s response to these issues. Consequently, they are the authorities on how
homosexuality should be read, understood, and responded to. In the following reference, Dallas (2006b) explains how this works:

Now here, I believe, Paul gives us a cue in Ephesians 2-10 when he says: “We, the church, are Christ’s workmanship.” And the Greek word he uses for workmanship is “Poiema,” from which we get our word “poem.” I love this thought. Just as a poet tries to express themselves through his work, so God is trying to express his heart and his mind through us, his Poiema. So ideally, if a non-believer wants to know what the God of the Bible feels for homosexual people, and what the God of the Bible thinks about homosexuality, that non-believer need go no further than God’s Poiema to get an accurate reading on the heart and mind of God. We are in essence, his visual representation on earth.

Those listening, therefore, have been equipped not only with the truth about homosexuality as seen by Focus on the Family and *Love Won Out*, but with God’s truth. They have been given the interpretive resources they need to understand exactly the power of the information received over the course of the day. Consequently, they see themselves as working to promote God’s true message of homosexuality, that it is sinful, dangerous and needs to be eradicated from society.

The strength of this mandate is such that Dallas (2006b) warns people to take their charge very seriously:

[being the visual representation of Christ on earth] puts a tremendous responsibility on the body of Christ. Because we know this from both testaments, God hates being misrepresented. People have lost their very lives for misrepresenting the very heart and mind of God. And so should we fall short of accurately representing his heart and his mind I believe God would call us to repentance and recommitment in three primary areas.

As this quote shows, the audience is urged to act on the information provided at *Love Won Out* since it is intimately connected with the true word of God and there would, therefore, be tremendous consequences if they either sat idle or were guilty of misrepresentation.

Such is the strength of the mandate for the audience to be active agents of change themselves, that they are given the interpretive resources they need to affect that change throughout the course of the conference. All of these different threads are then drawn together in the last session, “How Should We Respond?” In much the same as the speakers at *LWO*...
demonstrate the threat posed by the gay agenda across different social institutions, so they also illustrate how those listening can put the information they are hearing into practice to fight the incursion of the gay agenda in those same institutions.

The breakout session on education, titled “Teaching Captivity: Addressing the Pro-Gay Agenda in Your School” is explicitly designed for educators and parents to receive the information they need to counter pro-homosexual messages in schools. As the conference guide explains, “Parents, teachers and administrators often find themselves at a loss in countering this onslaught. This session outlines action steps in confronting gay-affirmative curricula and how to counter anti-family activism in your schools” (2006: 10). Carpenter begins the session by asking the audience members to identify whether they are parents, teachers, administrators or trainee teachers, and the majority fall into one of these categories. Having done this, he then lays out the problems of the pro-gay agenda in schools, which he partially explains in his after-lunch plenary address I explained in the beginning of this chapter.

Once the audience make-up is established and the problem is defined, Carpenter sets about presenting a set of solutions for teachers, parents and students. Of primary importance is that all three of these groups are encouraged to become more vocal and more active. Carpenter draws upon his own experiences as teacher, principal and college professor to suggest practical ways to do this. He begins with parents:

I can tell you first hand when I was a school principal I anticipated very little input and resistance on decisions that I made. I rarely thought, “well I wonder what people will think about this?” other than my teachers … very rarely did I think well I wonder how parents will think about this because it so rarely happened that somebody would come in, that someone would have an issue or a complaint. So, parents, first things first. What I tell folks is to think about how you can what I call protect your child. That is, if your school is going to address the issue, you want to tell them you want to be notified first so that you can make the proper decision for your child. (Carpenter 2006b)
In this extract Carpenter uses his own experiences to inform parents of the best way to counter the issue of homosexuality in schools, and that is to ask the school to keep a letter in the child’s file requesting parental permission before addressing this subject. In terms of becoming more vocal and more active, Carpenter suggests speaking to both like-minded parents and like-minded teachers. Teachers will be able to inform the parents of decisions made that contradict Conservative Christian values, as Carpenter (2006b) illustrates,

I just asked how many teachers do I have and I had teachers put up their hand all over the place. There are Christian teachers who know what’s going on and can tell you. I was one of those. It wasn’t unusual for a parent to come in and say hey I heard that the school is going to do x y and z what do you know about that? And I would tell them yes, no, this is what’s going on etc., etc. So you can find people who will help you.

Here, he suggests allying with teachers of a similar ideological mindset in order to have an insider’s point of view on the happenings within the school. He also recommends parents banding together to approach the school, since a group will not be as easily dismissed. Again, Carpenter (2006b) explains the importance of using these particular strategies,

Here’s how it’s done. I have done it not on this issue but I have done it when a parent came in with a complaint. I said well Mrs. Smith you’re the only one to come in and tell me that. Now what does she think? Wow, I guess maybe I’m overreacting, I guess maybe it’s just me. That’s how easy it is to dismiss an individual. But a group is not so easy to dismiss. As a principal my second worst fear was that a group of parents would come into my office with … with a complaint. It can be very intimidating.

In addition to providing a set of practical approaches for parents, Carpenter also presents a framework for action on behalf of teachers and students. Again, the most important of these is to be actively engaged within the school community with a number of likeminded peers, “so find those people in your building who believe what you believe or who would agree with what you agree with” (Carpenter 2006b). In the booklet that accompanies the breakout session, both teachers and students are encouraged to “relentlessly pursue the truth” (Teaching Captivity 2002:
30) about homosexuality—that it is sinful, dangerous and mutable. Teachers, for example, can insist upon:

Equal Time ... homosexual activists demand that teachers address the issue in class and more and more schools are requiring it. As a teacher, you may be forced to address it, but you can demand equal time. You can talk about or ask someone else to share a different message about homosexuality—that you don’t have to be gay. (Teaching Captivity 2002: 31)

In this extract, there is emphasis on sharing one of the messages that Love Won Out insistently promotes: that homosexuality is mutable, and that no one is born gay. Students, too, are provided with the discursive tools necessary to promulgate this central message of the LWO conference:

Refuse to be a pawn in the pro-gay agenda in your school. If the information you are being taught seems to have a pro-gay slant to it, it’s not being fairly presented. Use discernment when you suspect opinions, rather than facts are being taught. Don’t be afraid to raise your hand and ask your teachers about specific questions about the facts on homosexuality. This will get your peers and teacher thinking twice about the information. You can ask questions like:

I heard that only 1 to 3 percent of the population is gay or lesbian ... isn’t that true?

No studies have proven that homosexuality is genetic—right? It’s documented that thousands of people have come out of homosexuality—why do some people say it’s not possible? (Teaching Captivity 2002: 32)

In this passage, there is further reference to the fact that homosexuality is changeable; that the pro-gay agenda is based on opinion, not fact, and that those facts used are patently false. The students are then given exact instructions on how to combat these issues.

Within the educational establishment more generally, LWO also give explicit instructions on who needs to be contacted to address issues of homosexuality, and how to go about doing this. They suggest attendance at school board meetings, and give tips on how to achieve particular political goals within this realm. Moreover, they also include a sample letter from a parent to a school principal in the conference guide. This letter asks that parents be notified when the school teaches about anything connected with sexuality, homosexuality, or alternative
lifestyles. It also requests that homosexuality not be taught at all, and if referred to, should address both sides of the argument. By way of illustration: “if this issue must be addressed, we ask that the school at least present a balanced view by allowing knowledge authorities such as doctors and former homosexuals to address some of the consequences associated with homosexuality” (Teaching Captivity 2002: 24). Another letter is contained in the booklet Teaching Captivity (2002) that addresses similar issues in terms of how a student should contact their school or a newspaper editor.

In response to the pro-gay agenda in the religious community, Love Won Out provide a narrative framework that the audience can use to combat theological arguments gays and lesbians use to attempt to normalize homosexuality in the spiritual realm. In his session on “Understanding Pro-Gay Theology,” Joe Dallas (2006a) explains the purpose behind his address,

So pro-gay theology is in essence a revision of the scriptures and I’d like to look at the five Scriptures that specifically name and condemn homosexuality, two from the old testament, three from the new and I’d like to look this morning at the revisionist interpretation of these Scriptures, the pro-gay take on them and then offer a response to that. … so we can be better equipped to respond to those interpretations.

Here Dallas expressly states that his goal is to empower those listening to respond to pro-gay interpretation of the Bible in an appropriate manner, using the discursive tools he provides. The Scriptures he examines include excerpts from Leviticus, and assorted New Testament verses, such as 1 Corinthians. Dallas isolates passages, articulates the revisionist pro-gay interpretations of these passages, and then refutes then.

He begins by referencing Leviticus 18-22 “Thou shall not lie with mankind as one lies with a woman, it is an abomination” And Leviticus 20-13, “If a man lie with a man as with a woman, both of them has committed an abomination, they shall surely be put to death.” Dallas (2006a) describes the pro-gay interpretation in the following manner,
But the revisionist’s viewpoint would say something like this: Hey wait a minute, other prohibitions in Leviticus, dietary prohibitions, ceremonial prohibitions, etcetera, are generally viewed by the church today as being culturally bound to the ancient Israelites. That is, there are many scriptures both in Leviticus and Deuteronomy that we look at today and say well we are not bound by that, that was a cultural prohibition for that time. So why then should prohibitions against homosexuality be singled out and enforced today?

His rebuttal focuses on two key areas, whether or not biblical law condemns homosexuality and whether that condemnation is still binding. Dallas explains that the fact some of these prohibitions are repeated in the New Testament means they are still relevant. By way of illustration,

We do know according to specific New Testament verses that aspects of the law are not binding on us today. And so for example Paul told the Galatians, “You’re observing feast days and you’re observing dietary laws that you are no longer bound by.”… But it’s interesting to note that in Leviticus 18 and 20 you have prohibitions against sexual behaviors that are also prohibited in the New Testament as well. So the prohibitions in these chapters against adultery, incest, sorcery and homosexuality are confirmed in the New Testament as well. … for believers whether they be Jewish or gentile. (Dallas 2006b)

He details exactly how to answer back to theologians who may be drawing upon this type of narrative resource. He continues his refutation by explaining how a different revision of the same Scripture argues that homosexuality is only condemned as part of idol worship and Heathen ceremony. According to this premise, homosexuality outside of such a ceremony would be permissible. To which Dallas (2006a) responds,

Now if we are going to impose that contingency on the Scriptures referring to homosexuality we have to impose it on all of the other prohibitions as well. You can’t have it both ways. In other words, if we are going to say that homosexuality in Leviticus is only condemned if it’s practiced as part of idol worship we must say the same thing about adultery, incest and bestiality, which of course nobody is going to say because they are so obviously condemned throughout Scripture. So is homosexuality condemned in the Levitical code? Yes, clearly it is.

For each of the blocks of Scripture mentioned, Dallas goes through the same process I outlined above for the verses from Leviticus. He first outlines the pro-gay theological version, and then thoroughly discredits it. What he is doing, therefore, is furnishing those listening with
the interpretive tools critical for supporting their own ideological stance. Furthermore, since *Love Won Out* promote the idea that they are the sole purveyors of God’s truth about homosexuality, they are also arming their followers against the seduction of what they have determined to be the false doctrine of pro-gay theology (*Responding to Pro-Gay Theology* 2004). It is also important to note at this point that Dallas also explicitly refers to the impending Second Coming of Jesus before closing this session. This is important because Dallas (2006b) explains how true believers will recognize Armageddon,

*[Jesus said] “Take heed that no one deceive you.” And he said, “In fact in those days, the power of deception will be so great, if possible even God’s very elect are going to be deceived.” Paul said something similar to Timothy when he said, “In the last days the times are going to get perilous. Men will not endure sound doctrine. Objective, sound truth will become unacceptable and people will want to hear, not what is true, but what is convenient.”*

Here, Dallas stresses that the end of the world will come after believers start to reject sound doctrinal truths, and instead embrace a false set of truths—similar to the situation he portrays with the acceptance of pro-gay theology.

*Love Won Out*’s provision of a narrative framework allowing the audience to counter pro-gay beliefs in the church is mirrored in their empowering of the audience to fight legislation approving same-sex marriage. There are two sessions in the conference that deal expressly with this issue (they are both the same, but held at different times to ensure that the audience can attend one of them), called “Straight Thinking on Gay Marriage”. These are designed to do the following:

Gay marriage is a reality in the U.S.—now how do we as Christians make a convincing, compassionate case for why this is not in the best interest of society and our children? This session will equip attendees with the facts and strategies they need to effectively argue for the benefits of traditional marriage to their friends, coworkers and legislators (*Love Won Out Conference Guide* 2006: 11).
As the passage illustrates, *LWO* acknowledge that the express purpose of the session is to provide the tools the audience would need to counter proposed same-sex marriage legislation.

Towards the beginning of the session, the speaker, Bill Maier, reinterprets the discourse surrounding the gay marriage debate so that the audience are clear on what the arguments are “really about.” By doing this, he ensures that those listening are familiar with the appropriate institutional responses to same-sex marriage. They are, in fact, given the “right” responses and told exactly how they should think about this issue. Maier (2006) first outlines what *Love Won Out* say the gay marriage debate is not about:

First of all it’s not about whether gays and lesbians are nice people or good citizens... It’s not about whether gays and lesbians can form loving relationships... It’s not about whether gays and lesbians can be loving parents... And it’s not about whether homosexuals should be treated with respect and dignity. Every member of the human race should be treated with respect and dignity. As Christians we should be the first to uphold that because we believe that human beings are made in God’s image, exactly.

In this extract, Maier attempts to defuse all of the major arguments in support of gay marriage by reinterpreting the terms of the gay marriage debate. He carefully stresses that the question of whether or not gay couples should be allowed to marry has nothing to do with love, respect or citizenship. He does, in fact, say that lesbians and gays have loving relationships and should be afforded the secular rights of full citizens. Those listening are being shown how to effectively neutralize the potency of the gay agenda by agreeing with the key arguments, and instead refocusing the debate.

Having explained what the debate is not about, Maier then shifts his attention to what *Love Won Out* believe the same-sex marriage debate is actually about. The following passage explains their approach,

It’s about whether we have the right to redefine marriage so it’s elastic enough to include any grouping of adults regardless of their gender … It’s about whether we embrace the wonderful human diversity expressed in the two genders, male and female. It’s about whether men and women complement and complete each other in their differences. It’s
about whether mothers and fathers play unique and irreplaceable roles in the lives of their children... And it’s whether there are compelling societal reasons to define marriage as one thing, and not define it as something else. (Maier 2006)

In this extract, Maier outlines all of the key arguments that the audience need to be aware of in order to fight same-sex marriage. First and foremost, he questions whether anyone has the right to tamper with traditional marriage definitions. Later in this same speech, and in many of the other sessions over the course of the day, marriage is defined as an institution that is divinely ordained, “for those of you who are married or those of you who are aspiring to marriage, as Christians we know that heterosexual marriage was established by God … since marriage was created by God, it naturally follows that it is a universal, human institution” (Maier 2006).

Consequently, the audience are mandated to oppose any legislative changes to marriage since this is constructed as protecting the word of God. The remainder of this paragraph relates to the perceived role of men and women within the marriage relationship, and is connected with the wider discursive framework *LWO* use to define appropriate sexual expression in terms of gender and bodies.

In addition to redefining the terms of the same-sex marriage debate, Maier also gives the audience further information on combating the discourse put forth by the pro-gay activists. Specifically, he addresses the issue of benefits for same-sex and opposite-sex couples: “Now in the public debate over same-sex marriage gay spokespeople often argue that gay couples should be given the same, the same state and federal benefits, that are given to heterosexual couples and that’s a reasonable argument …”. Here, he identifies the demands of the gay community as seemingly reasonable, before he utterly refutes them:

The reason society provides benefits to marriage is because marriage benefits society in some remarkable ways… How does marriage benefit adults? Well in some pretty remarkable ways. Married people have better emotional and physical health and live longer than unmarried people. And before I go on lemme just tell you that I’m talking about, when I go into these statistics I’m talking about natural, heterosexual marriage. There’s no
evidence that homosexual marriage would provide these same benefits... Married couples have greater incomes than single adults and the longer they stay married the more wealth they accumulate. Married couples enjoy greater sexual satisfaction ... Married women are safer than unmarried women. Never married, cohabited, separated and divorced women experience higher rates of domestic violence then married women ... some of the ways that marriage benefits society. Marriage makes homes safer places to live because it curbs social problems such as domestic violence and child-abuse. Communities with more married parent families are safer and more attractive places to live because they're less likely to have substance abuse and crime among young people ... And married people are more likely to be healthy, productive and engaged citizens benefiting businesses and ultimately benefiting the economy ... married folks typically make ... make better employees than single folks or divorced folks. (Maier 2006)

This list demonstrates all the criteria that marriage is perceived to benefit both individuals and society. Maier suggests that these can all be used as strong points to argue when reiterating the need for marriage, and the requirement to deny state and federal benefits to same-sex couples. Moreover, he also expounds on the need to deny marriage to homosexuals, despite arguments suggesting that these same benefits would apply to same sex marriages:

There is recent research from the Netherlands that does not support that belief ... so what did they find as they looked at these male, gay couples in long-term relationships? Well gay men in steady partnerships stay together for an average of 18 months. These are the committed gay male couples. An average of one and a half years. And during that time gay men with a steady partner have an average of eight additional sexual partners per year ... monogamy and fidelity are virtually nonexistent in the male homosexual community. (Maier 2006)

Maier uses this example to strengthen claims that marriage should be restricted to heterosexuals since the key concepts of monogamy and fidelity are missing in male same-sex relationships. He does not specifically mention lesbian couples, although he hints that such promiscuity also characterizes lesbian relationships.

The final part of the discursive framework used by LWO to empower the audience to counter attempts to legalize same-sex marriage involves linking it with polygamy, incest, and pedophilia. This is a particularly powerful narrative tool as it simultaneously delegitimizes gay
and lesbian right to marry claims, while connecting them with two of society’s strongest sexual taboos: incest and pedophilia. From Bill Maier (2006) again,

Now, if we redefine marriage in one way, really there is no logical reason for us to not redefine it in another way and I think it’s important for us to look at what might lie ahead for our culture if same-sex marriage is legalized … what’s to stop us from redefining it to consider marriage between a man and four women or a group of six or seven heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual adults and their respective children? … if a father wants to marry his fourteen-year-old daughter, who are we to stop him?

Importantly, Maier takes the audience on a hypothetical journey from the historical moment when same-sex marriage is legalized, to the logical conclusion he describes. He implies that if those assembled do not organize to defeat this menace, then society will deteriorate to such a point where there are no sexual mores, and fathers would be free to marry their underage daughters should they desire—since there would be no legal justification for stopping them doing just as they please.

By the end of the session on gay marriage, the congregation has a set of definitive ideas on how to engage in dialogue with supporters of this legislation. They have been told how to understand what the debate is really about, marriage as a fundamental religious institution has been reiterated, the benefits of heterosexual marriage have been clearly outlined, homosexual unions have been proven false and the consequences to society of allowing gay marriage have been stressed. Consequently, the audience is now ready to carry the message about gay marriage to a wider circle of people and fight any potential legislation supporting same-sex unions. Indeed, at the very end of the session, Maier introduces a speaker who will be available to answer audience questions on how to combat specific state same-sex marriage legislation, and how to organize to pass constitutional marriage protection acts.
Saving Souls

The institutional selves produced by *Love Won Out* in service of the organization are encouraged to become active agents of change themselves. They are given a narrative framework that allows for identification and interpretation of the key issues in the debate over homosexuality and subsequently pushes them to fight incursion of the pro-gay agenda across different social institutions. This is not the end of the story for these selves, however. They are also given the interpretive resources necessary to affect change on an individual level. Since Focus on the Family is an evangelical Christian organization, this typically involves practical tips on how to evangelize the gay community, and how to reach gay and lesbian friends and love ones. Dallas (2006b) explains the importance of reaching out to individuals in the last plenary address of the day,

> To hear some of us talk, you would think it was more important to politically defeat homosexual people than it is to see them won into the Kingdom. And that ought not to be … The culture wars are important I will not withdraw from them. But there are more important things than the culture wars. There are the souls of the lesbian women and the gay men we are often opposing.

Here, Dallas recognizes significance of fighting against gays and lesbians politically, but also implicates the battle over souls as being the most decisive.

The speakers at the conference routinely suggest ways that the message they are promoting can be utilized outside the discursive boundaries of the conference. Much as production of the gay self rests on the two pivotal discourses of religion and reparative therapy, so, too, do the techniques for diffusing narrative constructions of the ex-gay self across the identity landscape. Indeed, those listening are repeatedly told that the characteristics of gay and lesbians selves are such that they are emotionally needy, temperamentally vulnerable, and can therefore be easily influenced.
One of the adjustments that audience members are told to make when first hearing that their loved one identifies as gay or lesbian is to reinterpret the way in which the gay or lesbian individual stories their own self identity. More specifically, *LWO* insist that gay men and lesbian women are not as happy as they initially exclaim on first coming out. As Mike Haley (2006b) explains in a session designed to help those wanting to reach out to their loved ones,

> It talks about in Scripture how sin is pleasurable for a season and oftentimes you will hear your loved one or your friend talk about especially when they first come out look I’m happier than I ever have been I’m being true to who I am I’m finally embracing who God has made me to be this homosexual individual … Scripture talks about that and so oftentimes it’s like the elephant has just been let out of the cage you know the zoo keeper wants to stand in the way and stop the elephant but he’s going to wind up getting trampled on.

This narrative formulation allows parents with gay children to reframe their child’s experience into a framework that still depicts homosexuality as sinful, emotionally damaging and dangerous. In other words, their children are not actually happy; instead they are being seduced by the temptations of homosexual sin. As Haley (2004) explains,

> Society has silenced any message of hope regarding change from homosexuality, and the church hasn’t stepped boldly up to the plate either. So individuals with same-sex attractions have been left to fend for themselves. When the pain of denial, hiding or repression becomes so heated the pot begins to boil and the top is blown right off, men and women ‘come out’ and express a newfound ‘freedom’ like never before. (47)

In this passage, Haley identifies the fact that the ex-gay message has been silenced as one of the key reasons that gays and lesbians feel repressed, and depressed. Subsequently, the expectations is that once they have embraced the counterfeit happiness offered by the gay lifestyle, and embraced the false idea of a biological immutable homosexual identity, they would indeed feel a huge sense of relief.

As a result, it is incumbent upon the church, parents and other loved ones to spread the message that homosexuality is, in fact, mutable. From Haley (2004) again, in response to a question from a mother concerning her son’s supposed happiness:
The key for your son in the weeks and months to come is for him to realize it’s not too late to turn back. This is where the church and loved ones like you come in. If he hears that change is possible, that he was not made this way, and that he is loved… there is hope that when the feeling of relief wears off and the emptiness sets in, he will try to live his life in line with God’s will. (47)

Haley is advocating for the message of change to be spread as widely as possible. He argues that the nature of homosexuality is such that people will eventually become tired of its false promise and begin to realize that they are beset by inner emptiness—as reparative therapists explain the some of the causes of same-sex desire. Before this happens, however, he stresses that “in the meantime, advise you to pray that he becomes as miserable as possible, as soon as possible” (Haley 2004: 47). Once this happens, Haley believes, then the stricken loved one would be more receptive to the religious message that the parent is trying to promote.

The speakers at LWO frequently combine the understanding developed through reparative therapy with evangelical religious discourse to suggest to the audience how to reach out to gays and lesbians. As I outlined above, and in earlier chapters, reparative therapists believe that homosexuals are fundamentally unhappy and have deep-seated psychological distress stemming from inadequate parent-child bonding. Consequently, those listening are urged to wait for evidence of this vulnerability before stepping in with the “message of hope” LWO are trying to spread. The following selections, from different sessions and from Haley’s book, illustrate this idea,

let him get tired and let him realize what homosexuality is all about so when they’re tired and they’re worn out that’s when we can begin to invest in their life (Haley 2006b)

you can still show empathy for a hurting person and say you know I’ve been through break-ups and I know it’s painful and I’m really sorry and I would even pray before you do this, but this is where I might see opportunity for evangelism: “You feel like the loss of this relationship is you know longer have a reason to live but let me tell you about my reason for living because man has let me down to when I say man I mean humans I don’t mean men but just in general. I’ve been let down a lot by people and I’ve been through bad break-ups but Jesus is the only one who is not going to let me down. I’d love to tell you about him.” (Fryrear 2006c)
… many hidden issues can contribute to a struggle with homosexuality. If you suspect your acquaintance is flirting with homosexuality, start by exploring these issues … if you are a youth pastor who wants to approach a youth, you could begin by saying … “Gary, when you talk about your family, you light up when you talk about your mum—always making sure I understand how much you ‘can’t stand’ your dad. Have you ever thought about how this negative relationship with your dad affects your life? … you may uncover homosexual inclinations, but more importantly, you are ministering to the core of the problem … . As with any sin issue, we must look beyond someone’s behavior and minister to the wound that have prompted them (Haley 2004: 67-68).

In all of these extracts, the focus is on finding an entry point into the gay or lesbian person’s life, which opens up when that self is wounded and suffering. Having found an entry, the emphasis shifts to introducing that self to the interpretive constructs necessary to free them from the constraints of homosexuality. In other words, the audience is taught to take advantage of suffering selves to evangelize them, and in their opinion, save their soul. This is what Love Won Out refers to as “ministering to their humanity.” For example,

… About ministering to their humanity which … doesn’t mean that we condone their homosexuality. If you have a coworker and you hear her crying in the office next to you and she’s just broken up with her partner well I mean who can’t empathize with a breakup? And even though the relationships are illegitimate in that they’re not God’s design the feelings are still real … and so being able to minister where that person is and … being able to share that God would comfort them and encourage them and show Himself to them. Now I’m not going to pray that her girlfriend come back not going to pray condoning their sexuality but being able to meet that person where she is in that moment of loss and grief that we can all relate to. (Fryrear 2006c)

Notice that the emphasis is on praying with the person who has been hurt, and bringing their soul back to God. Furthermore, the speaker in this extract, Melissa Fryrear, makes a clear delineation between praying for those hurting and support for their homosexuality.

In addition to ministering to those suffering, LWO also encourages the audience to go out of their way to befriend gays and lesbians and also to make sure they remain in close contact with their homosexual loved ones. The speakers suggest nurturing friendships in order to win a place of trust in the gay or lesbian’s life. Once this happens, the audience are depicted as being in a perfect place to minister to the gay or lesbian when the inevitable emotional breakdown

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happens. Fryrear (2006d) details how to structure a friendship with a homosexual individual so this can take place,

if you have a friend who is struggling … make [homosexuality] the back-burner issue. If we’re too aggressive on always talking about this, we run the risk of pushing that person away if he or she does not know Christ. That’s ultimately our greatest heart concern of seeing people come to know Jesus Christ. Be vulnerable and real about your own life, I like what Mike says, “Vulnerability breeds vulnerability.” Issues of sexuality and gender are some of the most intimate in our lives and there needs to be a level of trust built up in that relationship for that person to be able to talk openly, so invest in building that relationship.

Fryrear lays out expressly how to approach friendship with gays and lesbians. The ultimate goal is to save the soul of the unrepentant gay or lesbian and the easiest way to do this is to maneuver a position of trust such that the other person will open up about their life. Haley (2004) explains further, “show interest in his career, ask about his latest vacation, or simply enjoy your time with him over dinner” (51-52). The audience, therefore, are having their own self identity restoried such that they are seen to have a powerful role in reaching gays for Christ. They are empowered to become actively involved and are supplied with the narrative resources required to do this.

The role of the Christian loved one or friend as an evangelist is expounded by Joe Dallas (2006c) in his session on “Top Ten Questions Loved Ones Ask,” “As stewards of the truth, we should speak the truth as clearly and lovingly as possible, always remembering that it isn’t words that change people’s hearts and attitudes, it’s the spirit of God taking those words and using them in that person’s life.” In other words, those listening are constructed as being the only ones with a true understanding of homosexuality, and it is incumbent upon them to spread that message to people they love. Haley (2006b) advances this idea by furnishing his audience with a set of questions and answers that those listening can use to approach those they wish to evangelize,

one of the things that I often do when I’m dealing with people that struggle with homosexuality or people that want to walk away from homosexuality, or even people that don’t, is that I like to use what’s called the whole person model. God has created us to be sexual beings, physical beings, moral beings and social being … God has created in us the
ability to think. So one of the very first places that I want to engage with someone that’s dealing with the issue of homosexuality is their intellect. And the very first place that I start is tell me why you’re gay … because if they believe that they were born that way then you know where you need to begin to engage their mind and you know where the educational process needs to begin.

Haley’s initial approach to evangelism draws on one of the primary narrative resources _LWO_ stress over the course of the conference: that no one is born gay. If the target of evangelism believes this myth, the one reaching out is encouraged to use scientific studies to discredit this belief system, in the hope that the gay or lesbian will start to question their own sense of self identity. Haley (2006b) continues his instructions:

If they believe that homosexuality is something that happened in their life that it was developmental, then that’s a wonderful place because that’s where the area of ministry is going to start. Another place that I like to engage them is to talk about the physical. There’s some real potential danger of involvement in homosexuality … And these potential physical consequences are different for males than for females but they’re still a number of situations that are very negative physically for both men and women that involve themselves in homosexual behavior… Back to the physical, this is one of the things that I like to do with especially men that struggle with homosexuality … look you’re young, you’re attractive, you’re 25, 26 years old, the gay community is basically eating you up but you’re getting all the attention you need, you’re young, you’re attractive … the gay community thinks wow. But … I want you to notice when you’re at the bar at two in the morning when the lights turn on and everybody’s leaving, who’s left sitting at the bar? And who is it? It’s the 40, 50, 60 year old men that have less hair that have pot bellies, these are the ones that are left alone and why is that? Because they are no longer the valued commodity.

This selection, too, illustrates how to use the pivotal discourses of the _Love Won Out_ conference to reach out to struggling homosexuals. Haley implicates the reparative therapists’ developmental approach as the starting point for ministry. He then turns to the perceived physical dangers of continued engagement in same-sex sexual activity as a way to persuade unrepentant souls to change their behavior and outlook.

Reliance on the conditions of possibility for a sexual self defined by a discursive framework embedded within reparative therapy also suggests that homosexuality can be prevented as well as treated. As I have already mentioned, the ultimate goal of the _LWO_
conferences is defined as saving the souls of gays and lesbians who would be condemned to eternal damnation if they do not repent of their sexual sin. When taken in combination with reparative therapies’ discourse suggesting that causes of homosexuality have been isolated, this, I argue means that conference goers are encouraged and empowered to prevent homosexuality and therefore protect vulnerable souls. This has become such an important issue, that “the prevention of homosexuality in children has become one of the primary emphases of research within the ex-gay movement” (Haley 2004: 24).

Reparative therapy posits that homosexuality is a gender identity problem, as I have explained in earlier chapters. As a result, homosexuality can be prevented if children are encouraged to present and maintain appropriate gender expression. Parents, teachers, friends and other family members are therefore urged to actively police children’s gender identity. In the session called “The Prevention of Male Homosexuality,” Nicolosi suggests that parents must take proactive steps when dealing with their male children,

Clear and consistent affirmation of the child’s gender. Often parents make the error of doing nothing. They see the boy doing something effeminate and they do nothing, they freeze, they avoid. They rationalize; oh it’s just a phase and then the phase becomes a stage and the stage becomes a developmental period and then it becomes a decade and then an era and a lifestyle and then it’s too late … Intervene. Speak up. Because as Richard Green said, doing nothing is a signal to him of approval … And what you’re doing is reinforcing the androgynous fantasy. … Rather we advise parents a clear and constant message. We do not accept your effeminacy. We emphasize the positive: reinforcing the masculine but discouraging, but not punishing the negative. We avoid shaming, but we are supportive and encouraging and uplifting of anything that is masculine. You’re a boy, mum and dad love you as a boy, God made you as a boy, being a boy is special.

In this excerpt, Nicolosi gives clear direction on how parents must act toward their children. He assumes that effeminacy in boys results in later homosexuality and argues that suppression of this effeminacy young children will prevent sexual struggle–to the point that he supports gender intervention on children as young as two and three years old. If the young boy’s masculinity is consistently affirmed, Nicolosi insists that this will be enough to stop the development of same-
sex attraction. As he explains, “I believe that the future of the debate on homosexuality will not be on the treatment but on the prevention because we can accomplish with children in a matter of months what will take years of treatment for adults.”

To successfully prevent homosexuality, there is also strong emphasis on the importance of the parent-child bond, and the presence of two, opposite-sex parents. Reparative therapists like Nicolosi implicate poor parent-child socialization as one of the causal factors in adult homosexuality. If children grow up with inadequate gender role modeling from their parents, they are depicted as being vulnerable to struggles with same-sex attraction. Consequently, the audience are repeatedly urged to be role models to the children in their lives. Moreover, single mothers are advised to reach out to other adult men to help mentor their male children otherwise Nicolosi warns of a future rise in homosexuality. He explains thus:

A question always asked is with all these single mothers are we going to see more homosexuality? Well, yes, unless those women can get a good male figure. Two minutes before I started talking there was a question put to me by a mother, what do I do? Father’s not around. Find a male figure. This boy has to feel that there’s one man that really sees me as masculine. (Nicolosi 2006b)

Children of same-sex parents are also perceived as being particularly in need of adult same-sex role models. From Melissa Fryrear (2006d),

children need a mother figure and a father figure in raising them … if you have gay identified loved ones who have had children, I would encourage you to be a part of that child’s life, especially two women who have a son. How desperately he needs that father figure in his life, and so the grandfather or the uncle to be intentional in that boy’s life. On my best butch day I could not be a father to a son.

Prevention, therefore, rests on constant affirmation of what is deemed as appropriate behavior for boys and girls, in addition to the presence of two opposite sex parents. Since Love Won Out consistently argue that homosexuality is a danger to individuals and to society, early prevention of homosexuality would successfully diminish this threat.
The institutional selves produced by *Love Won Out* are supplied with the narrative resources they need to engender change in social institutions, and in other troubled selves. They are taught to recognize the threat posed to normative heterosexuality within the confines of education, the church and through support for same sex marriage. The gay agenda is constructed as having such potency that, if left unchecked, it will radically alter society. Consequently, the audience are repeatedly urged to fight the incursion of the pro-gay message in order to save society, and given practical ways to do this. As a result, they are facilitating the diffusion of their message across numerous other institutions. Furthermore, *LWO* define troubled gay selves as being able to change, and just in need of spiritual direction and ex-gay selves as needing the support of the church. Consequently, the speakers consistently exhort those listening to use the interpretive resources they have learned to reach out to, and save, other struggling selves. If these selves can be prevented from struggling with their sexuality in the first place, as reparative therapists suggest, then eventually the ex-gay self would be one that becomes unnecessary, meaning conferences such as this would become redundant.
CHAPTER 6
DOES LOVE WIN OUT?

The *Love Won Out* conferences are designed to promote the message that homosexuality is preventable and treatable and out of this comes the notion of the ex-gay self. I would argue that *LWO* go further than just promoting a particular kind of sexual self, however, they are also equally engaged in the political battle over homosexuality. Their most powerful tool is this ex-gay or ex-lesbian self. Using the moniker ex-gay or ex-lesbian privileges a particular narrative identity that is based on what the self used to be. Such a self becomes of paramount strategic importance in the public policy arena since it reinforces the core message of *LWO*: homosexuality can be changed. If one is not born gay, then there is no need to afford any type of legal protections to gays and lesbians since they are clearly able to change, unlike African-Americans. Continual use of the identity “ex-gay” as opposed to heterosexual is, I argue, partly a political strategy since to be known as “heterosexual” would mean being subsumed into the wider culture. In other words, identifying as heterosexual has no political utility in the battle over gay and lesbian civil rights, whereas ex-gay does.

This research falls within a larger political context as the battle over homosexuality is one of the key political issues of the present time. On one side are the gay and lesbian civil rights movements and their assorted allies arguing for equal protection under the law based on recognition of their minority status. On the other side are the conservative alliances, strongly linked to the New Christian Right (NCR), who maintain that to allow homosexuals any civil or legal recognition is a flagrant violation of the Word of God and will result in the downfall of society as we know it (Dobson 1990; 2004). The pivotal issue is whether or not gays and lesbians are a recognizable minority in a similar form as, for instance, African-Americans (Herman 1997; Smith & Windes 2000; Smith 1998). If they are seen to be a minority, then there is no
justification for withholding legal recognition. If they are not, however, there is clearly no need for advancing legal protections.

At the heart of the matter, therefore are the different conceptualizations of lesbian and gay identity. Traditionally, the lesbian and gay civil rights movement has drawn upon a discursive framework that constructs gay and lesbian identity as fixed, immutable, and something the individual was born with; the ethnic identity model (Epstein 1998). Adherence to this narrative formulation implies that since homosexuals are born that way, they should be afforded minority status and the attendant protections such a status affords (Bronski 1998; Button et al. 2000; Epstein 1998). Opponents of the lesbian and gay civil rights movement suggest, instead, that homosexuals are claiming special rights they do not deserve since they do not count as a legitimate minority (Button et al. 1997; Diamond 1995; 1996; Dobson 2004). This opposition rests on a narrative formulation implicating sexual identity as mutable and homosexuality as perverse, immoral and sinful.

One of the major NCR organizations involved in fighting against gay and lesbian civil rights is Focus on the Family, the evangelical religious organization formed in 1977 by James Dobson (Gilgoff 2007; Hedges 2006) and that served as the basis for this research. Their core message follows the pro-family rhetoric similar to many NCR organizations and further conceptualizes homosexuality as a threat to society, family and individuals. Furthermore, they have been instrumental in formulating and strengthening the discursive framework that depicts homosexuality as not only sinful, but also changeable (Haley 2004; Nicolosi & Nicolosi 2002). The Love Won Out conferences began in 1998 and were designed to promote this same message; that homosexuality is changeable, preventable and treatable. By promulgating these ideas, Focus on the Family (FOTF), through the Love Won Out (LWO) conferences are placing themselves in
the center of the political battle over gay rights by attacking the utility of the ethnic identity model. They seek to reformulate the discourse such that homosexuality becomes reframed as an object of pity, not of pride and a thing to be healed not protected.

**Importance of Institutional Selves at *Love Won Out***

In this project, I have used the concept of an institutional self (Gubrium & Holstein 2001; Holstein & Gubrium 2000) to describe in detail how the *LWO* conferences frame ideas about sexual identity. More specifically, the institutional self is one produced in service of an organization (Loseke 2001)–in this case Focus on the Family. Over the course of the conferences, the speakers construct the kind of self that will be most advantageous to the organization, that of the ex-gay. Narrative production of an ex-gay self allows Focus on the Family to address the competing discourses in the debate over homosexuality and provides a powerful, new sexual identity that diminishes the potency of the gay or lesbian self.

In chapter 3, I described how *LWO* mobilize the typical gay or lesbian self, which is a necessary first step in describing identity transformation from gay to ex-gay. In other words, without first producing a troubled gay or lesbian self, narrative identity of ex-gay makes no sense since it is reliant upon identification of what one was. The process of typification is described as a way of categorizing and understanding a particular social type, such that “the application of a categorical description provides a basis for ascribing other characteristics, activities and motives to objects or actions” (Gubrium & Holstein 1997: 138). In typifying gays and lesbians, FOTF are providing the audience with a clear framework through which to understand what being “gay” or “lesbian” means.

Of critical importance is the typification of gay and lesbian as something mutable. Without construction of a changeable sexual identity, notions of an ex-gay self identity become ridiculous and fanciful. To accomplish this narrative formulation, *LWO* draw upon the
understandings of both religious and secular discourse. Belief in biblical inerrancy, as would be expected of an evangelical religious organization, implicates heterosexuality as the only, true, God-given sexuality. Consequently, everyone is born heterosexual, so homosexuality becomes an aberration that can be fixed using the causal factors developed by reparative therapists. Reparative therapists suggest that homosexuality is a symptom of a deep-seated psychological disturbance, such as inadequate parent-child bonding, that manifests as inappropriate gender identity and subsequently same-sex sexual attraction.

Having defined gay and lesbians selves as able to change, *LWO* must produce further evidence suggesting that the typical gay and lesbian must change. Typification is important because it suggests specific courses of action, in addition to categorization. In the case of the homosexual, for example, simply presenting sexual identity as mutable does not mandate any particular action. Mobilizing typical gays and lesbians as deviant, pathological or dangerous does, however. As Gubrium & Holstein (1997) explain, “dismissing the act in question would be unreasonable … the type becomes more apparent as its concrete signs are identified … the assignment of experience to a particular category promotes distinctive constellations of understanding that carry evaluative implications with practical consequences” (139). *Love Won Out* expertly mobilize a typical gay or lesbian self that is unhealthy, emotionally traumatized, sinful, immoral, promiscuous, and dangerous to society, thereby presenting the audience with a way to understand “gay” and “lesbian” that justifies interference and a push toward healing.

Healing the troubled gay or lesbian self depends on two identity transformations, one religious and one sexual, as I explained in chapter 4. Evangelical religious doctrine constructs humanity as inherently sinful, and thus in need of salvation and repentance. This same understanding is applied to healing homosexuality; repent and be saved. The religious
transformation is sparked by the evangelism of an outside mentor, the success of which FOTF hope will inspire audience members to evangelize their own gay or lesbian loved ones.

Acceptance of religion as part of the troubled gay’s or lesbian’s sense of self necessitates further action on their part since this religious framework is incompatible with their sexual identity. *LWO* then focus on detailing the ways in which sexual identity transformation occurs.

In much the same way as mobilization of the typical gay or lesbian self relies on reparative therapy, so too does the required sexual identity transformation to become ex-gay. Reparative therapists embed their understanding of homosexuality within a narrative framework that depicts it as primarily an emotional problem. Consequently, those desiring change must be taught ways to fulfill those unmet emotional needs, including through the development of healthy same-sex friendships. These friendships are thought to aid the struggling selves in their quest for healing since they provide the required bonding, and also model appropriate gender behavior and same-sex intimacy.

The utilization of both religious and secular discourse creates what I argue is an inherent narrative tension between the two frameworks. As I have outlined earlier, evangelical religion defines sexuality in terms of what is written in the Bible, thus, everyone is born heterosexual. This formulation is then used as a platform to argue against homosexuality and promote the development of an ex-gay self. Reparative therapy also suggests that everyone is born heterosexual and that homosexuality is a treatable condition. The difficulty comes in interpreting and fulfilling the subsequent healing strategies. To successfully move through the healing process, ex-gay selves are taught the importance of maintaining appropriate gender identity; appropriate to their biological sex. Men are taught to be masculine and women feminine, within the discursive constraints of traditional gender constructions. Both masculinity and femininity,
therefore, are initially conceptualized as a natural consequence of biological sex, and then later as a uniquely social construction that can be molded to fit the requirements of a specific narrative formulation. The message then becomes very confused. The fledgling ex-gay selves have been told they were not born gay, and have a gender identity problem which requires realignment of their sex, gender, and sexuality. They are then given the interpretive resources they need to heal, which contradict all they have been told of the nature of their problem.

Discursive production of the ex-gay self also involves *Love Won Out* reframing the healing goals. Initial impressions suggest that ex-gay selves are ones that have been healed from same-sex sexual attraction. Over the course of the conference, however, the speakers routinely reinterpret “healing” such that the ultimate goal is not heterosexuality, but adherence to religious faith. Moreover, the speakers carefully redefine enduring same-sex attraction such that it becomes symptomatic of a fallen world, and a sign of continued temptation. This reformulation allows *Love Won Out* to claim that homosexuality can in fact be changed, despite evidence to the contrary. Again, self identity is understood within an evangelical religious discourse that imagines humanity as inherently sinful and continued homosexual attraction is another sign of this sin.

The institutional selves constructed by *Love Won Out* are also defined as being under a divine mandate to engage in political activism across different social institutions. To facilitate this social action, *Love Won Out* first define the far-reaching consequences of allowing gay and lesbian civil rights activists to continue unchecked. Framed in terms of pushing a gay agenda, homosexuals are portrayed as attempting to transform society by forcing acceptance of their immorality onto an unsuspecting public. The gay agenda is perceived as a threat to schools and children, the church and public policy, as I detailed in the previous chapter.
Such is the potency of the threat narrative that *LWO* suggest that not acting in defense of “traditional” values they promote would provoke the anger of a wrathful God. Consequently, the audience is taught how to be active agents of change themselves. From creating ex-gay selves, *LWO* create politically and strategically aware selves that will further the goals of the organization, some of which are tied to fighting the advent of gay marriage, and the extension of other legal protections to gays and lesbians. Political awareness is fostered through recognition of the extent of the incursion of the gay agenda into schools, churches and politics. The audience is taught how to identify the pro-gay agenda in schools and churches, and also how to defend traditional marriage against accusations of homophobia and bias. Moreover, the audience is taught specific strategies to use in the various social institutions that have a high chance of success.

In addition to providing the conditions of possibility necessary to produce an ex-gay self, *Love Won Out* also define the narrative resources required to promote the awareness of ex-gay selves outside the discursive realm of the conferences. The audience are shown how to recognize struggling gay or lesbian selves, and then told how and when to approach them in order to begin the healing process. In addition, there is frequent reference to the gay’s and lesbian’s own self perceptions, as understood by *LWO*, which explain how to initiate dialogue and promote the message of the conferences without offense. Finally, production of ex-gay selves is seen as such a crucial part of the battle against the pro-gay agenda that *LWO* believe prevention of homosexuality before it manifests itself is the way of the future. Using the same discursive frameworks of evangelical religion and reparative therapy that construct troubled gay selves, healed ex-gay selves, and produce strategically aware political selves, *LWO* instruct the audience on prevention strategies.
Theoretical Importance of Institutional Selves

The concept of an institutional self is an extremely important concept for investigation of organizations such as Focus on the Family, and an effective tool for examination of conferences such as Love Won Out. LWO are in the business of promoting a specific self identity, that of the ex-gay. Interrogation of their discourse highlights the specific narrative resources they use to develop this new kind of sexual identity. Importantly, institutional selves are those developed in the service of an organization. Consequently, rhetorical production of the ex-gay self has an explicit role in furthering the mission of Focus on the Family. Detailed exploration of these narratives, such as I have done in this dissertation, reveals exactly how FOTF hope to achieve their stated goals. Furthermore, utilization of the theoretical and methodological insights of institutional selves allows investigation of how FOTF privilege particular narrative resources in their ongoing battle against the gay and lesbian civil rights movement.

The format of the LWO conferences is such that there is limited opportunity for audience participation. As a result my analysis of interpretive practice is also somewhat limited. Holstein & Gubrium (2000) suggest that one of the components of an institutional self is the way in which a particular institutional discourse is interpreted by individual selves. As it is, I have explored this premise as far as is possible in a discursive arena in which audience participation is confined to question and answer sessions allowing only pre-scripted questions. An obvious suggestion for future research would be to examine more of the analytics of interpretive practice, and thus interrogate how the LWO discourse is used to formulate individual self identity.

A further limitation and possible area for future research concerns both the make-up of the audience and the other types of institutional selves produce by Love Won Out. From my own estimation, it appeared that the audience was made up primarily of parents of gays and lesbians, and gays and lesbians themselves. Without interviewing them, I have no way of knowing
whether this is actually the case. As a result, I have no clear sense of the reasons that many of
those in attendance chose to go. Furthermore, this also limits understanding of the way the
institutional discourse is used and interpreted by the audience. This, therefore, could be a fruitful
source of inquiry in the future. Related to this are the other kinds of selves that the *LWO*
conferences produce, and which are outside the scope of this dissertation. To name just a few,
Focus on the Family construct parenting selves, religious selves, activist selves, and evangelizing
selves. Each one of these could be a research project in and of themselves.

**Love Won Out in the Wider Sociopolitical Climate**

The *LWO* conferences are an interesting site for exploring self production due to the
nature of the discourse. In the fight over the definition of homosexuality and the promotion of
civil rights, *Love Won Out* is uniquely positioned within the identity landscape. They are in the
business of producing a new kind of sexual self, the ex-gay, with the express purpose of denying
the legitimacy of gay and lesbian truth claims. *LWO* consistently draw upon the discursive
framework of the lesbian and gay civil rights movement, and then counter every major argument.
Furthermore, the self produced serves to negate the very existence of gays and lesbians. The
conferences are an excellent research site for examining the manner in which the competing
discourses of sexual identity are formed and reformed, and for investigating the techniques used
by social movements such as FOTF to reinterpret existing discourse in a way that furthers their
political agenda.

This research is an important contribution in understanding the way selves are produced
within particular going concerns. In addition, it can serve as a resource for the gay and lesbian
civil rights movement in their ongoing struggle for equal protection under the law. I have
detailed the numerous ways in which *LWO* delegitimize any claims that gays and lesbians have
made to be a protected minority. This project, therefore, can help activists to reformulate their
discourse such that it takes into account the oppositional narratives of New Christian Right organizations such as Focus on the Family. In particular, my dissertation reveals the narrative resources most privileged by FOTF, and most challenging to the gay and lesbian movement—the complete disavowal of lesbian and gay identity, and the idea that homosexuality is mutable and therefore curable. Moreover, my research should also serve as a cautionary note against the ever-expanding use of the ethnic identity model by activists. FOTF have a potent way of challenging this narrative model, and in such a way that even existing protections become endangered.

In conclusion, Focus on the Family is carving out an important place in the identity landscape with the *Love Won Out* conferences. They are engaged in producing a highly controversial sexual self that is set to head out to battle against any incursion by the so-called pro-gay agenda in any and all social institutions. Exposing the narrative formation of the ex-gay self then becomes the key to its eventual defeat and downfall.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Welcome &amp; Introduction</td>
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<td>8.15-9.00</td>
<td>The Condition of Male Homosexuality</td>
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<td>11.15</td>
<td><strong>Breakout Sessions</strong></td>
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<td>Responding to Pro-Gay Theology</td>
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<td>Randy Thomas</td>
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<td>Dr. Bill Maier</td>
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<td>Top Ten Questions Loved Ones Ask</td>
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<td>Ten Things to Say When You Don’t Know What to Say</td>
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<td>How Should We Respond?</td>
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Helena Alden was born and raised in England. She attended the University of South Florida and graduated summa cum laude with a degree in criminology in 1999. She attended graduate school at the University of Florida and received her M.A. in 2001, and her PhD. in 2008. She is currently an Assistant Professor of Sociology at the University of Wisconsin Stevens Point.