Abstract

The strength of the American family is at the center of a new ideological constellation of US conservative politics that emerged in the late 1970s and remains in force today. The growth of evangelical Christianity, and the re-entry of US evangelicals to the forefront of the political scene during this period propelled the mobilization of concerns over the family. This chapter focuses on the discourses of the networks of non-profits through which the evangelical subculture enters into politics, focusing on the subculture’s most enduring and influential group, Focus on the Family. Analyzing radio broadcasts, online organizational literature, and newsletters from Focus and its sister organizations, I attempt to show how everyday norms of gender, work, and caregiving are mobilized politically. Foregrounding subcultural processes of political consciousness formation, I challenge Judith Butler’s influential theorization of the relationship between normativity and social power as ‘passionate attachment.’ This paper develops an alternative, psychoanalytically informed account of social norms through a reading of evangelical family discourses. Interpreting quotidian self-help and inspirational programming, phone-line counseling services, and multi-media guides for mentoring and family support provided by Focus ministries, I show that that norms can be reproduced through relational strategies and self-reflective practices. The picture of normative attachment derived from this reading informs my account of political consciousness formation.
Introduction

In the last third of the twentieth century, the socio-cultural and institutional support base of the US Republican Party, as well as its ruling ideologies, underwent a profound transformation. During this period, political and religious elites and movement leaders forged practical and ideational alliances around the defense of free markets and fiscal responsibility, and around opposition to secular, elite-driven big government. In the political discourses of an emerging conservative movement in the 1970s, these themes came together around the morally-laden, affectively-charged rhetoric of the family. The image of the virtuous family served as the anchor of free markets, the model of fiscal responsibility, the center of spiritual life, and the main object of concern for an exploding network of parachurch organizations and multi-media ‘ministries’ that provided a grassroots base of social order outside of the encroaching mechanisms of the liberal state.

The following two chapters offer an account of how, beginning in the late 1970s until today, the politics of the family became a central theme of conservative politics. Prominent elements of this transition, such as the mobilization of religious voters around opposition to abortion, and the surge in socially conservative ‘values voter’ political participation under George W. Bush, are parts of a wider socio-political transformation, on which the following chapters attempt to shed light. This chapter focuses on the discourses and organization of the networks of non-profits through which the evangelical subculture enters into politics. Focusing on the subculture’s most enduring and influential group, Focus on the Family, I tell the story of how Christian parachurch organizations and media industries constructed an ecumenical, devoted base of followers who turn out to support the political campaigns of the wider Christian Right.
Analyzing radio broadcasts, online organizational literature, and newsletters from Focus and its sister organizations, I show that the everyday concerns of work, marriage, and raising children are central. I make the case that the articulation of these concerns with political issues such as abortion, gay rights, and parental choice and religious freedom in education and health care provide the bridging discourse through which popular investments in family norms are channeled into electoral and legislative projects. As my next chapters will show, the successful mobilization of popular investments in the family into conservative political projects played a central role in the recent rejuvenation of the Republican Party, and its ideological transformation, that is under theorized in the existing literature.

I situate my account of pro-family politics in the social and political moment beginning in the late 70s, when norms of work and family life crystalized as widespread objects of contestation. After experiencing historical lows in the immediate post-Nixon era, the Republican Party was rejuvenated with large support from a new conservative base. Conservative women, led by Phyllis Schlafly, organized in opposition to feminists and liberals whom they charged with attacking the traditional family and its values.\(^1\) By the end of the decade, ‘New Right’ Republican elites such as Paul Weyrich took notice of the successes of ‘pro-family’ mass-based organizing, and reached out to movement leaders such as Beverly LaHaye and James Dobson to join a coalition, and bring the pro-family voice to Washington, and its support base to the polls.\(^2\)

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The story of Republican rejuvenation intersects with another story of political-cultural transformation that has been little attended to in political histories of the present, the story of the revival of the US evangelical subculture. In tapping into popular concerns that the wider liberal culture was unable to sustain the moral basis of American society, Christian Right groups such as Focus took part in a religious revival and cultural transformation within the evangelical community whose influence has endured into the twenty-first century.\(^3\) In what follows, I provide an account of the evangelical cultural discourse on the family in which Christian Right political appeals are framed. I point to the responsiveness of these discourses to historical conditions, such as the adaptation of biblical norms of male headship to dual-breadwinner households, and the attention to the decline of the domestic sphere as a privileged space of spiritual and moral reproduction with the encroachment of a cultural valuation of work and public achievement for both men and women.

My analysis of evangelical pro-family discourses provides an account of the salience of this discourse to political actors. Existing accounts tend to focus on the political stances and oppositional politics of the Christian Right,\(^4\) the position of these groups within the wider ideological and political culture,\(^5\) or within evangelical political

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\(^5\) A variety of historical accounts situate the Christian Right within late twentieth century socio-political transformations. For an account that focuses on the women’s movement see Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Brown, Christian America;* Sara Diamond offers detailed accounts of the political activities of a variety of Christian Right groups in *Facing the Wrath: Confronting the Right in Dangerous Times* (Monroe: Common Courage Press, 1996), and situates their politics in the framework of social movement building in
and theological traditions. By supplementing the formidable political and sociological histories of the Christian Right with a discourse analysis of movement media and literature, I attend to relationship between morals and norms, and wider discourses and relations of political power.

Interpreting these discourses, I will argue that the quotidian self-help and inspirational programming, phone-line counseling services, and multi-media guides for mentoring and family support provided by Focus ministries, while reaching geographically diverse and anonymous media publics, are nonetheless the bases of communities of support and collective action that have provided an enduring constituency for the Christian Right. This analysis departs from most political accounts, which focus on the political stances of Christian Right groups, and tend to view this politics as primarily oppositional, fueled by moral condemnation or resentment. While moral opposition is an important aspect of Christian Right politics, the focus on this aspect often stands in for a fuller account of the discursive, political processes through which actors come to identify their personal lives, and interpret their personal experiences through the lens of cultural activism offered by the evangelical subculture,
and groups such as Focus. In short, these accounts tend to lack an account of political consciousness formation.

My focus on political consciousness formation attends to the relationship of everyday norms of sex and kinship to social power, and leads me to challenge Judith Butler’s theorization of this relation. Butler’s account of the psychic bases of normative power as ‘passionate attachment to subjection,’ is widely influential in political and feminist theory, and has led to an impasse in thinking about the relation between social normativity and political power, as attested to by debates over how to conceive the subject and agency.

In locating the force of norms at the origins of “entry into social being,” Butler offers what commentators have variously described as a weak ontological (White) or genetic (Berlant) account of human social life, which casts the potentially dominating character of social norms as a feature of human sociality as such. I argue that her alignment of power with ‘normative discourse’ in her earlier writings and ‘the law’ in

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7 This oversight is more a question of the limitations of genre than a flaw in most political histories I draw on here. To supplement my analyses of the discursive construction of pro-family politics, I draw on sociological accounts of the evangelical subculture, which attend to the co-adaptation of religious practices and teachings and family life in the evangelical subculture. For excellent accounts of shifts in marriage and family norms see W. Bradford Wilcox, Soft Patriarchs, New Men: How Christianity Shapes Fathers and Husbands (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004) and Sally K. Gallagher, Evangelical Identity and Gendered Family Life (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003). For an account of theological adaptation within evangelical sectors of the women’s movement see Nancy A. Hardesty, “Mutual Submission, Active Discipleship, Women Called to Witness: Evangelical Feminism in the Nineteenth Century (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1984), 134-141, and Shibley, Resurgent Evangelicism.


more recent works, and subject formation with attachment to subjection, is misleading in two ways. Firstly, it models subject formation on a psychoanalytically truncated account of primary ‘foreclosure’ that inaugurates self-alienation and aggression, and thus does not take into account the variety of forms of relation, identification, and investment that constitute processes of self-formation. Secondly, it rests on a sociologically truncated account of subjectivity that does not take into account the impact of ongoing negotiations of cross-cutting norms and practices on social actors.

By attending to the parachurch, media-centered practices of counseling, mentoring, tuning-in to daily radio for practical and inspirational guidance, or implementing strategies to help family members develop their spiritual lives and uphold biblical values, this chapter aims to provide an account of the intermediary cultural processes of consciousness formation through which political power is formed.

The following proceeds in four sections. I begin with a historical sketch of pro-family politics. James Dobson and his massive Focus media ministry have been key players in the movement since its inception, and branched out to take on the role of the central mass-based political organization of the Christian Right in the last decade. This political history leaves us wondering how the quotidian concerns of the pro-family movement have consistently activated widespread political energies over a quarter century. To answer this question, section two turns to the US evangelical subculture, and the network of multimedia ‘ministries’ and parachurch organizations in which everyday negotiations of work and family norms are the object of common concern and practical counsel. At stake in this account of intermediary cultural discourses is how to best represent the relationship between everyday normative investments and social power.
Section three offers a critique of Judith Butler’s theory of the formation of discursive power through passionate attachment to normativity, which provides the most elaborate and influential account of this relationship in existing scholarship. Section four offers a discourse analysis of the media ministry of Focus on the Family. I conclude by attempting to situate the cultural politics of these groups within late 20th century transitions in norms and expectations of work and family life.

I. Pro-Family Politics

“Women’s lib is a total assault on the role of the American woman as wife and mother, and on the family as the basic unit of society.

Women’s libbers are trying to make wives and mothers unhappy with their career, make them feel that they are “second-class citizens” and “abject salves.” Women’s libbers are promising free sex instead of the “slavery” of marriage. They are promoting Federal “day-care centers” for babies instead of homes. They are promoting abortions instead of families.”


In 1972, when Phyllis Schlafly first turned her organizing energies to the fight against feminism, she tapped a wave of conservative discontents with the secular current of popular culture, and the overreach of the liberal political order. A series of Supreme Court rulings in the 60s had banned mandatory school prayer and Bible study in public schools.11 In the 70s, tax revolts in California spurred a national movement for a Balanced Budget constitutional amendment, which by 1982 had won the support of 32

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Civil rights legislation secured protections for women and minorities from employment discrimination, and granted women equal rights to education. As this legislation went into effect, women from the middle and upper classes began to pursue careers, contributing to a 21% increase in wives working outside of the home from 1962 to 1978.

Under Schlafly’s leadership, the Equal Rights Amendment became the focal point of conservative women’s opposition to liberal-secular influence in politics. The amendment, which prohibits discrimination based on sex, passed the Senate in 1972 and awaited ratification by the states. While Schlafly’s conservative organizing efforts concentrated on anti-communism in the post-war period, the threat of ERA ratification prompted her turn to social issues such as marriage and family. These ‘bread and butter’ issues served as a powerful basis for bringing conservative women, particularly religious women, into politics. Indeed, by the late 70s religious women played an increasingly prominent role in the conservative women’s movement, joining alongside Schlafly’s network of Republican women, the Eagle Forum. Beverly LaHaye’s Christian women’s organization, Concerned Women for America, took the helm of movement in the 80s, and continues to be a central actor today.

In the late 70s, the Eagle Forum and the emerging network of religious women activists mobilized by the ERA launched a number of campaigns to challenge the

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12 Critchlow, Schlafly, 283.
13 The Civil Rights Act of 1964 banned employment discrimination. This right was further supported by the Equal Employment Opportunity Act of 72. Title IX of the Education Amendments Act of 1972 guaranteed federal education funding for women.
14 Jane Mansbridge, Why We Lost the ERA (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), 105
15 Critchlow, Phyllis.
16 Mansbridge recounts that by 1976 Christian women organized through churches and home-based tactics such as phone and letter campaigns, and drawing on STOP-ERA literature, became the central force of anti-ERA organizing. Mansbridge, Why We Lost, 174-176.
17 Hardisty, Resentment, 72-86
feminist agenda. They first sought to win conservative representation in a series of state and regional International Women’s Year conferences, sponsored by the White House and the United Nations. Conservative leaders drew recruits to state based IWY Citizen’s Review Committees by widely publicizing what the saw as the anti-family, sexually radical feminist goals of IWY organizers. The movement’s broader pro-family agenda grew out of these organizing efforts, which culminated in a pro-family counter-rally outside of the feminist-dominated Huston conference in 1977.18

When the Carter White House announced a plan for a Conference on Women and Families to be held in 1979, conservative activists again mobilized their state and local network to elect pro-family delegates. By this time, the movement had gained the attention of political elite in Washington, and New Right leader Paul Weyrich reached out to Beverly LaHaye to join his Pro-Family Coalition.19 Dobson became involved in Conference planning after promoting the cause on his Focus on the Family radio show, prompting eighty thousand listeners to write letters encouraging his selection by the White House.20

Pro-family politics served as the unifying rhetoric and agenda of Weyrich’s elite policy organs, the Heritage Foundation and the Free Congress Research and Education Foundation, and the mass-based organizations of the nascent Christian Right.21 The

18 Brown, Christian America, 103-137.
19 Ibid, 141-146. In an interview with Brown, Weyrich admits that earlier in the ERA fight he suspected the Schlafly was “on a fool’s errand” in her attempt to organize the grassroots, p. 136.
20 Diamond, Not by Politics, 32.
21 The women and family policy experts at Weyrich’s Free Congress Research and Education Foundation (Connaught Marshner) and the Heritage Foundation (Onalee McGraw) were prominent early voices in the pro-family movement. Each wrote highly influential policy statements that helped set the new right agenda on family issues, including the demand for free-market alternatives to public education that is the focus of the following chapter. See Onalee McGraw Family Choice in Education: The New Imperative (Washington, DC: The Heritage Foundation, 1978) and for the Free Congress Research and Education see:
ideological assemblage behind the appeal to the family had a profound and lasting role in shaping Republican party and wider conservative politics, and remains in force today. This assemblage links religious or traditional views of marriage and family to a variety of populist and libertarian attacks on federal bureaucrats and the waste and overreach of government regulation and social programs. Legislative projects such as school vouchers to direct public funding to private and charter schools, and opposition to state mandated child care and Social Security, are framed as efforts to restore the power of parents over family moralities and economies. Reagan’s Republican Party platform of 1979 was the first to pit itself on the side of moral families against “federal bureaucracies with ominous power.” The party “insist[s] that all domestic policies, from child care and schooling to Social Security, and the tax code, must be formulated with the family in mind.”

In addition to providing a pointed political and ideological agenda, the Pro-Family Coalition created working relationships and organizational ties between economic conservatives and libertarians of the New Right and their Christian movement-building partners. Weyrich consistently serves as the center that links a variety of movement-based Christian organizations to policy and party elites. Since its formation, the alliance between these camps, widely credited with securing George W. Bush’s second presidency in 2004, has become more politically sophisticated and, perhaps, institutionally resilient through a number of organizational shifts.

The Pioneering Organizations of the Christian Right

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The Moral Majority, launched by Southern Baptist minister Jerry Falwell with the encouragement of Weyrich and prominent evangelical pastors of the Religious Roundtable, effectively served the task of convincing evangelical pastors that their religious mission required them to bring their congregations into politics, a role explicitly eschewed by conservative Protestants in the mid-century.\(^{23}\) Falwell’s network of pastors, and the churches they represented, served as the main constituency of the Moral Majority. In some instances, churches even provided directories of churchgoers for Moral Majority direct-mail campaigns, which instructed Christians to register and vote on moral issues such as abortion. These efforts are estimated to have registered two million new voters for the 1980 election.\(^{24}\)

The divisive fundamentalist message of the Moral Majority, as well as its reliance on a mostly Southern Baptist network of churches for membership and infrastructure, hindered the organization’s ability to sustain a broad base of conservative Christian support, and it was disbanded in 1988.\(^{25}\) The organization that emerged as the central organizing body of the Christian Right in the 1990s, the Christian Coalition, was significantly more sophisticated than its predecessors. Organizationally, the Coalition built a network of state affiliates and local chapters and equipped leaders with political organizing skills through local training sessions designed by the national office.

\(^{23}\) Justin Watson, *The Christian Coalition: Dreams of Restoration, Demands for Recognition* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 1997) Conservative Protestants, which were primarily evangelicals and adherents to ‘fundamentalist’ interpretations of the Bible, as opposed to ‘mainline’ Protestant, which adapted Christian beliefs and traditions to align with a modern, scientific worldview. After their public embarrassment in the Scopes Monkey Trial of 1925, conservative Protestants largely retreat from politics, and anti-communism was the only active political cause until the 70s.

\(^{24}\) Gilgoff, *Jesus Machine*, 84.

Ideologically, the group avoided theologically divisive subjects and concentrated on moral issues of broad ecumenical appeal.\textsuperscript{26}

To this end, Ralph Reed, the lead political strategist behind the Coalition, expanded the group’s message beyond the hot button issues of abortion and anti-pornography to embrace more quotidian economic issues such as tax and welfare reform, and opposition to Clinton’s federal healthcare plan.\textsuperscript{27} By adopting a broader pro-family agenda, the Coalition found common ground with economic conservatives in Congress, and endorsed the Republican Party’s Contract with America. The Contract defined the party platform for the 1994 midterm elections, which gave Republicans 52 seats and control of the House for the first time in a generation. Christian Right voters, who the Coalition reached out to in 120 Congressional races, comprised one third of the electorate and contributed to a massive increase in GOP turnout in what was dubbed the ‘Republican Revolution’ of ’94.\textsuperscript{28}

The trajectory Reed set for the Christian Right during his leadership of the Coalition is debated. The Coalition trained a broad base of Christian activists who since the early 90s have gained positions in state and local politics, as well as in Congress, exerting a strong conservative influence on the Republican Party.\textsuperscript{29} For such efforts, Reed is credited by some with integrating the Christian grassroots into the party infrastructure of the GOP. However, for many evangelical leaders, Reed signed on to readily to the Party agenda, compromising the movement’s ability to press for legislative action on

\textsuperscript{26} Gilgoff, \textit{Jesus Machine}, 94.
\textsuperscript{28} Gilgoff, \textit{Jesus Machine}, 100-101.
\textsuperscript{29} Diamond, \textit{Not by Politics}, 30. In 1995 30% of voters identified as evangelical, up from 15% in 1990, of these, 69% voted Republican.
moral issues perceived as posing immediate threats to the social fabric of American life. In addition to ideological disputes, a financial crisis brought on by IRS and FEC investigations for political activity by a non-profit precipitated Reed’s departure in 1997, and the Coalition’s rapid decline.

Among conservative leaders incensed by Reed’s concessions to the Republican mainstream, James Dobson was uniquely positioned to redirect the influence of the religious grassroots in electoral politics. Since its founding in 1977, Dobson’s multimedia ministry Focus on the Family established itself as respected voice, and its radio, publishing, and online programming helped frame the Christian approach to living within the pressures of secular society for a growing evangelical subculture. By the mid-90s a mailing list of nearly two million listeners received the flagship Focus magazine, one among nearly a dozen Focus magazines devoted to Christian-interest content. Dobson’s daily radio program was broadcast on four thousand stations, and a team of correspondents at Focus headquarters responded to 250,000 letters from listeners seeking advice per month.

Focus programming and literature is organized around topics of concern for Christian living, referred to as ‘ministries.’ As I elaborate below, the vast majority of Focus discourse and listener engagement concerns quotidian questions of how to anchor a spiritual relationship with God in one’s relationship practices with spouses and children.

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30 The Coalition attempted to fend off this claim by proposing an alternative Contract with the American Family in 1995, but this legislative agenda was too soft on social issues for most conservative leaders. Reed’s resistance to push for a unqualified ban on abortion in order to build alliances with more moderate Republicans grew widespread charged of ‘deception’ and ‘treachery’ from evangelical leaders. Watson, Christian Coalition, 72-76.
31 The organization was eventually found guilt of engaging in partisan political activity and forced to pay back taxes and penalties to the IRS, leaving the Coalition massively indebted at the end of the 90s. Gilgoff, Jesus Machine, 103.
32 Diamond, Not Politics, 31-2
33 Diamond, Wrath, 71.
By all accounts Dobson is committed to his role in providing spiritual guidance and practical advice to Christian families, and he sustained a clear division between Focus’ family ministries, of which he was the defining voice, and the political outreach and organizing with which he became increasingly engaged throughout the 90s.\textsuperscript{34} In 1989, with the encouragement of new president Gary Bauer, Dobson reinvested in the Washington D.C. based Family Research Council, and began to devote Focus resources and media networks to raise the Council’s public profile.\textsuperscript{35} The Council provided policy research and analysis, and devised political issue campaigns that were taken up by Focus affiliated Family Policy Councils, as well as non-affiliated ally organizations across the country. In the 90s, Focus and its affiliates displayed their political influence in successful anti-gay rights referenda in Colorado, and campaigns in variety of states, and through the passage of the child tax credit and the gay marriage ban at the federal level.

In the late 90s, Dobson became increasingly willing to leverage his public profile and widespread network of devoted listeners to pressure for legislative action on issues such as gay rights and abortion. Reaching out to evangelical leaders whose support waned during Bob Dole’s presidential campaign, leading House Republican’s launched a ‘Values Action Team’ of conservative Republicans in 1998. The group established open lines of communication and coordination between CR leaders and lawmakers, with Dobson and the FRC serving as the lead liaisons.\textsuperscript{36}

In 2004, with an eye to influencing that year’s presidential election, Dobson founded Focus on Family Action, a sister organization of Focus on the Family that concentrated on fundraising and campaigning for conservative candidates and causes.

\textsuperscript{34} Gilgoff, \textit{Jesus Machine}.
\textsuperscript{35} Gilgoff, \textit{Jesus Machine}, 117.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid, 114-120
The central rallying point of CR organizing for the 2004 election was gay marriage. Targeting values voters in key states, Focus Action, Focus state affiliates, and the FRC sent out mailings and held rallies casting homosexuality as a dangerous and immoral lifestyle choice, antithetical to the values of marriage and family. The success of gay-marriage amendments in thirteen states, as well as the importance of the Federal Marriage Amendment in Republican electoral campaigns, attests to the political power of the CR and the salience of the pro-family message. By mobilizing conservative Christians to register and vote, the CR contributed to a nine percent increase in evangelical turnout in 2004 over 2000, and gave Bush a crucial electoral margin.37

II. Evangelical Subculture

While many scholars note that the political successes of Christian Right campaigns attest to the power of pro-family discourses in the late twentieth century, the question remains as to why appeals to the family gained such widespread salience. Responses to this question in social-scientific accounts are partial and varied. Various authors credit the lure of authoritarianism,38 or moral outrage,39 which they associate with evangelical politics. In the following two chapters, I challenge these characterizations. Some helpfully point to the skill and effectiveness of political organizing and movement building in spreading the pro-family message.40 Others have argued that Christian Right

37 Ibid, 194. The Bush-Cheney team recognized the importance of the evangelical vote, and headed up their own efforts to mobilize these voters. Ralph Reed headed up their outreach to conservative churches, p. 188-196
40 Diamond, Not by Politics.
politics appeal to deeply rooted ideologies of religious and cultural traditionalism.\footnote{Critchlow, \textit{Phyllis}, 8.}

Christian Right groups indeed draw openly on traditions such as American Republicanism, libertarianism, and Protestant theology in constructing their political message. However, as my account will show, contemporary pioneers of pro-family discourse adapt these traditions to respond to particular historical circumstances and contests for political power.

To explain the up-take of pro-family discourses, I turn to the discourses and practices of the evangelical subculture. On the radio, in newsletters and in rallies, religious leaders offer counsel on spiritual and family centered living, and call on listeners to ‘vote values’ and donate to pro-family causes. My account of these discourses attempts to capture the highly adaptive character of the evangelical subculture. Since the 1970s, the growth of parachurch organizations, and Christian broadcasting and web-based media has transformed not only forms of religious association, but also the content of religious discourse. This section profiles the evangelical cultural network, and its central player, Focus on the Family.

**The Rise of the Neoevangelicals**

At the outset of the 1970s, with the prestige of American liberalism significantly diminished, a variety of cultural movements reformed the social bases, and re-polished the political moniker of conservatism.\footnote{For a general account of this trend see Critchlow, \textit{Phyllis}, 10. On the shifting profile of individuals who identify as conservative, see a Wilcox and Norrander study from the 70s to 2008, which found that at the later survey one’s view on gender roles was more likely to predict conservative identification than socio-economic status, and that conservative men were more likely to be lower and middle-class than in the earlier period, when they were more upper-class. Clyde Wilcox and Barbara Norrander, “The Gender Gap in Ideology.” \textit{Political Behavior} 31, n. 4 (2008).} A wave of new preaching and worship styles drew congregants to evangelical churches. In the West, evangelical churches drawing on
young adult crowds with soft-rock devotionals and casual dress, and an inspirational, Jesus-centered message, pioneered a new mode of evangelical religious practice. In growing numbers of congregations, charismatic preachers and their followers practiced channeling the ‘gifts of spirit,’ and attested to the power of prayer by recounting miracles and extra-biblical revelations. From 1971-1990, six million new members joined evangelical churches in the US.

The growth of evangelical practices and teachings in this period was a mark of religious revival, but also of a reorientation of American Protestantism to popular culture. In the previous period Protestant public engagement was at a low after a split in the 1920s between fundamentalist and ‘mainline’ or modernizing Protestant churches, in which fundamentalists were derided in wider popular culture. In the middle of the twentieth century, political activism by Protestant groups was largely limited to anti-communist activism. When Protestant churches reentered politics beginning in the 1960s and 70s, they did so with the aid of new networks of parachurch organizations, such as Focus on the Family (1977) and Concerned Women for America (1979), and new public platforms on TV and radio, such as Pat Robertson’s Christian Broadcasting Network (1959).

Parachurch organizations, which specialized in Christian-tailored social interest and activism, distributed religious teaching and news via mail, at conferences and rallies, and on radio programs.

43 Diamond, Not Politics, 10.
44 Perhaps the most visible charismatic figure was Pat Robertson. While leading prayer sessions on his 700 Club show Robertson frequently revealed messages he received from God, and took accounts of miracles from callers.
45 During this same period mainline Protestant churches saw a 2.6 million decline in membership. Diamond, Not Politics, 10. Citing Shibley, Resurgent.
46 Watson, Christian Coalition, 9-10.
Christian media was a central pillar of these new organizations, and a significant cultural force in its own rights. Breaking with the televised sermon format of religious programming, Robertson’s Christian Broadcasting Network and his flagship show *The 700 Club*, pioneered the Christian talk show format for delivering news, interviews, and call-in prayer sessions. Christian broadcasting grew tremendously in the 70s, with the number of Christian radio stations jumping from 399 in 1972 to 1,463 in 1996.\(^{47}\) In 1996, Robertson’s Family Channel reached 59 million homes, and the second major network, Trinity Broadcasting, reached 27.\(^{48}\) In addition to radio and TV broadcasting, American evangelicals in the 2000s support a multi-billion dollar publishing industry.\(^{49}\)

Focus on the Family, its political branch CitizenLink, and its state affiliates were among the most important political organizing networks of the Christian Right in the 2000s. To fully account for the success of this political network, I want to suggest, one needs to understand Focus’ as a parachurch ministry, and part of a broader evangelical subcultural movement.

Parachurch industries rival traditional churches in their import in shaping the evangelical subculture.\(^{50}\) By purchasing a Christian-themed novel, attending a school or conference, working in retail, presenting at a training institute, or sharing a mentoring CD at a church group meeting, Christians integrate religion into their everyday lives. As

\(^{47}\) The number has decreased slightly since, and there have been a significant concentration in ownership of Christian radio stations. Diamond, *Not Politics*, 39.

\(^{48}\) Ibid, 21


\(^{50}\) In her 1996 study of US evangelicals, Gallagher found that a vast majority of evangelicals cite belief in bible (48%) and personal relationship with God (44%) as source of religious teaching, while only 6% rely on the church, see Sally K. Gallagher, *Evangelical Identity and Gendered Family Life* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 67. In 2002, Wilcox found that of 22% of the US population who identified as evangelical, less than half, or 10% attend church once a month or less, and 12% attend several times or more, see Wilcox, “How Focused,” 263.
women have entered public life as employees, producers, and consumers, these industries provide venues for women to enter public institutions of religion.\textsuperscript{51} As we saw in the previous chapter, a rise in lifestyle and self-help centered media in recent decades tapped into new markets of women consumers.\textsuperscript{52} As a media empire, Focus media takes part in this trend.

The vast majority of Focus resources and operations are devoted to multimedia. Dobson first gained a reputation when he published \textit{Dare to Discipline} in 1970, a biblically inspired parenting guide that pushed back against the anti-authority cultural currents of the era. Under his leadership, Focus remained committed to providing practical advice to parents struggling to lead spiritually committed lives.

Focus media content is organized around ‘ministries,’ or campaigns targeted at Christian-interest issues such as winning homosexuals to God (‘Love Won Out’), placing ultrasound machines in abortion centers, or providing Christian-friendly entertainment for young adults. In the 2000s, Focus had nine magazines for children, parents, and young adults, focused on advice, entertainment, and politics. In addition, Focus ran twenty websites, such as Commit2Vote and CitizenLink, and hosted a variety of online resources. Citizenlink and Focus distribute online newsletters as well as politically focused email alerts. The daily Focus radio program runs today on over two thousand stations, down from as many as four thousand in the 90s, and Citizenlink launched a short

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\textsuperscript{52} Angela McRobbie, “Reflections on Feminism, Inmaterial Labor, and the post-Fordist Regime” (\textit{New Formations}, 2010)
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political program on 650 stations in 2012. Their message is also distributed through hundreds of books, DVDs and CDs that range from political-issue analysis to guided mentoring programs for couples, and counseling for troubled teens. In addition to being marketed for private consumption, Focus media provides content for the organization’s rallies, conferences, and political outreach.

A plethora of media formats, as well as conferences, rallies, and local political organizing provide a strong infrastructure for cultivating Christian lifestyle outside of the church. Focus has arguably done more than any other parachurch organization to integrate Christian-interest media, spiritual and self-help counseling, and political organizing. Despite its influence, the Christian subculture is almost invisible in the mainstream press. Perhaps the subculture’s most visible moment came with the Promise Keepers movement of the 90s. Founder Bill McCartney credits his on-air appearance on Focus radio with launching the movement, in which an estimated 3.5 million men participated in stadium events and rallies throughout the country. The Promise Keepers are noteworthy not only because of their astounding level of public support, but also because, like Focus, they advanced a message that combined gender and racially progressive themes with advise for how to maintain a traditional, though revised, moral order in the family.

As we will see below in the case of the Focus message, biblical teachings about male spiritual leadership and essentialist views of gendered dispositions combine with

53 According to self-reported numbers, see “Citizenlink Newsletter,” Citizenlink (Colorado Springs, CO) February 2013. Citizenlink is the predecessor of Family News in Focus which ran in the early 2000s.
54 Dale Buss, Family Man: The Biography of Dr. James Dobson (Weaton: Tyndon House Publishers, 2005), 218. Focus on the Family published the Promise Keeper’s Seven Promises of a Promise Keeper pamphlet, and Dobson spoke at PK rallies.
acknowledgement of the demands facing working mothers and fathers, and practical advice.

III. Do Subjects Negotiate Norms? Butler on Foreclosure and Attachment

I have so far made the case that in order to understand the salience of pro-family politics, we need to attend to the wider cultural discourse on the family in the evangelical subculture in which it is couched. Furthermore, I have suggested that in making appeals to everyday norms of work and family, parachurch discourses provide a moral framework through which individuals can position themselves in the wider society and ascribe value and significance to their experiences.

Before analyzing in more detail the content of Focus’ family discourses, this section attends to the formation of power at work here, and seeks to clarify the relation between social norms, which take root in familial relations of kinship and care, and normative discourses, which fuel political claim-making and ideology-formation.

To do so, I turn to Judith Butler’s theory of discursive power and social normativity. Supplementing Foucault’s account of normative discourse, Butler turns to psychoanalysis to provide an account of the formation of the psyche through ‘passionate attachment’ of libidinal energies to social norms. The Psychic Life of Power draws on Freud’s theory of libidinal energies to provide such an account.\(^{56}\) Butler’s theory of the subject’s passionate attachments to normativity has been widely accepted as a necessary supplement to the account of normativity and power offered by Foucault. While in the following chapters I too supplement Foucault’s account in order to show how political

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discourse is anchored in intimate and familial norms, I develop an alternative approach to Butler’s, which I will argue is socio-psychologically flawed.

This section offers my critique of Butler, which is twofold. Firstly, I argue that Butler’s theory of the “passionate attachment” of libidinal energies to social norms flattens the psychoanalytic account of social normativity and ego formation into an overly negative account that aligns normativity with domination. The strength of psychoanalytic accounts is that they draw our attention to the variety of forms of relation that ground dynamics of guidance, trust, and authority. The following section shows how parachurch discourses seek to foster these relations.

Secondly, I argue that Butler’s focus on the subject’s constitutive relation to social norms, centered throughout her work on the notion of “foreclosure,” replaces Foucault’s socio-historical account of political traditions and rationalities, with a highly speculative and pessimistic account of human social life that is extrapolated from her the theory of the subject.

In attempting to answer the question of how the subject relates to social norms, Butler introduces the notion of the conscious via Nietzsche and Freud. The idea of a conscious that can be said to turn back on itself, or self-consciousness, is elaborated in Nietzsche through his discussion of bad conscience and in Freud through the dynamics of ego and super-ego.\textsuperscript{57} For Butler, the origins and the development of self-consciousness involve an inevitable relation to a normative order.

\textsuperscript{57} \textit{Psychic}, 63-82.
The much-noted emphasis on the constraining force of subjectivity in Butler’s work, I suggest, derives from the way she describes this normative order. In Nietzsche, the creation of the self-conscious, willing subject takes place through the assumption, through violence, of a moral system and the guilt it provokes. Butler’s Nietzschian account of morality emphasizes guilt, prohibition and violence, so too does the account of normativity that she derives from psychoanalysis.

Another basic feature of Butler’s picture of normativity is the idea that it functions through culturally foundational and pre-established order and structure. This is conveyed through her account of language, which in the *Psychic Life of Power*, draws on Lacan’s structuralist account of the symbolic order of the unconscious. Butler refers to ‘the law’ as an order of social norms that is reproduced through the particular symbolic relations that produce meaning in language. The symbolic dyad of gender is significant for Butler because it provides an instance in which a symbolic relation orders social reality through a generalized prohibition, in this case the prohibition on incest and homosexual desire, which, in Butler’s reading of the Oedipus complex, are imposed simultaneously. I will return to this reading below.

In Butler’s work the gender dyad does not quite function as a structural foundation, but provides the exemplar case of a set of prohibitions rooted in an symbolic relation, and thus allows for Butler to develop a picture of language as the medium of a certain socio-cultural ‘law’ which is viewed as primarily prohibitive. This series of associations between language and normativity figured as ordered, law-like, and primarily prohibitive is expressed by Butler’s description of the “language of the
subject,” and “perhaps even [of] the unconscious,” as “structured by power relations that pervade cultural signifiers.”

This formulation signals the adaptation of Foucault that takes place in Butler’s work. In claiming that language is ‘structured by power relations’ I take Butler to be offering an account of social order as a stable set of symbolic relations, or order of norms, that is ‘structured by,’ or reinforced by relations of power. This interpretation is suggested by Butler’s comment that she finds in Foucault an account of how subjects can affect shifts in power relations by altering the symbolic order in which they are inevitably bound to participate.

In Foucault, power is manifest in its capacity to produce regularities in the conduct, habits, and evaluative schemes of individuals. For Butler the medium of power, perhaps the most basic medium, is symbolic order. If power is achieved in symbolic order, a certain agency is achieved in the alteration, within reiteration, of social norms. It is this identification with social norms through reiteration and alteration that Butler’s notion of the performativity of identity aims to capture. The agency described here is indeterminate, we cannot be sure in what direction new iterations will go. Indeed, the emancipatory direction of performative resistance is even less determinable than in Foucault’s account of resistance through subordinate knowledges prominent in his mid-career works.

Performative agency is weaker than resistance because we have learned that social norms, founded on prohibitions, have an erotic character. The formation of the ego takes place as libidinal energies are attached to social norms, which are also prohibitions,

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58 Psychic, 88.
59 Ibid.
and aggressive energies turn against the ego, and others, that fall short of such norms.  

These ego dynamics fuel what Butler famously calls our passionate attachment to subjection, which can also be understood as passionate attachment to normativity.

In reminding us of the dynamics of idealization and self-discipline involved in ego formation, and that this process can result in the attachment to ideals which involve repression and prohibitions, Butler makes an important, though not entirely novel, point. My critique of this argument, which rehearses my engagement with Butler more broadly, is that it rests on too one-dimensional an account of normativity, in which attachment to norms is figured as desire for domination and investment in a certain model of authority, which is prohibitive/prescriptive.

Butler may associate attachment with domination because she views subjectivity as born out of a primary dependency. In thinking the implications of this primary dependency, it is telling that Butler opts for a Lacanian version of psychoanalysis. Lacan is the theorist of object-less drives which propel the subject into social being, while other psychoanalytic currents, such as object-relations theory, attempt to draw out

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61 I should note here that Butler’s adaptation of a Lacanian model of ego formation over other models, such as the object-relations or more traditional Freudian model, leads her to overlook the more complex dynamics of norm-relation present in these models. In object-relations this would involve an account of the formation of non-objective shared symbols and ideals that are open and aspirational instead of prohibitive. In Freudian theory, this would involve an investigation of the difference between relations that shape the investment of the drives that can be said to function through repression vs. sublimation. This distinction is underdeveloped in Freud but treated later by theorists such as Hans Loewald.

62 Adorno’s earlier formulation of an account of passionate attachment to authority in the ‘weak-ego personality’ differs from Butler’s in so far as it views this variety of attachment to norms as one of many possible types, and attempts to link what he calls the ‘weak ego personality,’ to specific political-economic and cultural forms.

63 For a concise version of this critique see Berlant, Cruel Optimism. Op. cit.

64 Butler states the problem in terms of assuming a drive prior to an object (Lacan) and assuming drives depend on attachments in order to ‘acquire their passionate character,’ which she associates with object-relations varieties of psychoanalysis. Psychic Life, 71. For a more recent treatment of the debate between drive and object-relations theories and their import for social science, see Layton, Lynne. “On ‘Defining’ the Unconscious and its Stakes for Social Theory.” Psychoanalysis, Culture and Society. 2009, 9. New York: Pelgrave Macmillan. 33-51.
the various forms of interaction with others, objects, and the shared social world. If we attend to the variety of worldly mediations, the view of norms as inevitably imposed and passionately invested appears as only one among a vast variety of relations of authority and acts of self-formation or stabilization. Dependencies need only issues in reinforcement of authority if other forms of interaction and shared meanings are not developed.

To summarize, I have argued that the theory of passionate attachments to subjection offers too narrow and misleading a view of what our being ‘driven’ into social being entails for the possibility of autonomy. In focusing my argument on Butler’s account of language and action, I follow Linda Zerilli and Linda Alcoff’s recent critiques. Both authors argue that Butler collapses normativity with constraining authority. This view overlooks the use of language as a medium of action, necessary to orient ourselves in relation to the social world.  

My second critique concerns more directly where I see as Butler’s parting ways with Foucault’s efforts to provide a historical and sociological account of social normativity. In modeling social normativity on the gender binary figured as a ‘foreclosure,’ which in psychoanalytic terms is prior to the development of the ego, Butler cuts off an analysis of ego-formation from her account of normative reproduction,

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65 Zerilli, “Feminists Know Not”
See Alcoff, “The Metaphysics of Gender,” Alcoff’s focus here is on a philosophical critique of the metaphysical claims of constructivism, which she claims reject the materiality of social categories such as race and gender. Alcoff turns to a phenomenological claim about lived experience in order to refute Butler’s anti-objectivism. She argues that the material bearers of identity (sexual difference, skin color) and the historically constructed social structures that become bearers of stratified identities (the slave trade, the patriarchal family, socio-economic stratification) have material effects that shape lived experience primarily in its passive, habitual mode prior to the active mode that she takes to be central to Butler’s constructivism, especially in its emphasis on performativity.
which is the primary area where a psychoanalysis of attachment meets with a sociological analysis of the reproduction of norms and authority.

For Butler, ‘foreclosure’ refers to social prohibitions that are foundational to the social order, and thus are imposed on the subject at the entry into subjectivity, as the cost of becoming a socially and self-legible being. The subject comes into being through the differentiation of the ego from its external reality, including its immediate others. We might accept the psychoanalytic premise that our perception of ourselves as male or female is a primary moment of development of self-consciousness, and thus a binary of gender identity would constitute a foreclosure. Butler’s claim is distinct. She argues that not only non-binary gender identity, but homosexual object choice is foreclosed. The loss of homosexual object-choice is requisite for, and prior to, the formation of self-consciousness, and hence ‘ungrievable.’

The difficulty in Butler’s description is that she collapses the construction of gender identity, which persists through adolescence if not much of adult life through the navigation of prohibitions and choices, such as sexual object choice, to the assumption of a ‘male’ or ‘female’ subject position, which she argues is required for subjecthood. She states: “Heterosexuality is cultivated through prohibitions, and these prohibitions take as one of their objects homosexual attachments, thereby forcing the loss of those attachments. If the girl is to transfer love from her father to a substitute object, she must, according to Freudian logic, first renounce love for her mother, and renounce it in such a way that both the aim and the object are foreclosed.”

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As in this passage, Butler’s description of gender identity as melancholic, fueled by the ungrieved loss of non-binary attachments, brings together two claims that I want to suggest are largely incompatible. The first is that homosexual object choice as well as non-rigid ‘masculine’ vs. ‘feminine’ identities are foreclosed, ie that the constitutive foreclosure of one side of the dualism is required for entry into a subject position capable of self-knowledge, and for the subject’s lived ‘identity.’

The second claim is that lived identity is “cultivated through prohibitions.” This would suggest that identity, including sexual object choice, is shaped through an ongoing process in relation to prohibitions. However, Butler does not have an account of this process. Her description of lived gender identity focuses on ‘melancholia,’ the psychic response to the primary loss constituted through entry into the symbolic order. Consider the girl in Butler’s above example. If we accept that fundamental psychoanalytic claim that the girl must renounce object-love for her mother in order to erect the mother as a model with which she can identify, and thereby assume her feminine identity, this does not entail that future homosexual object choice, and non-rigid feminine identity, is foreclosed for her. An analogous argument would claim that the child, in ceasing to fantasize omnipotence and adhering to social norms, would give up the future possibility of engaging in fantasy and resisting or questioning these norms. A plausible account of the construction of gender identity would need to account for the process of negotiation of cross-cutting demands of social life, these negotiations do not come into view in the theory of gender melancholia and foreclosure.

Butler’s more recent work moves away from the generalized negativity of the theory of passionate attachments, but retains her more narrow diagnosis of gender
melancholia. In *Antigone’s Claim*, she criticizes Lacan’s theory of the symbolic for positing cultural norms such as gender as the universal structural basis of all culture, and thus attributing to cultural symbols a transcendent function. The structuralist account of social norms renders ‘gender’ a necessary contingency, produced in various modalities by the universal (and necessary) laws of culture, such as kinship. Suggesting a move away from the account of social normativity in her own earlier work, Butler argues that this notion of the symbolic has the effect of naturalizing cultural norms, and calls for an account of how symbolic orders come to be taken as necessary.\(^{67}\)

The resources to answer this question cannot be found in Butler’s account. While she criticizes Lacan for rendering gender a necessary product of social order, Butler herself continues to treat male and female subject positions as the product of kinship norms of heterosexual exogamy, norms which she suggests are produced through relations of power, and thus contingent. However she maintains that alternative forms of kinship, and thus alternative gender identities, are foreclosed.\(^{68}\)

The crucial oversight of Butler’s theory of gender is its failure to differentiate gendered subject positions –male or female identity- from social norms of femininity, sexual object choice, and relations of intimacy/co-dependency/or fealty associated with ‘kinship’ which are established through cross-cutting negotiations of social relations and norms and thus not reducible to gendered subject positions.

Instead of engaging in a more historical and sociological analysis of gender norms and relations, Butler seeks to show the contingency of gender by turning to an account of

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\(^{68}\) For example, Butler wonders suggestively if Antigone’s death as a consequence of her revelation of the normative order of sovereign power, reveals “a limit that constitutes political power that forecloses what forms of kinship will be intelligible, what kinds of lives can be countenanced as living?” *Antigone*, 29.
ethics. Her recent work describes ethics as a position in which actors—such as Antigone—
take up a position that actively reveals the limits of the regimes of order in which they are
legible. In works such as Antigone’s Claim, and Precarious Life, she traces a
destructive dialectic of formal law and social norms in which non-normative lives are
marked as ‘ungrievable’ and provoke ever new mechanisms of social exclusion.

In so far as Butler’s account of passionate attachment has been accepted as the
psychoanalytic insight into the relationship between normativity and discursive power,
this relationship has not been adequately theorized. Among feminist political theorists,
even critics of the limitations of Butler’s strategies of performative resistance and critical
desubjectification have taken up her diagnosis of passionate attachment, and suggest that
disrupting normative power requires that we change our will and loosen our desire for
subordination. Others take the misleading pessimism of Butler’s account as evidence
that we should repudiate the questions of normative attachment and social power raised
by ‘subject question’ altogether. Parting ways with these lines of critique, I want to
suggest that if we attend to the variety of forms of relation in which normative
attachments inhere we need not see an account of psychic attachment as issuing in an
impasse for thinking about political agency, but rather as illuminating the bases of
political ideological identifications.

In drawing our attention to the varied types of attachments and processes of ego-
development and ego-maintenance, psychoanalytic theory moves past a speculative

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69 Butler, Antigone, 28-29.
70 For example see Allen, Ourselves. Allen describes the task of social transformation as requiring the
“reworking of will and desire in a direction that motivates emancipatory self-transformation.” p. 12, and
argues that such transformation can be effect through counterpublic spaces in which actors cultivate: “new
modes of recognition, new possibilities for attachment, and thus new ways of becoming subjects.”
93. Allen draws on the norm of mutual recognition to orient social critique.
71 Zerilli, “Feminists Know Not What They Do”
account of primary aggression and social exclusion and moves into more differentiated analysis of social relations. In the following section, I attend to the depictions of normative relationality that are held up as models, offered as inspiration, or used to prompt self-reflection in Focus’ radio programming. Through these examples, an alternative view of norm formation comes to light, and motivates my alternative account of the role of everyday attachments in the construction of political discourse and ideology.

IV. Focus on the Family: Norms in Relation

Everyday, the radio program *Focus on the Family* reaches thousands of listeners across the country, beaming into their homes, offices, and cars on more than two thousand stations. On-air since 1977, Focus’s half hour radio program is the central platform through which the organization ministers the message of strengthening marriages and families to its 2.5 million active followers. Hosts James Dobson, and his successors Jim Daly and John Fuller offer spiritual guidance and practical advice, presented through personal experience and recounted in anecdotes. The program seems to serve a persistent need. In a typical month in 2005, 50,000 callers contacted Focus, most prompted by the day’s broadcast. In addition, the organization receives and responds to 183,000 letters a month by post and email.

Letters and calls come from listeners seeking advice for how to cope with personal challenges such as a child using drugs or a distant spouse, or wishing to purchase Focus guidance resources. Hundreds of specially trained staff dispense advice

73 Gilgoff, *Jesus Machine*, 46. The number of individuals who were on the active mailing list because they contacted the ministry within the last 18 months as of 2005.
by mail or over the phone, drawing on a database of advice culled from Dobson’s radio
programs, books, tapes, and DVDs and indexed by topic. Callers with more severe
problems are referred to one of Focus’ 16 licensed counselors. By its own account,
Focus radio responded to three quarters of a million parents in need of support in 2013.

The daily program is typically a conversation between the hosts, presently Jim
Daly and John Fuller, and the pastors, family counselors, child psychologists, and various
religious experts in spiritual living they invite as guests. Conversations are framed by
the guests’ accounts of their experiences helping families and couples confront particular
issues. The hosts frequently push their guests to offer practical advice, for instance by
interrupting a reflection on moral principles to ask: “how do I put this in action? Say I am
sitting with my daughter over breakfast, what do I say to her?” Towards the end of most
shows, John Fuller encourages listeners facing challenges like those discussed in the
program to call Focus counselors, or go online to find specialized Focus resources.

The overarching cultural-moral perspective that frames the show is the perceived
crisis in marriage in the US, and the sense that American families are embattled by
various social trends, which particular broadcasts attempt to explore. The trends that
provoke the most persistent attention and concern are the high levels of stress and

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75 Differing accounts cite half to one third of Focus’ 1300 personnel are devoted to mail and phone
correspondence with followers. See Gilgoff, Ibid and McDannel, Evangelical Identity, 126.
76 McDannel, Evangelical Identity, 126-7.
77 Focus on the Family, Jim Daly and John Fuller, “Loving Kids for Who They Are,” radio, Focus on the
Family, August 20, 2014.
78 James Dobson stepped down from hosting the show, as well as relinquishing all other Focus related
responsibilities, in 2010, a year after stepping down from the Board. He had previously stepped down from
the Focus presidency to head Focus on the Family Action, the organization’s political wing, in 2004.
79 Focus on the Family, Jim Daly and John Fuller, “Being the Intentional Parent Your Child Needs,” radio,
Focus on the Family, Sept. 17, 2014.
80 Focus on the Family, Jim Daly and John Fuller, “Building a Stronger Marriage,” radio, Focus on the
Family, Sept. 5, 2014. Ad for Focus marriage program argues that US has the highest divorce rate in the
world.
pressure facing parents, overvaluation of achievement and over-commitment to work, and the disorientation and lack of guidance men and women face in attempting to lead successful marriages, devote time to children, and manage work life. Daly, Fuller, and their guests present anecdotes to attest to these trends, and illustrate how commitment to personal relationships, including first and foremost a personal relationship with Christ, can help listeners confront these pressures and push against these trends.

According to these testimonials, the practices through which one fosters a personal relationship with God serve as a model and stepping stone for developing a more intentional and responsive relationship to oneself, one’s family, and one’s friends. Understanding what God says also requires “getting to know yourself, and getting him to know you,” and thus requires a confrontation with oneself. Furthermore, to hear what God is saying, one has to slow down, for, as one speaker attests, “the holy spirit works in our lives through contemplation.” A relationship with God requires a person to take the time to articulate what is ‘inward’ and face their issues rather than leaning on an ‘external identity’ drawn from the world, in order to cover them up.

The broadcast repeatedly attempts to show through examples that living in relation to God is practiced through relationships, for God “speaks through friends,” and Christians follow Christ’s model of love and grace by helping family and friends lead biblical lives. In addition to offering strategies for communication between husbands and wives, parents and children, Focus also responds to the concern that young people in the contemporary US lack models and teachers to show them how to have successful

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83 Ibid.
relationships by encouraging listeners to engage in mentoring. The broadcast occasionally showcases mentoring relationships, advising that they require only a willingness to listen, share experiences, and express one’s vulnerability, and directing listeners to mentoring workbooks and DVDs for further guidance.\footnote{Focus on the Family, Jim Daly and John Fuller, “Saving Marriages Before They Start,” radio, \textit{Focus on the Family}, August 28, 2014.}

An underlying theme that Fuller, Daly, and their guests point to in diagnosing challenges facing the family is the breakdown of traditional norms of male breadwinning and female domesticity, and the power arrangement, sexual ethos, and patterns of home practices these roles helped sustain. While this cultural shift is never named explicitly in these terms, it is referenced when Focus conversations describe the specific pressures facing men and women today, and prescribe remedies. A number of examples illustrate this point.

Tony Evans, a well-know African-American Evangelical pastor, came on the Focus program to speak about the role of fathers in “Raising Kids with a Kingdom Perspective.”\footnote{Focus on the Family, Jim Daly and John Fuller, “Raising Kids with a Kingdom Perspective,” radio, \textit{Focus on the Family}, Sept. 8, 2014.} At issue in this conversation was the need for spiritual leadership in the family, a task the bible assigns to men in their roles as husbands and fathers. Like many guests, Evans is himself the president of the parachurch ministry “Urban Alternative” and the author of guides for Christian living such as \textit{Kingdom Men}. Evans addresses the theme of paternal responsibility that has long been central to Focus teaching, perhaps most popularized by Dobson’s mass success TV spot, \textit{Where’s Dad?}, which remained popular in the 2000s, three decades after its release,\footnote{Gilgoff, \textit{Jesus Machine}, 23-4.} and the Promise Keepers
movement.\textsuperscript{87} This message combines a religious conservative view of ‘servant leadership,’ according to which men serve God by acting as the leader and conduits of His word in the family, on the one hand, with a call for men to take up their responsibilities in the home, resonant with contemporary gender-progressive discourse, on the other.

Evans’ approach also illustrates well the consistent Focus attempt to integrate spirituality and biblically guided living into one’s daily life, and to give biblical rules a living significance by rooting them in practices of relationship and discipleship. Evans inspires listeners to aim not for a “legalistic” conformity to God’s rules, but to “hold on” to his rules because they value the relationships with God, family, and community that are strengthened by biblical living.

The male over-committment to work is described in gender essentialist terms when raised on the show. Hosts and guests are careful to note that men, by their ‘nature,’ are driven to find fulfillment in their work lives, and desire to ‘make something’ of themselves in the world. This male character trait is contrasted to women, who tend to find fulfillment through relationships. Such gender essentialist views are further reinforced through advice. Jill Savage, who has a ministry targeted at mothers in the form of parenting guidance books such as \textit{My Hearts At Home}, counsels women to be mindful of these gendered differences in need and disposition.\textsuperscript{88} While reinforcing a gendered division of domestic and worldly work, Savage and the hosts nonetheless stress that it is “not fair” for men to choose to work late, and encourage women to confront their husbands to establish expectations for spending time at home with children. Furthermore,

\textsuperscript{87} Current hosts John Fuller and Jim Daly both have books on parenting for fathers.
\textsuperscript{88} Focus on the Family, Jim Daly and John Fuller, “Making Your Home Safe and Healthy,” radio, \textit{Focus on the Family}, Sept. 5, 2014.
Fuller, Daly, and Dobson consistently note that women today often work outside the home, and are under the pressure of balancing their own jobs with caring for children and supporting their spouses. They seek to address this pressure through communication strategies and intentional relationship practices.

The gender philosophy embraced by Focus also views women as endowed with God-given natures to be ‘submissive’ to their husbands. A July 2014 broadcast explored the practice of submission. The female ‘submissive’ guest argued for a revival of this practice, which she suggested was losing ground among Christians due to the influence of female-empowered culture. The emasculation of men in popular culture was also blamed for the “unstable sexual appetites” exhibited by women. The broadcast “Exposing the Lure of Erotica,” responded to the 2012 survey by a leading Christian publisher, which found that Christian women voted 50 Shades of Gray, an erotic novel about sadomasochist sexual practice, the most influential book of the year. Two female guests who lead a ministry for women suggested that narrative sadomasochist ‘pornography’ provided a perverted gratification of women’s desire for male leadership. Unable to find healthy practices of submission with their husbands, they suggested, women were increasingly lapsing in their traditional role as “stabilizers,” entrusted with “subduing sex into its Godly place in marriage.”

V. Conclusion: Servant Leaders and Working Moms

The New Traditional Woman is not the syrupy caricature that Hollywood of the 1950’s beamed into our living rooms. She is new, because she is of the current era, with all of its pressures and fast pace and rapid change. She is

89 Focus on the Family, Jim Daly and John Fuller, “Submission: Finding Strength in God’s Design,” radio, Focus on the Family, June 14 2011.
traditional because, in the face of unremitting cultural change, she is oriented around the eternal truths of faith and family. Her values are timeless and true to human nature.


As we have seen, as Christian media and organizing have brought religious messages into the production and consumption circuits of everyday life since the 70s, these discourses frequently framed themselves around everyday concerns of marriage and family. With the influence of pro-family discourses during this period, evangelical moral views about the family became more extreme, with 57% up from 49% opposed to premarital sex, and 70% up from 58% opining that divorce should be made more difficult.\(^91\)

Of course, debates about the family extend beyond evangelical discourses to the wider culture. As I suggested in the last chapter, these debates have been fueled by socio-economic change, such as a 24% increase in mothers working outside the home between 1975 and 2009,\(^92\) as well as declining rates of marriage and increased rates of divorce during this period.\(^93\) As the traditional family declined, so did beliefs about gender roles on which it was founded, leading to a 49% decrease between the late 70s and early 90s in Americans who reported to believe in the gendered division of labor.\(^94\)

Evangelical discourses about the family have adapted to these wider cultural trends, as changing views on the meaning of male ‘headship’ and gender roles in marriage attest. While in the early 20\(^{th}\) century ‘headship’ referred to the male’s role as primary breadwinner in contrast to the woman’s role in domestic care, these roles were

\(^91\) Ibid, 263.
\(^93\) A demographic survey of US adults from 1998-2002 estimates that 45% of total adults married, and 54% of evangelicals, see Wilcox, “How Focused,” 266.
\(^94\) Stassen, *Headship*, 112.
recast in a revived discourse on headship emerging in the 80s. Recent accounts show that headship discourses draw on mainstream progressive themes such as gender equality and the call for men to take a more active role at home. Male headship, as well as gendered role differentiation based on presumed essential male and female qualities, are cast as part of a complementary arrangement. By basing male headship in leading spiritual life at home rather than breadwinning, these discourses retain male authority while accommodating the fact of women working outside of the home.

Through providing daily therapeutic advice and support, and responding to the pressures facing contemporary men and women, Focus on the Family has established itself as a trusted authority and reliable guide for millions of followers in the US and beyond. The voices of Focus – James Dobson, Jim Fuller, John Daly, and their network of Christian pastors and religious leaders in the evangelical subculture – advance a discourse that speaks to the central relations and attachments in a person’s life, where she grounds her way of living and orients herself to the wider culture. Furthermore, by hosting conversations about the family, parachurch ministries such as Focus are consistently attentive to the everyday challenges facing their publics. In so doing, Focus has become one of the most influential voices in the evangelical subculture, a status that Dobson has carefully channeled into political organizing and activism.

In Focus family discourses, religious beliefs and gender norms are only rarely asserted as dogma. Rather, norms are reinforced, often implicitly, through descriptions of the obstacles facing families, and through practical advice. As the above analysis shows,

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95 Stassen, *Headship.*
96 Gallagher, *Evangelical Identity.*
97 In the early years of Dobson’s career at Focus he was careful to keep his political and family guidance voices separate, see Buss, *Family Man.*
this advice often concerns how to improve one’s relation to self and loved ones through reflective practices of listening to God and following his word. By sticking to this general outline of a Christian way of life and relational strategies, Focus discourses leave listeners to make choices on specific aspects of their lives, and thus allow room for Christian living to adapt to contemporary ways of life.

Why is the strength of the family so central to the teaching of Focus ministry, as well as many other ministries in the Christian Right subculture? In Focus discourse, the family is frequently lauded as the site for advancing God’s kingdom by bringing one’s children into a relationship with God. While such messages are longstanding Western Christian spirituality, the politicization of the family as a site of religious-cultural struggle a novel phenomenon. In the 70s, the role of families in religious-moral reproduction rose to the forefront of Christian discourse as the critique of pervasive cultural secularism and liberal government overreach became a mobilizing theme among the nascent organizations of the Christian Right.

Carrying on this theme, Focus today argues that “we” need to strengthen families because “we don’t want government transferring values and faith to our children.”

Reiterating this mantra, Focus radio occasionally reminds listeners to do their part in upcoming elections, directing them to Focus websites such as Commit2Vote, where they can register to vote, or CitizenLink, where they can find information about issues of interest to family values voters and guides for voting on key state and local ballot measures and elections.

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98 Focus on the Family, Jim Daly and John Fuller, “Helping Kids Thrive in Middle School,” radio, Focus on the Family, August 8, 2014.
Through these and other measures, the appeal and authority of family discourse in the evangelical subculture is mobilized behind political issues such as reforming funding and administration of public education, tax policy, healthcare, and government spending. For instance, in the politics of ‘school choice,’ Christian conservatives’ desire to protect their children from liberal-secular education has been channeled into successful campaigns for school vouchers and privatization.

In order to explain the mobilization of family discourse behind pro-family campaigns such as school choice, requires a more nuanced account of political discourse formation than offered by Butler’s account of the relation between normative discourse and political power. This chapter has attempted to show that the misleading pessimism of Butler’s account of passionate attachment follows from her truncated account of relationality. Whereas Butler views normativity as inevitably complicit with a constraining authority, I have suggested that norms are reproduced through a variety of attachments rooted in everyday practices of kinship and intimacy. I turned to Focus therapeutic discourse to show that norms can be reproduced through relational strategies and self-reflective practices. Challenging Butler’s alignment of normativity with relations of dominance, I have paved the way for viewing normative attachments as the basis of consciousness formation, and thus as a powerful element of political discourse as such. If I am right, normative discourses on the family should not be critiqued based on their complicity with authority, for this authority is less one-sided than Butler suggests. To get critical traction on pro-family discourse, we need to attend to the ideational constellations and political alliances through which pro-family politics was formed and achieved its
effects on the contemporary political scene. I attempt such an analysis in the following two chapters, beginning with the politics of school choice.