
Demons in San Francisco Bay

How a Street Preacher Launched Modern-Day "Conversion Therapy"

ABSTRACT In 1967, street minister Kent Philpott began outreach to lesbian, gay, and bisexual hippies in the Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco. Over the next decade, he counseled those who purportedly wanted out of what he referred to as "the gay lifestyle," combining charismatic religious beliefs in demons, divine healing, and glossolalia with psychological theories on gender and child development. This article examines Philpott's efforts to provide the nascent "ex-gay movement" with cultural, social, and intellectual foundations. This article specifically documents how sexual liberation, hippie culture, and conservative religion converged in San Francisco and spawned the "ex-gay movement." Philpott, swept up by the Jesus People Movement, incorporated religious and psychological beliefs prominent in the Bay Area and infused charismatic Christian influences and traditional understandings of masculinity and femininity into the "ex-gay movement." **KEYWORDS** California, counterculture, gender, sexuality, evangelical Christianity, conversion therapy, ex-gay movement

In 1967, Kent Philpott found himself in the middle of a cultural revolution. As a student at Golden Gate Baptist Seminary, he witnessed thousands of new arrivals pour into San Francisco as the Summer of Love began. He remembered the time as "the beginning of the hippie culture" and "the start of the drug scene." He also recounted how "evil pervaded" as "satanic mind control" entranced drug-addicted and sexually immoral transplants. In *A Manual of Demonology and the Occult*, published in 1973 by the evangelical press Zondervan, Philpott wrote about "dozens of satanic incidents and cases of demon possession" that he witnessed, some of which included men and women with same-sex desires.¹ After these initial encounters with lesbian, gay, and bisexual

1. Kent Philpott, *A Manual of Demonology and the Occult* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1973), 11.

residents of the Haight, he started ministering to individuals whom he described as wanting out of the “gay lifestyle.”²

Philpott’s ministry highlights how the San Francisco Bay Area served as a center for religious and sexual conversion beginning in the late 1960s. As a street preacher, Philpott wanted to “save” lesbian, gay, and bisexual souls, and he co-founded Love in Action, a Christian living center that provided biblical guidance to born-again Christians who had fantasized about or engaged in same-sex sexuality. Philpott, a Baptist, also authored two books on “gay conversion” counseling. In these, he established many of the features that would define faith-based sexual conversion efforts into the twenty-first century. By focusing on Philpott, this article documents how modern-day therapies to “change” sexual orientation and gender identity originated in San Francisco, the cultural center of American gay life, and not in the nation’s Bible Belt. Philpott’s religious beliefs, grounded in the charismatic movement and located in the Bay Area, help us comprehend these controversial counseling efforts to “pray the gay away.” It is important to understand the roots of these practices in our current political moment as states like California ban “conversion therapy” for minors.

As the Summer of Love beckoned hippies and wayward youth to the Bay Area, Philpott felt called to the Haight. The cultural zeitgeist of the Sixties influenced him; and for this reason, he found himself drawn to the charismatic practices and aesthetic of the Jesus People Movement. He had long hair, sported a mustache, and carried around an acoustic guitar but held conservative beliefs around gender, sexuality, and the family. As such, Philpott felt uniquely positioned to minister to lesbian, gay, and bisexual hippies

2. Writing about conservative religion, gender, and sexuality in the post-World War II United States presents the historian with several semantic challenges. In this article, I place quotation marks around words, terms, and phrases to highlight how historical actors referred to sexual orientation and gender-identity change therapies. Here, for instance, I have placed “gay lifestyle” in quotations, as this was the language Kent Philpott and many subsequent sexual orientation change counselors used. In some ways, the choice of the word “lifestyle” reflected the language used by lesbian women and gay men at the time. Lesbian and gay people, however, stopped describing their same-sex desires as a “lifestyle” in the 1970s and 1980s. The continued use of the word “lifestyle” by conversion therapists, then, has represented an effort to delegitimize the valid identity claims of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) persons. It is with these realities in mind that I call attention to the words, terms, and phrases used by conservative Christians like Philpott, which, I think, provides an empathetic examination of their lived experiences and cultural worldviews while signaling that I do *not* support their political, social, and religious agenda. I employ the same approach of placing “conversion therapy,” “ex-gay,” and “ex-gay movement” in quotations to indicate my opposition to these counseling practices.

in the Bay Area. He talked about the potential of divine healing practices, the importance of the Holy Spirit, and the transformative reality of *glossolalia*, or speaking in tongues. He believed that miracles were real, and he maintained that he experienced one when three gay men sought help from him in the same week in 1972. After that experience, Philpott became a leader in what has since become known as the “ex-gay movement.” He published *The Third Sex?: Six Homosexuals Tell Their Stories* in 1975 and *The Gay Theology* in 1977. The two books offered the religious, psychological, and intellectual foundation for the “ex-gay movement” for the remainder of the twentieth century. *The Third Sex* and *The Gay Theology* also advertised the sexual conversions purportedly happening in the Bay Area. Desperate readers, seeking to “change” their sexual desires, not only wrote to Philpott but also traveled to San Francisco to receive the counseling they learned about in the minister’s books.³

Historians have seen San Francisco as a prominent hub for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) communities, as the city has served as a prominent site for sexual liberation since the 1960s; but few have recognized the Bay Area as a formative space for the conservative “ex-gay movement.” Philpott’s charismatic beliefs and innumerable controversies surrounding claims to sexual conversion have obscured his formative role in the “ex-gay movement.” The most comprehensive history of the Jesus People Movement, Larry Eskridge’s *God’s Forever Family: The Jesus People Movement in America*, includes Philpott as a prominent charismatic street minister in the Haight but fails to mention Philpott’s role in founding Christian communal living centers for gay people seeking to change their same-sex desires.⁴ Anthropological and sociological works offer examinations of “ex-gay” ministries, although even the best of these studies miss the complicated nature of conservative religion at the beginning of the “ex-gay movement.” In *Straight to Jesus: Sexual and Christian Conversions in the Ex-Gay Movement*, for example, Tanya Erzen provides a commendable portrait of Love in Action as it existed at the turn of the twenty-first century; but her coverage of the ministry ignores the charismatic roots that Philpott injected

3. Kent Philpott, *The Third Sex?: Six Homosexuals Tell Their Stories* (Plainfield, N.J.: Logos International, 1975); Kent Philpott, *The Gay Theology* (Plainfield, N.J.: Logos International, 1977).

4. Larry Eskridge, *God’s Forever Family: The Jesus People Movement in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

into the “ex-gay movement” in the 1970s.⁵ Tom Waidzunus’s *The Straight Line: How the Fringe Science of Ex-Gay Therapy Reoriented Sexuality* addresses Philpott’s belief in the demonic possession of lesbian, gay, and bisexual people.⁶ Without the context of the historical development of conservative Christianity in parts of the American West, Waidzunus misses the appeal of divine healing, miracles, and glossolalia for a range of LGBTQ people who lived in the San Francisco Bay Area.⁷ These oversights are understandable, especially since some of the supposedly ex-gay men Philpott interviewed for *The Third Sex?* and *The Gay Theology* later emerged as harsh critics of his ministry efforts, making these sources difficult to work with.

Philpott’s writings underscore a fundamental shift in the history and development of “conversion therapy,” even if scholars must be careful and discerning interpreters of sources on the “ex-gay movement.”⁸ Sexual conversion had previously been conducted by psychiatrists and counselors with many years of education and professional training. After the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from its list of mental disorders in 1973, this type of therapy slowly disappeared. Philpott, however, offered a new way forward, reinterpreting psychology, religion, gender, and sexuality in ways that borrowed from his own experiences in the Bay Area. He was one of the first people, for instance, to write about the importance of being spiritually saved and performing “godly” gender as part of a sexual

5. Tanya Erzen, *Straight to Jesus: Sexual and Christian Conversions in the Ex-Gay Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); Lynne Gerber, *Seeking the Straight and Narrow: Weight Loss and Sexual Reorientation in Evangelical America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

6. Tom Waidzunus, *The Straight Line: How the Fringe Science of Ex-Gay Therapy Reoriented Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 78–79.

7. Scholars have been most comfortable examining the religious beliefs and practices of evangelical Protestants, but a recent wave of research has expanded this focus to include strong analysis of Mormon “ex-gay” counseling. See, for example, Taylor G. Petrey, *Tabernacles of Clay: Sexuality and Gender in Modern Mormonism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020); and Gregory A. Prince, *Gay Rights and the Mormon Church: Intended Actions, Unintended Consequences* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2019).

8. “Ex-gay” testimonies of “change” and “conversion” cannot be taken at face value, largely because so many prominent “ex-gays” have later emerged as “ex-ex-gays” and claimed that “conversion therapy” is a fraud. Despite this, certain narratives permeate the history of the “ex-gay movement.” When examining Philpott’s *The Third Sex?* and *The Gay Theology*, I focus on these common narratives. Along with that, I draw from Philpott’s interviews with members of Love in Action as carefully as possible, purposefully selecting testimony provided without incessant probing and/or leading questions from Philpott.

“conversion.”⁹ Rather than shunning the psychological in favor of the sacred (or vice versa), Philpott combined both approaches as he tried to reinforce traditional gender norms, specifically as the feminist and gay liberation movements sought to dismantle heteropatriarchy.

By focusing on how Philpott found his way to the Bay Area, the first part of this article highlights the minister’s religious conversion to Pentecostalism; and in doing so, it addresses how conservative Christianity along the Pacific Coast shaped counseling efforts to “convert” LGBTQ people and reinforce traditional gender roles. Subsequent sections provide a close analysis of the charismatic beliefs and practices infused in the early “ex-gay movement.” These parts of the article also show how Philpott combined religious and psychological thought as he tried to “change” people’s sexuality. The conclusion then addresses why Philpott has not been remembered as a prominent figure for religious-based sexual conversion efforts, including a war of words over the testimony in *The Third Sex?* and *The Gay Theology*. The final pages of the article also note that California has remained a center for “conversion therapy” since the 1970s, further spotlighting the presence of religious conservatives in the Golden State.

CONSERVATIVE AND CHARISMATIC CHRISTIANITY IN CALIFORNIA

In “San Francisco (Be Sure to Wear Flowers in Your Hair),” Scott McKenzie sang about “a strange vibration” and “people in motion.” The lyrics, written by John Phillips of the Mamas and the Papas, were meant to describe the upcoming Summer of Love. The song, however, could have described much of postwar California’s history. In 1940, the Golden State had a population of nearly seven million. Thirty years later, close to three times that number

9. Lynne Gerber offers what I think is the best analysis of gender in the “ex-gay movement.” She counters other scholars’ assertions that men in the “ex-gay movement” seek to attain standards of hegemonic masculinity. Instead of emphasizing heterosexual prowess, which theorists like R.W. Connell propose as a core feature of hegemonic masculinity, Gerber argues that “ex-gay” ministries support a “godly masculine ideal” that de-emphasizes heterosexual conquest, promotes inclusive masculinities, and fosters homointimacy. A weakness of Gerber’s work, however, is that she does not interrogate how Dr. Joseph Nicolosi, a Catholic clinical psychologist, influenced evangelical “ex-gays” to the extent that he did beginning in the early 1990s. See Lynne Gerber, “Grit, Guts, and Vanilla Beans: Godly Masculinity in the Ex-Gay Movement,” *Gender & Society* 29, no. 1 (February 2015): 26–50; Christine M. Robinson and Sue E. Spivey, “The Politics of Masculinity and the Ex-Gay Movement,” *Gender & Society* 21, no. 5 (October 2007): 650–75; and R.W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

lived there.¹⁰ As in the rest of the nation, baby boomers, many of whom came of age in the late 1960s and early 1970s, fueled this growth. The state also attracted a diverse array of migrants, from Pentecostal preachers and conservative evangelicals to lesbian women and gay men.

California, in short, became a place to start anew. Evangelicals and Pentecostals proselytized the fastest-growing state in the nation. As Darren Dochuk observes, southern evangelicalism had an “ascent on the West Coast,” which “coincided with the beginning of a conservative revolution that gathered momentum,” particularly “in Southern California during the early Cold War period before breaking through nationally in the 1970s.” These evangelicals, who also held influence in Northern California, were on an “errand,” according to Dochuk.¹¹ Many people with same-sex desires, on the other hand, escaped small-town America for the first time in their lives to move to urban centers, including San Francisco. They abandoned “the closet” and found an urban queer community. With so many people in motion, it was only a matter of time before a conservative Christian like Philpott thought he could “save” lesbian, gay, and bisexual souls.¹²

Philpott’s journey to California and into the Jesus People Movement underscores the cultural impact of Pentecostalism in the Cold War American West. In *Memoirs of a Jesus Freak*, Philpott recalls his first encounter with charismatic Christianity as a child in the early 1950s. He notes how Pentecostal meetings “were cropping up all over the country, and one came to the hall around the corner” from where he lived in Portland, Oregon. Philpott remembers that he and his brothers, along with a friend, sneaked out to watch the Pentecostals during their emotional meetings. “We slipped in the back door, found seats in the back, and enjoyed our entertainment,” he writes. The service included the over-the-top theatrics that had earned Pentecostalism a bad name in the first half of the twentieth century. According to

10. See U.S. Census Bureau, “United States Summary,” 14, <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1940/population-volume-1/33973538v1cho2.pdf>, for California’s population (6.9 million) in 1940. See U.S. Census Bureau, “1970 Census of Population,” 2, <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1970/pct1/02605992cho1.pdf>, for California’s population (19.7 million) in 1970.

11. Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2010), xix.

12. Excellent scholarship exists on the migration of evangelicals to Southern California and how this shaped the New Right. See, for instance, Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); and Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt*.

Philpott, people rolled around on the floor as they welcomed the Holy Spirit into their bodies and souls. Philpott's mention that the services provided "entertainment" highlights how amusing the situation must have been for a boy no older than thirteen. It was just not how respectable Protestants were supposed to act. Philpott's father attended "the North Baptist Church about a mile from the house" and came from the tradition where Baptists were "quiet" and "serious." The newly arrived Pentecostals in Portland were not the stern and solemn believers of the white Baptist tradition.¹³

Pentecostalism, however, had strong support in communities along the U.S. Pacific Coast. California, for instance, was home to the Azuna Street Revival in the early 1900s as well as Aimee Semple McPherson's Foursquare Church. The believers at Azuna Street spoke in tongues, a core practice for some charismatic and Pentecostal believers.¹⁴ McPherson, on the other hand, moved to the West Coast and founded Angelus Temple in 1923. There, according to the scholar Arlene Sánchez-Walsh, McPherson grew "a 10,000-seat church that would become one of the first megachurches in the United States."¹⁵ The religious tapestry of California was not restricted to charismatics and Pentecostals, though, and McPherson joined a curious mixture of faith healers, Eastern medicine believers, and fundamentalists. In the decades after World War II, a range of religious adherents, including but not limited to Pentecostals and charismatics, continued to redefine the religious experience in California.¹⁶ Christians in California, in other words, had numerous options, including fundamentalist and charismatic churches, as they shopped the religious marketplace in search of eternal salvation.

13. White Americans used the emotionality of African American religious expression to paint Black religion as "unrespectable." During the Great Depression, increased Black presence in charismatic groups also worried African American religious leaders. Judith Weisenfeld writes: "While Holiness and Pentecostal churches were becoming increasingly popular and prominent in black communities, many mainstream black religious leaders were cautious about their presence on the religious landscape. . . . Elite clergy often saw the exuberant worship of Holiness and Pentecostal churches as unrefined and threatening to their ability to project a respectable image to white-dominated political and economic powers." For the racial dynamics of charismatic religion, see Judith Weisenfeld, *New World A-Coming: Black Religion and Racial Identity during the Great Migration* (New York: New York University Press, 2017), 263–64. See Kent Philpott, *Memoirs of a Jesus Freak* (2nd ed.) (San Rafael, Calif.: Earthen Vessels Publishing, 2016), 3, for his experience in the Pentecostal meeting.

14. Arlene M. Sánchez-Walsh, *Pentecostals in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 4.

15. *Ibid.*, 25.

16. Richard Rayner, *A Bright and Guilty Place: Murder, Corruption, and L.A.'s Scandalous Coming of Age* (New York: Anchor, 2009), 27.

Philpott's own path to becoming "a flaming Pentecostal" involved a period of spiritual awakening amidst this curious mixture of religious beliefs. One experience showed how Pentecostalism was not considered by some fundamentalists to be a proper expression of the Christian faith. In 1963, at the age of twenty-one, Philpott underwent his conversion at the First Baptist Church in Fairfield, California, only forty miles northeast of Berkeley. Philpott recounts how he listened to Pastor Bob Lewis for nine months before he "experienced the new birth," but it was, in his words, "a sudden, Billy Graham sort of conversion" once it happened.¹⁷ Once more, he learned that Pentecostalism was a unique expression of faith. Pastor Lewis, in his mid-thirties and serious about discipleship, handed the born-again Philpott a book on what were described as Bible-based American cults. Philpott remembers that the small volume covered five groups: Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Christian Scientists, Seventh Day Adventists, and Pentecostals.¹⁸ The book from Pastor Lewis delivered a powerful message to the impressionable Philpott. Pastor Lewis warned that there were some practices and beliefs that were unacceptable for the Protestant faithful and that even Bible-believing Americans could belong to cults.

Philpott held this negative view of charismatic religious belief and practice into 1967, at which time he was a student at the Southern Baptist-affiliated Golden Gate Baptist Seminary, located just north of San Francisco in Marin County. Philpott, who had enlisted in the Air Force at the age of nineteen, had to get a job because his GI Bill benefits did not cover all his expenses.¹⁹ (He seemingly used some of these benefits to study psychology at California State University, Sacramento, too.) One night, as he was driving home from a part-time position at the retail chain J.C. Penney, McKenzie's "San Francisco" played on the radio. To Philpott, the song was more than a rock-pop hit; it was also a call for him to shepherd lost souls back to religious salvation. At that moment, attests Philpott, God spoke to him, telling the young seminarian to "go to the hippies in San Francisco." Philpott listened to God and drove to the Haight, in what was the first of many trips to this part of San Francisco. "Many hippies and others were converted during those days in 1967," Philpott writes about his early street

17. Philpott, *Memoirs of a Jesus Freak*, 3-4; Don Keown, "The Unusual Ministry of Kent Philpott," *Marin Magazine*, February 8, 1975, M1.

18. Philpott, *Memoirs of a Jesus Freak*, 3-4.

19. Keown, "The Unusual Ministry of Kent Philpott," M4.

ministry efforts, “but it was only the trickle before the flood that was to come.”²⁰

In the Haight, Philpott transformed into a Jesus Freak after experiencing several events that changed his religious beliefs and practices. First, he claims to have seen satanism as well as instances of demonic possession. Philpott argued that Satan and his demons pervaded San Francisco for multiple reasons but that recent religious and spiritual trends were the main problem. He supposed that the increased acceptance of “astrology, magic, fortune-telling, spiritualism, necromancy, Satanism, clairvoyance, telepathy, astral projection, psychokinesis,” and other spiritual movements symbolized the power that Lucifer held over modern American culture.²¹ Second, in early 1968, Philpott became a tongues-speaker, communicating in an unknown language after being overtaken by the Holy Spirit. Third, he unknowingly participated for the first time in deliverance ministry, which seeks to “cleanse” people of demons and evil spirits. He had a strange interaction with a silent thirty-year-old man in the Haight. After a few minutes of the man being unresponsive, Philpott, who thought the man was on drugs, heard a loud explosion. There were eleven more booms. “One crash seemed to come from the ceiling, the next time a wall, then another wall, then the ceiling again, then the floor—boom, boom, boom, louder than an M80 firecracker going off,” Philpott remembers. Trying to make sense of the experience, Philpott interpreted the booms as a demonic threat. He believed that Satan’s demons tried to frighten him. It worked that night but not for much longer.²²

Philpott also saw the healing potential of charismatic practices. After graduating from Golden Gate Baptist Seminary, he, his wife Bobbie, and their two daughters, Dory and Grace, moved to Los Angeles to live with his parents. (Philpott’s parents had relocated there from Portland in the mid-1950s.) Philpott continued his work in the Haight, hitchhiking the nearly four hundred miles to San Francisco whenever he could. In these months, he “finally became convinced that there was an actual devil and demons” as he witnessed a seemingly possessed man jump a foot in the air whenever Philpott uttered the name “Jesus.” “I did this several times,” Philpott records, “and the result was the same each time.” He also helped establish Soul Inn, a residential center for Christian conversion in the Haight. It was at Soul Inn where

20. Philpott, *Memoirs of a Jesus Freak*, 14.

21. Philpott, *A Manual of Demonology and the Occult*, 12.

22. Philpott, *Memoirs of a Jesus Freak*, 21, 27–28.

Philpott not only saw the potential of live-in sites for Christian ministry but also observed his first miracle. He swears that a one-quart can of pork and beans was able to feed twenty-six hippies who came to Soul Inn for food. “There was enough in the can to feed all twenty-six people, with as much left as when we started,” Philpott alleges. “Twenty-six bowls filled with pork and beans came out of what had been a nearly empty quart can.” Philpott was, it seemed, at the center of a religious awakening in the San Francisco Bay Area.²³

Spiritual and personal renewals were not confined to Philpott and others drawn to charismatic miracles. As Philip Clayton writes, “California has been at the forefront of transformation in religion” since World War II.²⁴ As people traveled to the West Coast to start anew over the course of the 1960s, a range of religious and spiritual beliefs took shape, sometimes syncretizing with psychological understandings of the self and the mind. In San Francisco and elsewhere, hippie migrants experimented with the mind-altering properties of hallucinogenic drugs, such as acid and “magic mushrooms,” for a range of reasons, including the promise of spiritual transformation and self-actualization.²⁵ The hope to “turn on, tune in, and drop out,” as psychologist and cultural critic Timothy Leary famously said, motivated many California migrants looking for a new start.

The growth of Central California’s Esalen Institute reflects the period’s fusion of the spiritual and the psychological—the same context that surrounded the “ex-gay movement.” Located in Big Sur, California and founded in 1962, Esalen offered an eclectic range of meditative and therapeutic approaches to its clients. It was, in Linda Sargent Wood’s words, “a place of religious and psychological exchange,” a site “where any number of religions and religious combinations were bought and sold.”²⁶ Fritz Perls, a German-born psychiatrist, for example, offered Gestalt therapy at Esalen from

23. Philpott was not the only person to attest to such miracles. Aryae Coopersmith, for instance, claims to have fed large numbers of people at the House of Love and Prayer in the Haight. See *ibid.*, 29, 30, 33–34; and Aryae Coopersmith, *Holy Beggars: A Journey from Haight Street to Jerusalem* (El Granada, Calif.: One World Lights, 2011), 65–80.

24. Philip Clayton, “Four Prophets: What the Free Speech Movement, Jesus Freaks, Esalen, and Goddess Worship Have in Common,” *Boom: A Journal of California* 5, no. 4 (2015): 72.

25. Michael Pollan, *How to Change Your Mind: What the New Science of Psychedelics Teaches Us About Consciousness, Dying, Addiction, Depression, and Transcendence* (New York: Penguin Books, 2018), 203–4, 315.

26. Linda Sargent Wood, “Contact, Encounter, and Exchange at Esalen: A Window onto Late Twentieth-Century American Spirituality,” *Pacific Historical Review* 77, no. 3 (2008): 462.

1964 until 1969. Perls's Gestalt therapy claimed to have enhanced awareness of sensation, perception, bodily feelings, emotion, and behavior. Esalen offered a different kind of spiritual renewal than the Jesus People Movement, to be sure, but there was clearly a larger search for personal meaning and fulfillment happening along the California coast.²⁷ The important point is that there were many religious and psychological options in the Bay Area in the 1960s and 1970s. Someone who traveled to California to find personal meaning and sexual adventure during the Summer of Love could have found their way to Perls's counseling sessions at Esalen, or they might have been confronted by Philpott in the Haight.

Philpott's experiences, including his aversion to the kind of drug culture that thrived at a place like Esalen, propelled him head-first into the Jesus People Movement. As a seminarian trained in the Southern Baptist tradition, Philpott was a born-again Christian who believed in a literal reading of the Bible. He was convinced by his experiences in the Haight that Satan and his demons represented a fundamental threat to Christ's victory during the Second Coming. Philpott's insistence on the satanic, miracles, and deliverance ministry was so far out of the Baptist mainstream, though, that his efforts at securing a second graduate degree at Golden Gate Baptist Seminary were rebuffed. When he submitted his thesis on demonology and the occult, he failed. Dr. Richard Cunningham, Philpott's thesis advisor, had apparently signed off on each chapter, but it was simply too odd for others. "He reminded me that Golden Gate was a Southern Baptist institution," Philpott recounts, "and that they would never allow a tongues speaker to be awarded a high academic degree."²⁸ Philpott's new religious beliefs and practices, in other words, were outside of mainstream evangelical and Baptist norms. Dogged and determined, he contacted Bob DeVries at Zondervan publishing,

27. Fritz Perls's own religious beliefs are interesting to explore. Jeffrey J. Kripal argues that Perls had a "cantankerous relationship to religion" because he, "like so many other intellectuals of his generation who had witnessed with horror the Nazis' effective use of religion, was a militant atheist dead set against what he liked to call 'the black mud of occultism and mysticism' (a phrase he got from Freud, who used it to reject Jung)." Jeffrey J. Kripal, *Esalen: America and the Religion of No Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 164.

28. In other places, Philpott was not so upfront about what happened with his thesis. In the most extensive newspaper coverage of *A Manual of Demonology and the Occult*, there is no mention of failing the thesis. For the claim that Dr. Cunningham signed off on each chapter see Philpott, *Memoirs of a Jesus Freak*, 135 and Keown, "The Unusual Ministry of Kent Philpott," M1, M4, for the aforementioned newspaper account.

and the rejected thesis was published as *A Manual of Demonology and the Occult* in 1973. It was six years after Philpott had heard the voice of God while “San Francisco” played on his car radio.

PHILPOTT AND THE SUPPOSED EXISTENCE OF DEMONS IN SAN FRANCISCO BAY

Philpott’s street ministry ultimately gave way to an obsession with books. In 1972, he and his business associate Clifford Silliman opened the Christian General Store in San Rafael, California. Philpott understood his reputation as a Jesus Freak and he wanted to avoid that getting in the way of the business’s success. “We chose the name Christian General Store because we didn’t want to be limited,” Philpott told the *Daily Independent Journal* in a story published on October 7, 1972.²⁹ By the end of the following year, though, his views on demon possession, divine healing, and glossolalia could be read by anyone with \$2.95.³⁰ *A Manual of Demonology and the Occult* publicized Philpott’s charismatic beliefs and practices and provided a glimpse into his nascent ministry with lesbian, gay, and bisexual San Franciscans. For an evangelical audience, largely located outside the Bay Area, the *Manual* portrayed San Francisco in an unflattering light, paving the way for the city to be seen by outsiders as a place of sinful debauchery. Philpott, however, thought he had a solution to San Francisco’s problems. In the *Manual*, he advocated for biblical literalism, explained the relationship between charismatic religious belief and psychological thought, and discussed the perceived dangers associated with sex outside of monogamous marriage.

Biblical literalism had long been a feature of Philpott’s religious beliefs, but after claiming to have seen demonic possession in the Haight, a fundamentalist reading of the Bible helped Philpott formulate his approach to dealing with Satan and his demons. Throughout his *Manual*, Philpott offered “a direct approach” to biblical material. His denouncement of divination and his belief in the casting out of demons, for example, came from Acts 16, a passage in the New Testament where Paul expels an evil spirit from a girl involved in fortune-telling. Because the Bible includes such stories about possession, Philpott insisted on the reality of demons, claiming that they

29. Mary Leydecker, “No Money in This Business: Pair’s New Store ‘A Ministry,’” *Daily Independent Journal* (San Rafael, California), October 7, 1972, 23.

30. This is the price on the cover of the third edition. It was also the price in a Zondervan advertisement. See *Clarion-Ledger* (Jackson, MS), May 5, 1974, 134.

existed in San Francisco. In fact, he made this point clearly in the *Manual's* preface. "I accept the biblical passages dealing with the demonic as authentic and directly applicable to an understanding of contemporary occult and demonic practices," he wrote. He continued: "In line . . . with the biblical material, I am assuming the reality of Satan and demons." Although science might one day determine the existence of demons, he relayed, he already had the proof he needed. "That Satan and the demons already are is my assumption, and I am working from there."³¹ He had seen enough in the Haight to feel self-assured in making this statement.

Philpott's biblical literalism put him in an intriguing dialogue with professional psychology. He had a working knowledge of psychological theories and principles from his time as a student at CSU Sacramento. Throughout the *Manual*, Philpott addressed the limitations of modern-day psychology, particularly on the issue of demon possession. He wrote that the psychological approach to demonology "dismisses the reality of any external spiritual demonic influence or power." Instead, Philpott contended that psychologists misdiagnosed demon possession as several contemporary illnesses. Psychology, he argued, "views demon possession as some type of neurosis, psychosis, or other emotional illness." He even insisted that psychologists misrepresented what Jesus accomplished; Philpott argued that instead of recognizing Jesus's healing power, psychologists understood Jesus as ministering to the mentally ill.³² Philpott contended that it was dangerous for mental health officials to inject postwar America's therapeutic culture back in time. Doing so demeaned Philpott's work throughout the Bay Area and limited his ability to transform the lives of the satanic and the possessed.

In the *Manual*, Philpott also published some of his initial thoughts on the relationship between the psychological and the sacred. He was able to draw from what he supposedly saw in the Haight, for instance, when he speculated about the difficulty in telling whether someone was mentally ill or possessed by satanic demons. He argued that many similarities existed between people suffering from mental illness and individuals under demonic possession. Philpott explicitly pointed to schizophrenia as a condition that could cause confusion. "A person suffering from the psychological disorder termed schizophrenia," he wrote, "may exhibit bizarre symptoms in that he may feel he is being persecuted, perhaps by demons, or that he has been hypnotized, or

31. Philpott, *A Manual of Demonology and the Occult*, 12.

32. *Ibid.*, 19.

even that demons are living inside him.” With some similarities between schizophrenia and demon possession, how could a faith healer or a psychologist know the difference between the two? According to Philpott, there was a clear difference—“the truly demonized person” would rarely refer to their possessed status. As Philpott made clear throughout the *Manual*, Satan and his demons were masters of deception. Whereas the possessed might jump at hearing Jesus’s name, Philpott attested that “[t]he mentally ill will usually have no trouble in speaking of Jesus, and if people try to cast demons out of such a person, he will not be overly upset by it and no evident change of behavior will result.”³³

Philpott’s street ministry in the Haight showed him that the psychological and the sacred could be intimately linked to each other. Philpott recognized that demonization and psychopathy might afflict the same person and that this could make it difficult for a proper diagnosis to be determined. “It may be that the psychopathological personality is more vulnerable to being demonized than other forms of mental illness,” he wrote. This connection was crucial for Philpott’s efforts at syncretizing psychological and spiritual thought, since it demonstrated that psychological ailments could open the way for Satan and his demons to infiltrate humans. This type of dual affliction was something he thought he witnessed as he ministered in San Francisco. At the same time, however, Philpott insisted that mental illness was not a prerequisite for demonization.³⁴

Participation in the occult, according to Philpott, was a primary way for satanic demons to not only possess people but also create the environment for immorality to thrive. Although he warned that occultism was on the rise throughout the nation, it was especially alive and well in San Francisco Bay. Local witches, he asserted, were remarkably guilty of religious and sexual subversion. Philpott noted that the witch’s sabbath was notorious for “sexual orgies.” He claimed that he personally knew people who had joined a witch study group and had told him that witches were a bunch of swingers and wife-swappers. He argued that this kind of group sex and promiscuity helped demonic possession take root in the Bay Area.³⁵

Philpott also contended that habitual lust manifested itself in other ways in sexually liberated corners of San Francisco. The street minister argued that

33. *Ibid.*, 33–34.

34. *Ibid.*, 38.

35. *Ibid.*, 95 and Keown, “The Unusual Ministry of Kent Philpott,” M4, for an account of witches in the Haight.

lust was particularly problematic since it brought on immorality and a change in a person's ethical values. He even claimed that lustful sexual relationships with demons happened in the Bay Area. According to Philpott, there had been a "stout, middle-aged woman" who attended a local Bible study. In counseling with him, she shared not only a long history of being a part of the occult but also a sexual relationship with an incubus, a demon appearing in a male form. Others might be seduced by succubi, or demons who take on female form, he wrote. He contended that the purpose of these sexual demons was to create perverted desires among members of the occult.³⁶ These perversions, in turn, created confusion and further alienated people from God's purpose. Incubi and succubi could only flourish in purportedly immoral places, Philpott contended, like in areas of San Francisco where the occult thrived.

The youth who flocked to San Francisco before and after the Summer of Love probably inspired another belief Philpott included in his *Manual*. At the center of Philpott's religious, sexual, and gendered message in the *Manual* was the conservatism of the traditional family—a patriarch, his wife, and their children. In the post-World War II period, the strength and status of the traditional family became a national obsession, serving as a form of "domestic containment," as historian Elaine Tyler May explains.³⁷ In his work, Philpott specifically suggested that the family defended Americans against demonic sex. The problem, as he saw it, was that demons exercised undue influence on the nation's seemingly innocent youth, thus derailing adolescents and young adults from their so-called natural path to heterosexual marriage. Demons, Philpott contended, sought to pervert God's will for these monogamous and lifelong unions. In the *Manual*, Philpott specifically identified the demonic opposition to God's creation, and he discussed how demons undermined God's desire for people to be "healthy and whole."³⁸

Each of these passages expressed support for the nuclear family. Philpott's reference to God's creation, for instance, conjured images of the gender

36. Philpott, *A Manual of Demonology and the Occult*, 120–21, 142.

37. Elaine Tyler May writes that the emergence of the traditional family in the 1940s and 1950s "was not, as common wisdom tells us, the last gasp of 'traditional' family life with roots deep in the past. Rather, it was the first wholehearted effort to create a home that would fulfill virtually all its members' personal needs through an energized and expressive personal life." For more on the post-World War II roots of the traditional family see Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), 11; and Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York: Basic Books, 1992).

38. Philpott, *A Manual of Demonology and the Occult*, 72, 80, 89.

complementarity of Adam and Eve; and the phrase “healthy and whole” referred to monogamous unions between men and women. This was not coded language. It was, rather, the crux of the conservative Christian message on sex, sexuality, and marriage, the argument that men and women possessed different but complementary traits, skills, and dispositions. According to Philpott, conservative Christians not only needed each other to survive and bring children into the world but to also stave off demons.

A Manual of Demonology and the Occult was not only rooted in Philpott’s charismatic religious beliefs but also his experiences as a street minister in San Francisco. He espoused the importance of biblical literalism, declared the reality of Satan’s demons, and explained some of the connections he saw between religious and psychological thought. He also wrote about immorality, which included several sexual arrangements that perverted God’s supposed design for monogamous marriage between one man and one woman. Despite not containing specific references to same-sex sexuality, the *Manual* provided some intellectual and religious foundations for Philpott’s “ex-gay” ministry. Crucially, Philpott’s books on counseling lesbian, gay, and bisexual people included similar references to casting out demons and performing deliverance ministry. Yet charismatic understandings of demonic possession and divine healing only went so far with the men and women who wanted to escape San Francisco’s “gay lifestyle.” For members of the “ex-gay” community, many of whom had lived in the Bay Area for some time, testimony exposed a range of lived experiences while revealing to readers just how peculiar the adventure from queer-to-straight could be.³⁹

TESTIMONY FROM THE “EX-GAY” MOVEMENT

Philpott’s dedication to a lesbian, gay, and bisexual ministry in the Bay Area intensified in 1972. That year, three men came to him in the same week, all wanting help ending their same-sex desires. Interpreting this as a miracle, Philpott organized a prayer group, which then grew when one of the participants invited three women to join. Over the next decade, the group, called “Love in Action,” flourished as a nationally recognized ministry for lesbian,

39. Philpott also led a petition effort to repeal a San Rafael ordinance that allowed occult practices within city limits. Philpott told the *Daily Independent Journal* that his church, the Church of the Open Door, fell short of collecting the 2,007 signatures needed for this kind of petition. For more on this legal debate see “Anti-Occult Petition Fails,” *Daily Independent Journal*, September 4, 1975, 5; and John B. Todd, “Marin County’s Devilish Problem: How to Handle the Occult,” *The San Francisco Examiner*, July 6, 1975, 4.

gay, and bisexual Christians and transformed Marin County into a center for sexual-orientation-change efforts.⁴⁰ Two of Philpott's books were essential for this growth. In 1975, he published *The Third Sex?*, followed by *The Gay Theology* two years later. In these books, Philpott printed interviews with ten Christians who had purportedly left the "gay lifestyle," analyzed the interviewees' lived experiences, and outlined biblically informed methods for supposedly eradicating same-sex desire. These two books addressed so much of what has constituted the "ex-gay" movement's approach to counseling, from the life history and testimonial approach of the interviews to an emphasis on gender identity, that they deserve close examination and careful analysis.

Philpott's books contain a treasure-trove of information about the origins of the "ex-gay movement," with the interviews offering particularly penetrating insights into Bay Area sexual-orientation and gender-identity change efforts. Though scholarship has chiefly focused on efforts to "pray the gay away," gender identity, including the lived experiences of transgender men and women, have been a focus of the "ex-gay movement" since the 1970s, as Philpott's books show. The interviews account for substantial portions of the books—152 of *The Third Sex?*'s 210 pages and 75 of *The Gay Theology*'s 196 pages.⁴¹ Collectively, the 227 pages of interviews shed light on five women and five men who underwent religious and sexual conversions from the late 1960s into the mid-1970s. The equal representation between men and women was unique to the 1970s. During the early Cold War, psychiatrists and other therapists focused largely on male homosexuality, particularly since many Americans viewed gay men as a threat to the masculine virility that was deemed necessary for defeating communism. In the 1980s and 1990s, the emphasis on men reemerged as a dominant theme, as sexual-orientation-change therapists aimed to counter a perceived crisis in masculinity. The "ex-gay movement" of the 1970s, though, included outreach and therapy to both men and women with same-sex desires.⁴²

40. For an example of early national coverage, see Tom Minnery, "Homosexuals CAN Change," *Christianity Today*, February 6, 1981, 36–41.

41. I counted the number of pages in Philpott's prefaces when calculating page totals.

42. On concern over the so-called treatment of male homosexuality, see Kenneth Lewes, *The Psychoanalytic Theory of Male Homosexuality* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1988); and David K. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

Coming to California for a chance at a new life was an important decision for many of the people Philpott interviewed. Many hailed from somewhere in the Pacific Northwest, and they found their way to the Bay Area for work or pleasure. Susan, for example, was born in Portland and moved to San Francisco. At the time of her interview, the fifty-seven-year-old worked as an administrative supervisor for a computer manufacturer.⁴³ David was a thirty-seven-year-old accountant from Seattle who lived in San Jose when Philpott interviewed him for *The Gay Theology*.⁴⁴ He got out of the military, spent some time in Los Angeles where he hit up gay bars, and found his way north to San Francisco by the early 1970s. Others came from farther away. Polly, a forty-six-year-old administrative supervisor, was originally from a small midwestern town. She moved to Seattle and joined the Air Force, where she “became acquainted with homosexuals and became involved in homosexuality,” before finding her way to San Francisco.⁴⁵ For eight of Philpott’s interviewees, the Bay Area was a place to move to find same-sex lovers.

These sources confirm what historian Allan Bérubé noted more than thirty years ago—lesbian and gay military veterans viewed urban centers as safer spaces for same-sex sex in the post–World War II period.⁴⁶ At some point during their service, these men and women would have spent time in the nation’s big cities. Military members serving in the Pacific, for example, could have found themselves in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Portland, or Seattle for training or leave. Because of this, the veterans that Philpott interviewed knew that cities like San Francisco had a thriving gay culture, even if bars, restaurants, and baths that catered to lesbian women and gay men received increased police surveillance during the so-called lavender scare of the postwar period. For David and Polly, military service introduced them to other lesbian and gay service members and exposed them to the urban centers where they could fulfill their same-sex sexual desires.

Two of Philpott’s ten interviewees spent their formative years in the Bay Area and found themselves immersed in the gay world of San Francisco by

43. Philpott, *The Third Sex?*, 30.

44. Philpott, *The Gay Theology*, 56–57, 65.

45. Philpott, *The Third Sex?*, 82, 99.

46. For more on gay men and lesbians women during and after World War II, see Allan Bérubé, *Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Lesbians in World War II* (New York: The Free Press, 1990): 106–9, 244–45; Amin Ghaziani, “Measuring Urban Sexual Cultures,” *Theory and Society* 43, no. 3/4 (2014): 371–93; and *ibid.*, “There Goes the Gayborhood?” *Contexts* 9, no. 4 (2010): 64–66.

their early twenties. Bob, a forty-five-year-old schoolteacher, lived the first seven years of his life in a small town in the San Joaquin Valley and then moved to San Francisco.⁴⁷ There, he was able to have gay relationships without the surveillance of his family. Importantly, Bob's career required him to be closeted since teachers were often fired for being gay. A twenty-four-year-old man named Jim was the other interviewee originally from the Bay Area. In his words, he was "born in San Francisco [and] reared in an exclusive community in Marin County." He elaborated that his "parents were wealthy" and that he "was more or less a spoiled rich kid."⁴⁸

Nine of Philpott's interviewees had same-sex relationships in the Bay Area.⁴⁹ Their experiences ranged from one-night stands to long-term, monogamous unions. Although the "ex-gay" interviewees highlighted a range of same-sex experiences, most described it as a shallow and promiscuous way of life. Jim, for example, talked extensively about the need to lift weights and to build a perfect body so that he could conform to gay male understandings of strength and beauty. By focusing on bodily aesthetics, he said, he was able to secure the affection of men in the Castro, one of the first gay neighborhoods in San Francisco.⁵⁰ Unlike other interviewees, Jim offered specific geographical details about where he sought out sex. The specific mention of the Castro demonstrated his knowledge of gay life in San Francisco, noting the growth of the city's main "gayborhood" near the Haight. Indeed, the formation of the Castro as *the* gay neighborhood in San Francisco happened as LGBTQ people drifted over from Haight-Ashbury in the late 1960s. It makes sense that Jim would have found himself in the Castro, especially as the Haight became increasingly expensive to live in, as he searched for sex in the early to mid-1970s.⁵¹

Other interviewees held similar criticisms of what they viewed as the "gay lifestyle." In his interview, Ted, a thirty-nine-year-old artist living in San

47. Philpott, *The Third Sex?*, 53.

48. *Ibid.*, 3.

49. Veronica was the only interviewee who might not have engaged in a gay relationship in the Bay Area. Veronica was, at the time of her interview, a thirty-four-year-old nurse who was born in Melbourne, Australia, and lived in Toronto, Canada. See Philpott, *The Gay Theology*, 38–55, for Veronica's interview.

50. Philpott, *The Third Sex?*, 16.

51. For information on the formation of the Castro as a "gayborhood," see Christina B. Hanhardt, *Safe Space: Gay Neighborhood History and the Politics of Violence* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2013); and Randy Shilts, *The Mayor of Castro Street: The Life and Times of Harvey Milk* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982).

Francisco, described a particularly active sexual past. He had spent his early twenties “turning tricks for money” in the Los Angeles bar scene.⁵² Like Jim, Ted critiqued gay men as shallow and only concerned about physical beauty. He contended that fitness culture was a prominent part of what Philpott called “the homosexual thing.” “I guess it was,” Ted admitted when asked this seemingly leading question, “because I knew if you had a good body you would be accepted right away—you didn’t have to work at it. You could just stand around and people would pick you up,” he said.⁵³ In their interviews with Philpott, Jim and Ted had clear criticisms of what they interpreted as unsavory parts of San Francisco’s gay life.

Philpott’s interviews also revealed what lesbian and gay partnerships looked like in the Bay Area in the 1960s and 1970s. In contrast to depictions of promiscuity, many of the people interviewed for *The Third Sex?* and *The Gay Theology* had entered long-term relationships and expressed a desire to marry and have a family. In these instances, the connections between conservative understandings of religion and sexuality were paramount. Anne recalled having “many affairs” before meeting her lesbian partner, whom she lived with for five-and-a-half years. “When I became a Christian I was able to leave my lover,” she informed Philpott.⁵⁴ The ability for God to intervene in ending same-sex relationships popped up in other interviews, too. Frank Worthen, one of Love in Action’s leaders, had the same male lover for eleven years, although the two did not live together. After his conversion experience, Frank claimed that God kept the gay lover away from him since he would not have been able to resist the strong sexual and emotional bond the two had developed over such a long period of time. Frank believed there was something else he was called to do. He talked admiringly about the significance of Christian fellowship as he abandoned the “gay lifestyle.”⁵⁵ Philpott wrote that it was necessary for “ex-gays” to leave these same-sex relationships, asserting that they “must really die to follow Jesus.” He argued that the religious and sexual conversion process required abandoning their old “lifestyle” of same-sex sexuality as they embraced their born-again selves.⁵⁶

One commonality that “ex-gay” men and women in the Bay Area shared, as Anne and Frank’s experiences show, was a strong religious conversion

52. Philpott, *The Third Sex?*, 116.

53. *Ibid.*, 115.

54. Philpott, *The Gay Theology*, 5.

55. *Ibid.*, 29–30.

56. Philpott, *The Third Sex?*, 189.

experience. Most had been raised in Christian homes, and nearly all the people Philpott interviewed for his books had drifted from Christianity at some point in their youth.⁵⁷ Frank, for instance, abandoned his faith when he moved to San Francisco and heard that a person could not be gay and Christian. As he approached his fortieth birthday, he experienced six-to-eight months of religious rebirth that fostered a sexual awakening that aimed to eliminate his same-sex desires. Eve, on the other hand, was a successful forty-year-old businesswoman who had grown up in a Catholic home for girls in Georgia. When she learned that the Bible declared that same-sex sexuality was a sin, Eve seemingly left behind years of lesbian sexuality and became a fervent believer in God. She devoted herself to studying the Bible, believing that Jesus would help her fight off the supposed sinfulness of her same-sex desires. Polly had a similar experience after being told that it was impossible to be both lesbian and Christian. In her interview, she recounted how she went to Philpott's Christian General Store to purchase books to learn about sin and salvation. "As I studied I started taking a good look at my life," she recalled. "All I saw was the emptiness—the past that had nothing in it. And I saw that I really had nothing to look forward to." She got on her knees and asked God to forgive her.⁵⁸ Many of these religious conversions happened in the Bay Area.

Charismatic religious belief also emerged as a key theme in some of the interviews. More specifically, some interviewees talked about what they viewed as the very real presence of Satan in San Francisco and in their lives. Frank, for instance, discussed how Satan influenced his sexual desires. "Satan brought all sorts of tempting situations to me" after a religious conversion, Frank told Philpott. "Everything that was totally unavailable to me before became available." Frank claimed that sex with "beautiful young people" became easy and that it was Satan making this possible. Only through

57. The religious upbringings of the interviewees in *The Third Sex?* included: raised Catholic (Jim); attended a Baptist church for most of life and switched to a Presbyterian church (Bob); abandoned the Baptist tradition (Ted); raised Catholic but attended a Lutheran Church (Susan); had been a member of the Church of Christ (Polly); and a Catholic background but attended a Lutheran Church (Eve). For this breakdown of religious and denominational affiliations see Philpott, *The Third Sex?*, 165.

58. Socially conservative readings of the Bible stress several passages that supposedly prohibit same-sex sexual activity. These are not the only interpretations of the Bible, though. As Heather R. White notes, "Before the 1940s, the Bible's seemingly plain condemnation of homosexuality was not plain at all." For information on how the anti-gay interpretation of the Bible was a twentieth-century invention see Heather R. White, *Reforming Sodom: Protestants and the Rise of Gay Rights* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 1–3.

cooperation with Christ and through Christian fellowship did Frank feel like he was able to resist Satan's lustful traps.⁵⁹

Satan seemingly did the same thing to Eve. In her interview with Philpott, she said, "It seems as though Satan just walked in and took over." She thought that Satan recognized her desire to rebel against sexual norms. "He saw that I was getting strength, and he didn't like it," she speculated. "I went right back into his road again." She clarified that she did not act on her same-sex desires, fearing that she would not be saved. "I don't want to jeopardize my eternal happiness," Eve elaborated. "This is what stops me because God can call us at any time. He could call me right in the middle of an orgy."⁶⁰ Exactly how Satan (or at least his demons) would have led Eve to that orgy was left unsaid, but her statement documented how she viewed same-sex sexuality in the Bay Area after her conversion. Eve's belief in being called was a guiding principle that kept her from engaging in group sex in San Francisco.

Though these interviews might have mentioned the existence of Satan and demons in San Francisco, there was less commitment to other charismatic beliefs. Philpott's interviews, despite being a key component of the analysis he included in his books, contained only one example of exorcism. Ted, who had been born during the Great Depression, had participated in the occult, an experience that had supposedly led him to gay sex. In his interview with Philpott, Ted recalled how deliverance was a necessary part of his counseling experience. He specifically noted that he was afraid to undergo an exorcism. "I was scared—this was all new to me," he said, "but I knew that I needed deliverance." Philpott was the person who purportedly expelled the demons from Ted. Philpott pronounced that there had indeed been "a spirit of homosexuality that was cast out" of Ted during the session. As he responded to Ted's admission of needing deliverance, Philpott reminded him that not everyone had to undergo such drastic steps to eliminate their same-sex desires. "Not all people involved in homosexuality need deliverance," he said to Ted. "In your case the main influence was the occult. Being exposed to the occult left you wide-open to becoming demon-possessed. So, really, you went through a Christian exorcism."⁶¹ In relaying this message, Philpott exposed

59. Philpott, *The Gay Theology*, 26–27.

60. Philpott, *The Third Sex?*, 150.

61. For Ted's experience with deliverance ministry see *Ibid.*, 134–35.

the most extreme of his charismatic beliefs to readers; and he relayed that the occult, which supposedly fostered same-sex desires, was alive and well in the Bay Area.

While none of Philpott's ten interviewees specifically identified as transgender, they did talk about gender presentation and gender roles. The women were especially forthright around this issue. Eve, for instance, made some of her most noteworthy observations about gender identity when she discussed her experiences in the military. She observed that during basic training, all of the women instructors were "very masculine-looking. They acted like they were men." Initially, Eve had no clue why everyone acted so masculine. But, when she transferred to overseas duty, she found one of the masculine women sexually attractive. There was an air of sexual promiscuousness that pervaded the detachment, she contended. According to Eve, "Everyone from the first sergeant on down was gay," and as a femme Eve pursued the company of butch women.⁶²

After being discharged from the military, Eve continued to be attracted to butch women; and she thought that her femme identity created a sense of gendered understanding in her relationships. She could satisfy the feminine and "wifely" role while she pursued emotional and sexual comfort from masculine women. Her attractions, in other words, described more than gender presentation. Rather, they created a sense of the gender wholeness that purportedly defined relationships between men and women. A city like San Francisco, with its greater acceptance of a range of gender presentations for women, offered Eve relationships that included both femme and butch gender roles. The focus on gender identity—and not only sexual desire—highlights a core feature of the sexual conversion efforts that sprang up in the Bay Area. On top of undergoing a religious conversion, Philpott's counseling stressed traditional gender roles and presentation. Eve and the other people Philpott interviewed never expressed a transgender identity. They did, however, share that some form of "gender confusion" led them to the "gay lifestyle."

62. Jack Halberstam wrote one of the core texts on the concept of "female masculinity." In it, Halberstam critiques the privileged status of male masculinity and argues that for over two centuries, versions of female masculinity have offered a distinct alternative. Notably, Halberstam includes extensive discussions on the politics of butch/femme in lesbian communities. These discussions reflect what Eve noted in her interview. See Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998). For information on Eve's gender identity, see Philpott, *The Third Sex?*, 144, 147.

Philpott's approach to eliminating same-sex desires was not a foolproof plan for creating heterosexual attractions. Anne, for example, declared that she was no longer attracted to women and that she had "gained an attraction to men but still struggled like heck relating emotionally to men." Although it was several years after her conversion experience, Anne said that she was only "beginning to feel more and more that I am attracted to men."⁶³ Frank admitted to something similar. He recognized that he would not "automatically become heterosexual" and that it would take years for women to appeal to him. He claimed that marriage was a real possibility for him in the future, but that he would be content if he never married. "I am content in the Lord," he shared. "And if I stay single the rest of my life, this is just fine with me. I'm happy the way I am." He continued: "I don't need a wife, though I might like to have one."⁶⁴ Others, like Ted, might have had an easier time with sexual conversion because they had previously been sexually active with the opposite sex.⁶⁵ Eve, however, admitted that she had no opposite-sex attractions. When asked if she felt like she could be heterosexual, Eve responded matter of factly: "I don't think so."⁶⁶

The range of sexual and religious conversions contained in Philpott's books underlined the idiosyncratic nature of his Bay Area "ex-gay" ministries in the 1970s. Commenting on contemporary "ex-gay" ministry efforts, the scholar Lynne Gerber acknowledges what she called the "queerish" nature of "ex-gays" who devote themselves to celibacy instead of submitting to what they viewed as same-sex sexual lust. She writes that "[t]heir celibacy is thus a queerish one, requiring abstinence from sex strongly desired and permitting sex tepidly desired."⁶⁷ As Philpott's interviews exhibited, religious and sexual conversions oftentimes required celibacy for a period of time before heterosexuality purportedly occurred. Philpott was clear on this. He even warned the men and women he counseled against rushing into an opposite-sex relationship to foster heterosexual desires. The interviews in Philpott's book showed that sexual conversion was not simply "praying the gay away." It

63. Philpott, *The Gay Theology*, 13–14.

64. *Ibid.*, 34–35.

65. Philpott, *The Third Sex?*, 118.

66. *Ibid.*, 152.

67. Lynne Gerber, "Queerish' Celibacy: Reorienting Marriage in the Ex-Gay Movement," in *Queer Christianities: Lived Religion in Transgressive Forms*, eds. Kathleen T. Talvacchia, Michael F. Pettinger, and Mark Larrimore (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 25, 30.

involved, instead, years of Christian fellowship. Religious conversions might feel instantaneous, but sexual reorientation was much more difficult.⁶⁸

Philpott privileged the testimony of “ex-gay” men and women in the Bay Area in *The Third Sex?* and *The Gay Theology*. This testimonial (or witnessing) approach was a powerful one, even if the sexual conversions seemed incomplete. Philpott presumed that these personal stories revealed how human agency could remake religious and sexual selves. By devoting so much time to the lived experiences of the “ex-gays” in his own Marin County ministry, he foregrounded the potential for change.⁶⁹ Over time, “ex-gay” testimonies became weapons in the nation’s culture wars, with religious right groups using them to delegitimize the authenticity of lesbian, gay, and bisexual identities.⁷⁰ Supporters of so-called traditional family values would also, in due time, fuse the sacred and the psychological as Philpott did in *The Third Sex?* and *The Gay Theology*. He did not know it then, but the self-described Jesus Freak furnished the “ex-gay” ministry movement with a counseling approach that has lasted into the twenty-first century.

PHILPOTT COUNSELS LESBIAN, GAY, AND BISEXUAL CHRISTIANS

Philpott set up the Marin Christian Counseling Center in the same San Rafael building that housed his Christian General Store. In these quarters, Philpott drew from his academic coursework in psychology, along with his seminary training, to offer a syncretic approach to religious and sexual conversions. On February 8, 1975, Don Keown of San Rafael’s *Marin Magazine* shared that Philpott had begun counseling gay and lesbian people there. Philpott expressed how this was a much-needed effort. “Homosexuality is huge in the Bay Area, and is growing,” he told Keown. “And it is a very complicated problem, and a very difficult ministry. But it has to be done. It is a genuine ministry.”⁷¹ More than other works from the 1970s, *The Third*

68. Philpott emphasized suffering when he discussed celibacy. “Having to be celibate after months or years of homosexuality is difficult and involves suffering,” he wrote. “But suffering that is endured actually builds up and produces strong character, a solid personality.” For more on the theme of suffering see Philpott, *The Gay Theology*, 80–82.

69. Waidunas, *The Straight Line*, 78.

70. Erzen writes that “Christian Right activism now directly relies upon the personal testimonies of ex-gays to oppose any local, state, or national attempts to secure rights for gay people in the realm of marriage, gay-positive school curricula, partner benefits, and adoption policy.” For the religious right’s use of “ex-gay” testimony to counter the gay rights movement see Erzen, *Straight to Jesus*, 185.

71. Keown, “The Unusual Ministry of Kent Philpott,” M4.

Sex? and *The Gay Theology* outlined what “genuine ministry” for sexual orientation change looked like. In these books, Philpott combined psychological theories about gender and sexual development with conservative religious understandings of morality. There were not only discussions of psychological theories about sex, sexuality, and child development, but also arguments about the importance of the traditional family. For Philpott, it was difficult to treat any ailment, no matter how small, without addressing the religious and the psychological elements. In these ways, Philpott offered what he interpreted as a total counseling approach, one that appealed to the people who traveled to the Bay Area to try to alter their same-sex desires.

In *The Third Sex?*, Philpott shared how he had fused theories of child development and gender identity with a conservative reading of the Bible at the Marin Christian Counseling Center. He declared that no one was born lesbian, gay, or bisexual but that God created everyone heterosexual. For Philpott, this was an important point to counter the LGBTQ rights movement’s claims that sexual minorities had been “born that way,” a belief that was growing more popular in queer literature and in medical publications. It was also a way to incorporate psychosexual theories about sexual object choice into his book. He insisted, for example, that each of the people he interviewed for *The Third Sex?* had been damaged during their formative years and subsequently “chose to live the life of a homosexual.” On these points, Philpott echoed (though he did not cite) the work of psychiatrists who traced same-sex desires to overbearing mothers, deficient fathers, and traumatic childhood experiences. Freudians and neo-Freudians proposed that if nothing went awry during childhood, everyone would develop heterosexual desires. In his own counseling, Philpott borrowed from the Freudian and neo-Freudian traditions, which he undoubtedly learned as a student in psychology at CSU Sacramento, and “concentrated on the early years” of “ex-gay” lives. He swore that “roots of rebellion are usually buried there.” Like an orthodox psychiatrist, Philpott proposed that it was necessary to expose “old sick patterns” that emerged from “neurotic family relations.”⁷²

Along these lines, Philpott placed special emphasis on traumatic childhoods that included “gender confusion.” He pointed out how he never personally felt deficiently masculine at any point in his life. In *The Third*

72. For more on these theories see Jack Drescher, “I’m Your Handyman: A History of Reparative Therapies,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 36, no 1 (1998): 5–24; Ronald Bayer, *Homosexuality and American Psychiatry: The Politics of Diagnosis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987); and Philpott, *The Third Sex?*, 192.

Sex?, he reflected on how his parents did everything possible to ensure that his gender identity matched his birth sex. “Surely by age five,” he wrote, “I wore pants and not a dress.” Other markers of gender helped him grow into a stereotypical version of post–World War II masculinity. His mom purchased him western boots, a Roy Rogers shirt, and a cap pistol so that he could assume the role of cowboy. “It was clear—I wasn’t a cowgirl,” he emphasized. Because his parents had apparently done a good job, others, including the kids at school, his teachers, and neighbors, treated him like a boy as well. His parents also ensured that he understood the fatherly role that he would assume later in life. “My folks talked about me growing up to be like my dad,” he wrote, “and that’s what I wanted because I liked my dad.” These experiences, which happened in and near his childhood home in Portland, Oregon, reinforced Philpott’s masculine gender identity in ways that “ex-gay” men apparently had not felt during their own childhoods.⁷³ Having one’s gender identity match their birth sex was deemed essential for heterosexual development. The interrelationship between sex, gender, and sexuality demonstrated the precariousness of heterosexuality and normative gender identity in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s.

In addition to psychologizing the roots of same-sex attractions, *The Third Sex?* revealed gendered assumptions about the nature of “ex-gay” counseling in the Bay Area. Philpott wrote that although female counselors could be effective in some circumstances, male counselors would likely see better results with male as well as female clients. This matched the patriarchal culture of post-World War II religious American culture. Male counselors, he shared, needed to have a firm love of Christ, exhibit confidence in their counseling ability, and earn the trust of those they saw in ministry. The gendered component of the counselor-counselee relationship was crucial. According to Philpott, it might be unhealthy for women counselors to work with male clients because “the male homosexual has difficulty relating to women anyway” and because “[m]any male homosexuals detest women or are afraid of them.” More important, Philpott warned that women counselors might defy the patriarchal order that the Bible purportedly demanded. “It is not appropriate (or in good order) for a woman to be guiding a man into assuming his God-given role,” he commanded. Philpott claimed that men needed to teach other men how to be straight. It was what his

73. Philpott, *The Third Sex?*, 191.

conservative reading of the Bible taught him about Christian heteropatriarchy and the relationship between men and women.⁷⁴

In the two years between the publication of *The Third Sex?* and *The Gay Theology*, this heteropatriarchal message helped propel the “ex-gay movement” in the Bay Area. After getting in touch with another “ex-gay” ministry, EXIT at Melodyland (located in Southern California), Philpott and Frank Worthen helped found Exodus International, an umbrella organization to connect sexual-orientation-change therapists with each other. Philpott’s role in the growth of the “ex-gay movement” in the mid-1970s cannot be overstated. *The Third Sex?* circulated far and wide. People were doing more than simply reading the book, though. Philpott recalled how after the book’s publication, people showed up to Marin County with suitcases, looking for help from Love in Action. Veronica, the only non-American interviewed for either of Philpott’s books on “conversion therapy,” traveled to the Bay Area from Toronto after reading *The Third Sex?*. Love in Action established Christian living centers for these transplants, and as a result, the Bay Area became a hotspot for sexual and religious conversions.

By the time Philpott published *The Gay Theology* in 1977, he had over four years of experience ministering to lesbian, gay, and bisexual Californians. The counseling itself remained relatively simple, with prayer groups, social functions, and one-on-one sessions for those who wanted extra guidance. Many of these meetings took place in the Marin Christian Counseling Center. Philpott presented a much more complicated understanding of the “ex-gay” “problem” in *The Gay Theology*, however. He proposed that faith-based counselors might have to help “ex-gays” through their homophobia, which included a hatred of their own same-sex desires. On this issue, Philpott discussed how some “ex-gay” men and women worried about their sexual identities. These people, he claimed, needed to be reminded that God “made us male and female” and that homosexuality “is totally contrary to reality.”⁷⁵

Philpott also encountered the problem of misogyny among the men and women who came for counseling—a condition he defined as not only the fear of marriage but also the distrust of the opposite sex. It was hard to speculate why some members of the Bay Area feared and distrusted the opposite sex: some had suffered emotional, physical, and sexual abuse, while others had seemingly not. But, for this affliction, Philpott hypothesized that

74. Ibid., 183–84.

75. Philpott, *The Gay Theology*, 134, 136–37, 142.

“a misogamist might ignorantly suppose himself to be homosexual as he tries to analyze why he fears the opposite sex.”⁷⁶ Although concerns over misogamy were new to Love in Action, Philpott had an answer to this purported problem. He stated that much like the homophobes he counseled, misogamists needed to know the “truth” about marriage. They had to be told that “sex in marriage is good and right and can be extremely beneficial.” As a corollary to this principle, Philpott thought that it was important for misogamists to know that since God “made sex,” they should see heterosexual sexual activity in marriage as healthy.⁷⁷ Once more, Philpott exposed readers to the range of issues he counseled just north of San Francisco.

Philpott published his two books on counseling lesbian, gay, and bisexual clients as American mental health officials entered a lengthy debate over the meanings of sex, gender, and sexuality. In 1973, the American Psychiatric Association (APA) removed “homosexuality” from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM)*.⁷⁸ Although it is tempting to view the “ex-gay movement” as a backlash to the APA’s decision, Philpott did not reference what was happening in the world of professional psychology in either *The Third Sex?* or *The Gay Theology*. He had started ministering to gay and lesbian people before the APA seriously considered removing homosexuality from the *DSM*. If anything, Philpott viewed the psychiatric approach to “curing” homosexuality as inadequate, claiming that it failed to address the religious needs of patients.⁷⁹ He was offering a new approach to addressing same-sex sexual desires. Unlike the professional psychiatrists and psychologists who wanted to remove homosexuality from the *DSM*, Philpott combined charismatic religious beliefs in demons, miracles, and divine healing with some psychological theories on gender development in his Bay Area ministry. If a licensed mental health professional had done something like this, they would have been at risk of losing their practice. Philpott, however, offered Christian men and women a supposed “cure” to same-sex desire that spoke to the reactionary conservative politics of the late 1960s and the 1970s. The

76. Ibid.

77. Ibid.

78. The American Psychiatric Association removed “homosexuality *per se*” from the *DSM* in 1973. In 1980, the APA added “ego-dystonic homosexuality” to the *DSM*, though. This new designation allowed for the “treatment” of men and women who thought that their same-sex desires interfered with the ideal images they held of themselves. Until ego-dystonic homosexuality was eliminated from the *DSM* in 1987, the APA sanctioned “conversion therapy.”

79. Bayer’s *Homosexuality and American Psychiatry* still offers the best examination of debates to remove homosexuality *per se* from the *DSM*.

success of Philpott's books demonstrated the continued demand for "conversion therapy," particularly among conservative Christians, as mental health organizations started to oppose efforts to "change" someone's same-sex desires.

PHILPOTT'S LEGACY AND THE "EX-GAY MOVEMENT" SINCE THE 1970S

The "ex-gay movement" could not have emerged just anywhere. In the San Francisco Bay Area, sexual liberation confronted religious conservatism head-on, creating the circumstances for sexual conversion efforts to occur. Kent Philpott found himself in the middle of this cultural revolution. He joined the Jesus People Movement and ministered to down-and-out hippies in the Haight. In the process, he launched into ministering to lesbian, gay, and bisexual people, believing he could convert them to heterosexuality. He wrote about what he had seen in the Bay Area, publishing *A Manual of Demonology and the Occult*, which served as an intellectual precursor to *The Third Sex?* and *The Gay Theology*. Through his ministry work and books, Philpott set the stage for the next thirty years of "conversion therapy." He combined conservative religious thought with psychological understandings of sexual and gender development. He also pioneered the anti-gay movement's testimonial approach through his books' interviews. *The Third Sex?* and *The Gay Theology* exposed readers to a countermovement forming in the unofficial capital of LGBTQ America. Because of Philpott's efforts, San Francisco Bay became a key site that fueled the growth of the "ex-gay movement."

Despite being an influential figure at the start of the "ex-gay movement," there are several reasons Philpott's role has been either erased from or downplayed in histories of "conversion therapy." First, charismatic influences on the "ex-gay movement" waned, at least among some of the key advocates of sexual conversion efforts. Beginning in the 1980s, the nascent religious right eschewed its charismatic factions when it threw intense support behind the cause of "conversion therapy," largely to win over people wary of miracle faith healing. By downplaying the charismatic roots of "conversion therapy," the "ex-gay movement" was better able to draw support from several religious traditions, including but not limited to Catholicism, Mormonism, and Orthodox Judaism.⁸⁰

80. There is a rife scholarly debate over the formation of the religious right. Historians like Neil J. Young have argued that theology, not politics, defined the religious conservative resurgence in the 1970s. In many ways, though, one can see similar readings of the Old and New Testament within

Second, Philpott experienced a sexual “fall,” a common feature for many “ex-gay” ministers. Often, these ministers, most of whom are men, revealed themselves to have experienced sexual desire for other men. Even while serving as ministers to gay men, these Christian counselors had sex with other men. Understandably, gay rights leaders have pointed to these “falls” as evidence that “ex-gay ministry” efforts are a sham.

There is no evidence that Philpott was sexually attracted to men. Instead, his “fall” was different—he and his wife divorced after he sexually assaulted his adopted daughter. As a result of the scandal, he temporarily resigned from being a religious and counseling leader in Marin County. Philpott’s sexual lust, not to mention his divorce, put him on shaky ground with the conservative religious and social beliefs of the emerging “ex-gay movement.” Since he was unable to control his sexual passions, Philpott was no longer seen as a model minister who could help Christians abandon the supposedly sinful life of same-sex relations.

Lastly, there were always questions about whether the events in Philpott’s books were true. John Evans, known as Ted in *The Third Sex?*, accused Philpott of taking liberties when describing religious and sexual conversions; and importantly, it is not difficult to find these discrepancies when reading Philpott’s books. Deliverance ministry, for instance, appeared much more prominently in Philpott’s analysis than in the interviews themselves. If deliverance was an essential part of the “ex-gay” religious conversion experience, interviewees would have mentioned it when asked about their efforts to leave the “gay lifestyle.” Even more revealing was how some of the early members of Love in Action later came out as proud gay men.⁸¹ For at least forty years, stories of men and women abandoning the “ex-gay movement” after learning to live out-and-proud as queer people have undercut the belief that “conversion therapy” can “change” someone’s same-sex desires.

California, though, has remained prominent in the therapeutic and political wars over “conversion therapy.” Dr. James Dobson’s Focus on the Family, founded in 1977 in Southern California, wholeheartedly supported sexual

the “ex-gay movement,” whether by Protestants, Catholics, Mormons, or Jews, especially when interpreting the story of Sodom and Gomorrah. For the challenges that faced the religious right as it sought to bridge faith and politics across religious traditions see Neil J. Young, *We Gather Together: The Religious Right and the Problem of Interfaith Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

81. For information on John Evans, see Wayne Besen, *Anything but Straight: Unmasking the Scandals and Lies Behind the Ex-Gay Myth* (Binghamton, N.Y.: Harrington Park Press, 2003), 66–67, 79. For Philpott’s analysis of deliverance ministry, see *The Third Sex?*, 168.

orientation and gender identity change efforts in the 1980s and 1990s.⁸² By the early 1990s, another California transplant, Dr. Joseph Nicolosi, was the country's foremost specialist on sexual orientation and gender identity change efforts. Nicolosi published books on what he called "reparative therapy," co-founded the National Association for Research & Therapy of Homosexuality (NARTH), and became a prominent speaker at religious right conferences. Nicolosi also teamed up with Dobson's Focus on the Family throughout the 1990s as the culture wars raged across the United States.

The type of modern-day "conversion therapy" that Philpott helped launch—and others have refined—has rightfully come under increased medical and political scrutiny. In 1998, the American Psychiatric Association issued a statement against "conversion therapy," and a string of declarations from other medical associations soon followed.⁸³ Importantly, these recent statements specified transgender individuals as targets of "conversion therapy." Citing these statements as well as emerging scholarship on the dangers of sexual orientation and gender identity change efforts, California became the first state to ban licensed mental health professionals from offering sexual orientation and gender identity therapies to minors. Since then, other states across the American West, including Oregon, New Mexico, Nevada, Colorado, and Utah, have likewise banned "conversion therapy" for minors. Because contemporary "conversion therapy" has its roots in the Haight-Ashbury District of San Francisco, it was fitting that California led this legal charge against what most Americans, including every major psychological organization and mental health association, view as an efficacious and inhumane practice.⁸⁴

Indeed, as LGBTQ rights advocates have challenged the ethics of "conversion therapy" by publishing the stories of the harm that sexual reorientation change efforts cause, the number of Americans who support

82. For more information on James Dobson's and Focus on the Family's efforts to convert sexual and gender minorities, see Hilde Løvdal Stephens, *Family Matters: James Dobson and Focus on the Family's Crusade for the Christian Home* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2019), 156–93.

83. See American Psychiatric Association, "Position Statement on Conversion Therapy and LGBTQ Patients," December 2018, <https://www.psychiatry.org/File%20Library/About-APA/Organization-Documents-Policies/Policies/Position-Conversion-Therapy.pdf>, for the APA's various statements against conversion and reparative therapies since the late 1990s.

84. For an overview of efforts to ban "conversion therapy," see Carl Streed, J. Seth Anderson, Chris Babits, and Michael A. Ferguson, "Changing Medical Practice, Not Patients—Putting an End to Conversion Therapy," *New England Journal of Medicine* 381, no. 6 (August 8, 2019): 500–502.

“changing” someone’s same-sex desires has plummeted to less than 10 percent. This declining support for “conversion therapy” is not only a remarkable change from the 1970s, it also demonstrates growing, though not nearly expansive enough, support for sexual and gendered nonconformity throughout many parts of the United States, including California. With increasing social and political backing for LGBTQ rights, critics of “conversion therapy” have been able to highlight the dangers that sexual reorientation efforts pose to the mental health and well-being of children, adolescents, and adults. In the 1970s and 1980s, gay rights activists published horror stories about suicides that resulted from “conversion therapy.” In the twenty-first century, there has been an explosion of memoirs about the psychological damage caused by “ex-gay” counseling efforts. In addition, some of these memoirs highlight how “conversion therapists” have targeted trans youth. These publications helped Americans comprehend the immorality and harm of trying to change someone’s sexuality or gender identity.⁸⁵

Despite this changing political terrain, as well as his “fall” after sexually assaulting his adopted daughter, Philpott has remained committed to “conversion therapy.” “The political battles presently being waged and won” by LGBTQ rights activists, he wrote in 2013, “will only be celebrated in the here and now and not in the forever, which is where we are all headed.”⁸⁶ This comment from Philpott highlights how diehard “ex-gay” ministers remain committed to the reactionary world of religious conservatism that took root in the 1960s. Philpott’s ideas and practices about counseling lesbian, gay, and bisexual Christians reveal a deep opposition to urban life that drove many, including former hippies, from cities like San Francisco, to conservative faith, to conversion, and to country life.

The counterculture, widespread protests, and drug burnout brought a reaction in the back-to-nature movement, which was illustrated in songs about leaving cities, as well as a movement to Christianity, as echoed in songs by The Byrds, Bob Dylan, and others. Increasingly, hippies and other members of the counterculture found it hard to wear flowers in their hair in cities

85. Streed et al, “Changing Medical Practice, Not Patients,” 500–02. The most prominent memoir about the dangers of “conversion therapy” is probably Garrard Conley, *Boy Erased: A Memoir of Identity, Faith, and Family* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2017).

86. Kent Philpott, “Gay Is Now Good?,” July 5, 2013, <http://kentphilpott.com/2013/07/05/gay-is-now-good>.

where racial minorities were on the move and pollution was rising. In some ways, Philpott and other Jesus Freaks previewed the conservative turn of the baby boom generation, particularly as hippies grew up and searched for new understandings of self-actualization and personal fulfillment. Some headed for communes. More “sold out” and entered corporate America. And others, like Philpott, transformed conservative Christianity in the United States.

In the 1970s, conservative opposition to modern understandings of sex, gender, and sexuality fueled the rise of the “ex-gay movement,” with Philpott serving as a prominent leader and voice for religious-based “conversion therapy” efforts. After his sexual assault scandal, Philpott had to abandon his leadership role in the “ex-gay movement,” though his personal and moral shortcomings are not the only reasons why “conversion therapy” has become an unpopular practice. Many Americans have come to recognize the importance of gendered and sexual diversity to the human experience. Philpott has had to turn to talk about “the forever” (or Heaven) because the American public generally understands that it is unethical and dangerous to try to “change” someone’s sexual orientation or gender identity. In the 1960s and 1970s, Philpott’s ideas about “curing” lesbian, gay, and bisexual people were widely held across the United States. Fortunately, much has changed in the ensuing years. Philpott, the former Jesus Freak and leader of the “ex-gay movement,” is now part of a distinct minority who believe that “conversion therapy” works.

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