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"I'm a Jesus feminist": Understandings of Faith, Gender, and Feminism Among Christian Women

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Faith, Gender, and Feminism Among Christian Women

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ABSTRACT

The emergence of the Christian Right and the feminist movement in the mid-to-late 20th century have had a significant impact on the political, psychological, and social landscape of the U.S., and this is especially true for Christian women who sit at the crossroads of these movements. To understand the context surrounding this group, I examine different areas of sociological literature: the primacy of gender and religion in identity formation, Christian marriage and gender roles, the "culture wars" of the Christian Right, and a brief overview of feminist theory. Utilizing qualitative research methods, I interviewed 13 self-identified Christian women to learn how they understood their female and Christian identities, as well as how they negotiated gender roles. Participants were also asked to share their definition and identification with feminism (or lack of identification). A short quantitative survey followed the interview. Themes that emerged from this research include idealized understandings of faith and self, complex and contradictory practice, and rejection of labels. Through self-definition, participants were able to navigate away from stereotypes and communicate their beliefs as they related to their experience.

INTRODUCTION

As the future of feminism and Christianity in the U.S. are being reinvestigated and reconsidered, this research seeks to contribute to the sociological understanding of Christian women. The emergence of the Christian Right in the late 1970's was a formative time for U.S. politics, religion, and culture, and their vocal discussions about social conservatism, marriage, and gender roles have reverberated through popular culture and sociological literature. Another significant wave of influence has come from the Feminist Movement, which has had lasting changes on legal, economic, and social opportunities for women. Although Christians and feminists are often presented in the media as arch-rivals, this research was conducted to see how Christian women understand their own identity and how they respond to their experiences and beliefs. Their complex, thoughtful, and sometimes contradictory responses demonstrate that, in the words of one of my participants, "I don't identify with all feminists just because I am a feminist, and I don't identify with all Christians because I'm Christian."

Qualitative research methods were used to capture the nuanced narrative of each participant, and a total of 13 self-identified Christian women volunteered to participate in one-on-one interviews. Major themes that arose from this research included: idealized theory of faith, identity, and gender issues in the church; complex and contradictory practice as a Christian woman, in marriage, and in their public lives; and rejection of labels, specifically negative associations with "Christian woman" and "feminist". Although these findings are not novel in sociological literature, I believe that they further

substantiate and detail how Christian women navigate their experience, beliefs, and practices. By actively choosing how to define themselves, "Christian woman", and "feminist", these participants found a middle ground where they felt empowered in their faith and in their female identity.

A reader is likely to immediately notice that the literature review and research here do not elaborate on issues of race and class, and I acknowledge that including these areas would significantly increase the generalizability, complexity, and relevance of this topic. It is my hope that qualitative research of Christian women will continue and that these dimensions will provide further insight as to how race and class shape Christian women's experience. Additionally, this research is specific to the U.S. context, and even more specifically, to Southern California.

This research was deeply personal for me, and the idea for this came out of my own experiences and observations in Christian contexts, and it was also highly influenced by my sociological courses at Pomona College. In all steps of this research I have tried to remove my own bias as much as possible, but my fingerprints and influence are fundamentally integrated into the research design and interviews. That said, I believe that my commonalities with participants helped to develop trust between us, and that trust made the interviews more honest and open to sharing their experiences and opinions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The role and identity of Christian women is a pressing question in our contemporary age, as the relevance of the Christian Right and the legacy of feminism is being debated. To understand sociological and psychological literature discussing the intersection of these factors, I review several relevant areas of research. First, I briefly review understandings of gender and religion as they relate to identity and social organization. This is followed by a review of the social and economic value of marriage, which then focuses on Christian marriage and related gender roles. Next, I highlight the emergence and the significance of the Christian Right in shaping discussions of marriage and gender roles, which has culminated in a "culture war" against secularism, with particular emphasis on discrediting the feminist movement. I conclude the literature review with a brief overview of feminist theory, highlighting the complexity of definitions, the importance of language, feminism in popular culture, and the emergence of feminist theologies.

GENDER & RELIGION

Gender

Identity is often understood by social-psychological and sociologists to be a system of group memberships of various sorts (McCall & Simmons 1978). Gender is a central criteria of understanding identity, and it is a category used by individuals and groups to understand the biological, behavioral, sexual, social, and symbolic differences

between men and women in our society (Hagemann-White 1989, cited in Hirschmann 2002). Subsequently, it has become a central organizing theme for social theory (Davis et. al 1991). The most common criteria for determining gender is determining the biological sex of a child, and this is often done right at birth. During the beginning of the Feminist Movement of the 1960's and 1970's, by assuming that gender was a signifier of biological difference, women were able to "name, analyze, and set about changing their victimization" (Zinn et. al 2000, cited in Andersen & Hill Collins 2007, 148). The idea of a "sex/gender" system was introduced by Gayle Rubin, and it was a way to understand how society transforms biological traits into "products of human activity" (Nicholson 1986, 71). In this view, sex (biology) was understood to be different from gender (society), so the early work of feminists was aimed toward eliminating social restrictions but ultimately still affirmed the concept of biological difference. Since then, theorists like Judith Butler have even challenged the biological nature of sex (see *Gender Trouble* [1999] by arguing that biological sex, too, is socially constructed and interpreted.

Gender socialization occurs at every stage of life (Katz 1979), and it shapes how we interact with and understand the world around us. However, in social and psychological theory, "femaleness" has been historically understood in comparison to male parameters, and Gilligan's (1982) influential work has specifically pointed out the inherent gender bias in many psychological models of identity and gender development. Gender is also imbedded into our language, and this, too, holds power over women: linguistic discrimination "relegates women to certain subservient functions: that of sex

object, or servant; and therefore certain lexical items mean one thing applied to men, another to women, a difference that can not be predicted except with reference to the different roles the sexes play in society" (Lakoff 2004, 39-40). Thus, as we seek to understand the central role of gender to our identities, it is also critical that we look to history and language to understand and critique our conceptual frameworks.

Religion

Religion has long been studied by sociologists, and several theorists who have irrevocably shaped the discipline devoted significant writings to understanding the phenomenon, including Karl Marx, Max Weber, Rudolph Sohm, and Ernst Troeltsch (see Adams 1976 for more information about their various perspectives). Like gender, religion is another dimension by which we understand our identity, and Beit-Hallahmi (1991) argues that religious identity can be both a psychological identity and a collective identity. Since religion is often learned and acquired early on in life, "the only choice most individuals make, if they can make a choice at all regarding the dominant religious belief system in their group, is whether they will follow group tradition" (Beit-Hallahmi 1991, 97). The question then arises: is there a distinction between "pure" religious belief and the role of social influences and factors? Day (2011) suggests that people with religious beliefs "believe in belonging" (191) and that beliefs should be understood not as a transcendent universal reality but should be understood primarily as a social phenomenon because "belief, like emotion, does not exist pre-formed with the individual

but is relationally produced, suggesting resonance with an earlier meaning of belief: 'be-loved'" (193). Since the context of religious belief is so important, I turn to a short review of religion in the U.S.

It has been well-established that Christianity is one of the largest social structures in the U.S., and it is a significant social, educational, psychological, and political force in the national atmosphere (Moberg 1962). However, Richey (1974) argues that the civil religion of America is not Christianity but is "The American Way of Life," and that this civic religion "serves to mobilize support for the attainment of national goals" (35). Although the pre-Civil War U.S. is sometimes considered to be a Christian nation, the current arguments of a consistent Christian focus in politics and social life fail to account for other influences that have shaped understandings of religion in the U.S. (Fea 2011).

However, despite the various perspectives concerning how "Christian" the U.S. is, the fact that approximately 76% of the population identified as Christian in 2008 (this includes all Christian denominations and groups) should not be ignored[1]. With so much research and theory being devoted to the changing demographics of family and marriage, in the U.S., it is essential to research how Christians understand marriage and related gender roles because their influence will shape the national discussion (Bartkowski 2001). Below is an overview of marriage in sociological literature, followed by a focused look at literature concerning Christian marriage and gender roles.

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[1] http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2012/tables/12s0075.pdf

MARRIAGE: SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC APPROACHES

Economic Value of Marriage

Although research has recently shown that three of the top reasons to marry in the

U.S. are love, a lifelong commitment, and companionship (Pew 2013, Love & Marriage),

marriage is defined in sociological literature as a "legal relationship, usually involving

economic cooperation as well as sexual activity and childbearing, that people expect to

last" (Macionis 2006, 347). Academic literature, then, may understand marriage as it is

connected to and shaped by economic systems. Writing in 1884, Friedrich Engel applied

a Marxist framework to understand marriage, concluding that monogamous marriage was

established as a result of the development of private property. In this system, men have

social and legal power over women, who must bear children and assume subordinate

roles to guarantee their own survival. Women must be sexually faithful to their husbands

in order for land to successfully be transferred to their sons, further strengthening their

economic dependence upon men. Thus, women are in the position of the proletariat[2] both

legally and sexually, for the purpose of guaranteeing a legitimate inheritance for

subsequent generations (Engels 2004, [1884]).

Thus, in a Marxist understanding, marriage is specifically connected to the

emergence of capitalism, and this relationship is ultimately repressive for women. This

understanding of marriage is significant because it clearly states that women are

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[2] A word used originally by Marx and Engels to collectively refer to workers and/or working class
individuals whose work and production was controlled by the ruling classes (bourgeoise)

subjugated in marriage and that condition is a result of capitalism as an economic system. In contrast, research specifically concerning Christian marriage often understands the subjugation of women to be tied instead to theological beliefs about gender hierarchy (Hoffman & Bartkowski 2008, Gallagher & Smith 1999). This contrast demonstrates how an economic framing of marriage and its subsequent definition largely shapes not only the research conducted but the subsequent findings as well.

Continuing to develop the relationship between marriage and economics, researchers like Michelle Marzullo (2011) have demonstrated connections between neoliberalism and marriage. Marzullo argues that four key values of neoliberalism (autonomy, individualism, responsibility, and universality) have largely influenced discourse on marriage in the U.S. (Marzullo 2011). Drawing on a definition of neoliberalism provided by Harvey (2007)[3], Marzullo uses discourse analysis to conclude that the discourse on marriage has been re-envisioned to reflect neoliberal markets, even despite the important influence of Christian understandings of marriage (763). Marzullo's work complicates the ability of research to broadly understand marriage and gender within one specific framework; research may unknowingly draw on discourses of marriage as shaped by neoliberalism. This is potentially problematic for sociological research on marriage, because future research on marriage is likely to be based on previous assumptions and definitions of marriage that have neoliberal roots.

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[3] Neoliberalism is a "theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade" (Harvey 2007, 2).

Since neoliberalism presupposes the value of free markets, the commercial value of marriage is another important angle to explore. In her work on the institutionalization of heterosexuality, Ingraham (2008) details how global labor markets are utilized to provide cheap wedding products and the image of the heterosexual "white wedding" is promoted by the media to maintain marriage norms and promote consumption. Ingraham argues that valued marriage traditions like diamond rings, white wedding dresses, and destination honeymoons are examples of how marriage traditions are embedded in capitalist systems. Using the term "heterosexual imaginary"[4], Ingraham illustrates how the media normalizes and sacralizes marriage as an essential human experience. When research seeks to understand the role of sacredness of marriage (Dollahite et al. 2012), this broader institutionalization and moralization of heterosexual marriage may be reproduced within the literature itself without observation.

Social Value of Marriage

Although the accepted definition of marriage in sociological literature is based on economic concepts and principles, marriage is also studied for its social and personal value. As a way to organize individuals into distinct groups, marriage reflects the values (expressed or implicit) in a society. In the U.S., race, religion and education are three factors that significantly shape endogamy[5], with race remaining the most salient factor

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[4] The heterosexual imaginary is "that way of thinking that relies on romantic and sacred notions of heterosexuality in order to create and maintain the illusion of well-being and oneness" (Ingraham 2008, 26)

[5] Endogamy is defined as the custom of marrying only within the limits of a local community, clan, or tribe

(Rosenfeld 2008). The number of articles, journals, books, and conferences dedicated to studying marriage testify to its variable definitions and subsequent contestations about its relevancy, both now and in the future. Critiquing the combination of feminist and Marxist analyses of marriage, Hartmann (1979) argues that the relationship between Marxism and feminism has been "…like the marriage of husband and wife in English common law: marxism and feminism are one, and that one is marxism" (1). By highlighting how a Marxist perspective completely ignores the significance and role of gender, Hartmann demonstrates that Marx failed to understand how capitalism effects men and women differently, and that women's struggles are often subsumed under the struggle against capital. Hartmann's work is significant because it shows how theoretical understandings used to understand marriage ultimately shape the conclusions reached.

The work of Talcott Parsons' (1955) has also been largely influential in the sociology of marriage. Condensing all family value into two functions, Parsons attempted to categorize and understand the purpose of the family, as legitimized by marriage. The first function is the socialization of children, and the second is the constant development of the adult personality. Parsons bases his theory on the theoretical premise of functionalism, where each part of society is understood through the lens of how it contributes to general social cohesion and stability. For Parsons, marriage and the family are essential to the functional order of society, and it provides invaluable emotional security. One critique of Parsons is that it glorifies the nuclear family (a term he coined) and accepts marriage and childbearing to be inevitable, natural and beneficial, whereas

many subsequent theories have come to critique marriage as repressive toward women and discriminatory toward non-heterosexual individuals (Brake 2012).

One social movement that has greatly influenced marriage trends in the U.S. was the Feminist Movement. Gaining momentum in the 1960's and 1970's, women began to organize and challenge their accepted roles. Literary works like *The Feminine Mystique* (Friedan 1961) were catalysts for discussing the specific ways in which women were denied the opportunity to pursue careers and were instead socialized to become wives and homemakers. Following significant legal and social changes, more and more women entered the workforce, and that number has continued to grow over time. In 1967, slightly less than 15% of women had full-time, year round employment. That percentage doubled to 30% by the late-1980's, reaching an all-time high of 43% in 2009 (U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey). These numbers have not stopped growing, either; estimates from the 2012 American Community Survey show that 66% of women ages 20-64 are employed, with 72% in the labor force (American Community Survey 2012). However, the increase of women in the workforce hasn't necessarily lead to a different set of expectations for women; women who choose to pursue a career are still expected to take care of their home and children (Hochschild 1989).

Marriage and divorce statistics also began to shift; 1990 was the first year that the median age of first marriage was at or above its 1890 value[6], and divorce rates more than

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[6] http://www.census.gov/hhes/socdemo/marriage/data/acs/ElliottetalPAA2012presentation.pdf

doubled between 1960 and 1980[7]. There has also been a decreasing relationship between marriage and parenthood, with 36% of children born out of wedlock in 2007, and cohabitation has also increased; 47% of adults in their 30's and 40's have cohabited with someone they were not married to[8].

With so many social changes concerning marriage, there has been a surge in sociological literature that is concerned about the social status of marriage and how that would change society over time (McNamara 1985, Hunter 1991, Waite 1995, Bartkowski 2001, Cherlin 2004, Nock 2005). Writing about changing marriage cultures, Amato (Peters & Dush 2009, 75-90) draws on three different types of marriage that have accompanied social changes; institutional, companionate, and individualistic marriage. Institutional marriage is a strictly patriarchal relationship, where expectations of personal fulfillment are low and social integration is high. Companionate marriage is structured around the concept of teamwork and love, but the husband still has more authority in decision making (Lindsley & Evans 1927). Individualistic marriage is a union between two "soul mates", where the relationship is egalitarian and the main purpose of the marriage is personal happiness and fulfillment. Although research has generally concluded that marriage has been shifting toward the more individualistic model (Bartkowski 2001), there are still debates about what marriage trends will look like in the future.

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[7] http://www.vanneman.umd.edu/socy441/trends/divorce.html

[8] http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2007/07/01/as-marriage-and-parenthood-drift-apart-public-is-concerned-about-social-impact/

Qualitative and Quantitative Methods

Both qualitative and quantitative methods are used to research the economic and social value of marriage, sometimes utilizing both strategies (Gallagher 1999, Trinitapoli 2007). Studies that research groups with smaller populations (like Christian fundamentalists) are at a disadvantage using qualitative methods because of their small sample sizes (Nash 2006, Rose 1987, Pomerantz & Raby 2011). Although these studies can generate valid observations about their populations, the small sample size (N) makes it difficult to replicate or to generalize to other contexts. However, qualitative methods often have the ability to tease apart complex phenomena with more depth than surveys are able to (Sharma 2008), and longitudinal studies can provide rich data about trends over a lifetime (Hoffnung 2004). For studies using quantitative methods, nationally representative surveys are common, including the General Social Survey (Peek et al. 1991, Hackett & Lindsay 2008, Gallagher 2004), Religious Identity and Influence Survey (Denton 2004), and the Baylor Religion Survey (Smith & Johnson 2010).

CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE AND RELATED GENDER ROLES

For sociologists, Christian marriage is an ideal topic for researchers seeking to understand the interaction between marriage, religion, and gender. Since religious language is often used to define and redefine group identities and boundaries (Lichterman 2008), the study of religious marriage can provide valuable insight into various gendered and religious world views. Often, the literature uses religion as a master frame for

understanding social dynamics involving Christians. In other words, religion is studied as a fixed category and variations in behavior and belief are attributed to different religious beliefs. Conservative evangelicals and fundamentalist denominations are popular subjects of research, and a finding often highlighted is how women use available resources to subvert patriarchal marriage and church structures while still adhering to accepted beliefs and practices. The general picture of marriage presented in the literature is complex and nuanced; Christian marriage is understood as a practice and structure that provides limited options for gender roles and religious involvement, but is also experienced as a strong social and ideological framework that provides security, social ties, and an ideological worldview. More specifically, the literature often addresses how research participants often agree with a traditional theological understanding of marriage and gender roles, but make decisions and work in ways that are more egalitarian in nature.

In the study of Christianity, several terms are used to describe particular denominations and beliefs concerning the Bible. Although evangelical is often used as a synonym for Protestant, it can be more appropriately defined as biblically-based Christianity that emphasizes a personal relationship of the believer to Jesus Christ (Warner 1979). Additionally, Warner distinguishes "mainline" Christianity and "liberalism" to mean the tendency to regard the Bible as metaphorically true and an understanding that Jesus Christ is an ethical prophet. Another category for understanding Christians, fundamentalism is often defined as an insistence that the Bible is literally true (Peek et al. 1991, 1205). However, the term fundamentalist also carries connections to

divisions in the U.S. Christian community during the 1950's, when moral and theological differences between Protestants led to denominational splits (Hunter 1991). These tensions led fundamentalism to be associated with traditional family structure, Biblical literalism, and gender roles that were even more restrictive than in evangelicalism (see Coleman [2004] for a history of Christian marriage).

General Trends

In academic literature about Christian marriage and gender roles, one common trend is the understanding of religion as a baseline identity that can be correlated to behavior and attitudes (Hoffman & Bartkowski 2008, Brooks 2002, Trinitapoli 2002, Rosenfeld 2008). Researching religion and public concern with family decline, Brooks uses religious influence theory[9] to understand how religion is transmitted and shapes belief about family decline. He concludes that the three mechanisms contribute to concern about family decline: denominational membership, variable rates of church attendance, and exposure to denomination-specific influences (193-4). These variables have also been subsequently used in other related quantitative research (Smith & Johnson 2010, Trinitapoli 2007, Denton 2004). These categories are particularly useful for quantitative data because respondents can choose the category with which they most closely identify, but there are limitations to this defined approach. When theoretical

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[9] Religious influence theory is "causal assumptions regarding the likely effects of religion on family processes and attitudes" (Brooks 2002, 193).

frameworks like religious influence theory are used to understand religious individuals and groups, religion becomes the basis for understanding their relation to other social phenomena. Although this can be one useful method for understanding how religion shapes the social world, it can also shift the focus away from factors that shape religious identity and behavior itself. The work of Hoffman & Bartkowski (2008) make this critique, and their research methods are modeled to understand how religious belief is influenced by external conditions. Exploring what factors predict adherence to biblical literalism[10], Hoffman and Bartkowski understand literalism be a cultural schema that works as a resource that gives women in patriarchal denominations power to legitimate their contributions and negotiate their roles (1249). By assuming that literalist ideologies are created and maintained by other social phenomena like gender, Hoffman & Bartkowski illustrate the complexity of religious experience and its subsequent effects on social structures like marriage.

Sociological and psychological research about marriage has concluded that it has both positive and negative impacts on individuals and society. Although this initially seems contradictory, the complexity of marriage allows it to simultaneously function on several levels. Marriage has been shown to significantly improve psychological well-being among individuals who experience depression (Frech & Williams 2007), and both marriage and religious involvement have far-reaching, positive effects in the lives of

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[10] Biblical literalism is technically the belief "that every word of Christian scripture found in the Bible is true or accurate" (Hoffman & Bartkowski 2008, 1268 (note 1).

individuals (Waite & Lehrer 2003). Using a framework based on the research and theories of Emile Durkheim, Waite & Lehrer argue that marriage and religion are so beneficial for individuals because they respectively provide "…social support and integration and by encouraging healthy behavior and lifestyles" (Waite & Lehrer 2003, 262). Citing various of sociological and psychological research, Waite & Lehrer specifically argue that marriage and religion are linked to benefits in physical health and longevity, mental health and happiness, economic well-being, children, sexual activity, and domestic violence (257-261). Although this is an oft-cited article, Waite & Lehrer did not conduct any research of their own; they simplify and synthesize marriage and religion research and conclude that they are different (but compatible) means of social integration.

This understanding of marriage and religion presented by Waite & Lehrer is well-cited, but its causal link between marriage and religion with happiness and well-being is deserving of critique. Wells & Zinn (2004) specifically responded to Waite & Lehrer's article, ultimately arguing that the benefits understood to be from marriage are, in reality, associated with class position and other structural privileges. Conducting research on thirty white, rural families, Wells & Zinn conclude that family stability is correlated with social position. Importantly, they point out that beginning in the 1990's, research began to increasing report on marriage as a social good, and they understand that "the express purposes of this literature is to inform the American public of the benefits of marriage, thus encouraging individuals to "choose marriage" when making difficult personal decisions related to matters such as non marital pregnancy and divorce" (Wells & Zinn,

2004). Additionally, as Wells & Zinn point out, marriage and religion can't be understood to have uniform effects for all individuals, and research like Wait & Lehrer (2003) can perpetuate academic blindness to larger systemic issues like race and class.

One specific and consistent theme that exemplifies this tension between positive and negative research on Christian marriage and gender roles is that of the repressed, conservative Christian woman who uses subversive strategies to gain power within a patriarchal marriage and/or religion (Hoffman & Bartkowski 2008, Gallagher & Smith 1999, Bryant 2006, Gallagher 2004). Although many conservative Christian couples believe that a man should be the head of the family, most of those marriages actually look more like egalitarian marriages when decision making and work contributions are taken into account (Gallagher & Smith 1999). In these relationships, which Gallagher & Smith call a "bargain with patriarchy" (228), women exchange their affirmation of symbolic headship for emotional intimacy, economic security, and a commitment from their husbands to participate in marriage (228). Similar research was conducted on a college campus, and Bryant (2006) found that small, all-women Bible study groups served to encourage women to fulfill expectations of submissiveness, while simultaneously promoting their distinction and difference from men (Bryant 2006). Although these women weren't allowed to claim leadership positions in their religious club, fulfilling their expected roles gave them a distinct identity and role within the fellowship and their romantic relationships. Christian women in this literature are understood to be problematically oppressed and/or restricted; thus, the focus of the research is to

understand how they negotiate their circumstances and strategically use their resources for their benefit. At this point in the discussion, it is relevant to take a look at how the emergence of the Christian Right has fueled social and academic discussion about gender roles both in and outside Christianity.

CULTURE WAR: FEMINISM AND THE FAMILY

Literature about the relationship between gender and Christianity has been increasingly influenced by the political emergence of the Christian Right in the late 1970's and early 1980's. Specifically, the concept of a "culture war" in the literature is a reflection of Christian conservatism that asserts moral decline is correlated with social and political decline. The family is understood to be the the primary victim of this war, and political platforms on like same-sex marriage, abortion, same-sex marriage have been mirrored in sociological literature. These moral shortcomings are sought to be corrected through legal means, and the theological perspective of reconstructionism (also known as dominion theology) provides divine permission to transform the government according to Christian beliefs and values. Although these beliefs and goals are often polarizing and staunchly opposed by politicians and members of the general public, the literature points out how the Christian Right has adapted their strategies and have used grassroots networks and cultural institutions (such as publishing houses and radio shows) to spread their values and ideas. In contrast to the Christian Right was (and still is) the Evangelical

Left, which has found its social causes in racial justice, social engagement, an anti-war agenda, and simple living (for more information, see Swartz 2012).

One major critique of this literature is that research conducted on the Christian Right often presents it as unprogressive and culturally backward (McNamara 1985). Specifically addressing this bias within literature studying Christian Right family structure, McNamara writes that "…"By emphasizing the social control dimensions, the [Christian Right's] view of the family fails to address pressing contemporary needs, and freedom. These presuppositions act as blinders preventing social scientists from seeing dimensions of the [Christian Right's] position that emphasize agency and personal autonomy" (451). Focusing on Weber's concept of *verstehen*[11], McNamara points out that social scientists must also consider how values and meaning are understood by the participants themselves, and failing to do this leads to conclusions that are angled toward the researcher's perspective. This critique is also echoed by Warner (1979), pointing out three biases social scientists have against evangelicalism: class bias, liberal bias, and evolutionary bias. In Warner's perspective, assumptions that evangelicals are poor, politically conservative and socially retrogressive are derived from previous studies that were overgeneralized. Warner connects this understanding to Parsons' (1969) influential work on religion, which understands theological liberalism as a form of evolutionary progress[12] and fundamentalism as retrogressive. These critiques of the literature about

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[11]Translated from German, *verstehen* means "to understand" or "to realize", with connotations of being able to understand a situation or concept as a whole

[12] This concept is referred to in Parsons work as "value generalization"

Christians and the Christian Right are important because they highlight the power of

assumptions in shaping research designs, definitions, and the ultimate conclusions or

findings.

What is the "Culture War"?

The term "culture war" is often used in research on the Christian Right, and this

militaristic language is often employed to describe beliefs and behaviors of those

associated with them (Feld et al. 2002, Hunter 1991, Greenberg 1997, Wilcox 1996).

Hunter (1991) describes the "culture war" as a "competition to define social reality" (39)

that has been fueled by minority cultures and a Protestant-based populism[13]. This

militaristic language is often repeated by Christian leaders like Dr. James Dobson,

founder of *Focus on the Family[14]*, one of the largest Christian groups in the country. After

resigning from his leadership role, Dobson spoke to his staff, saying, "We are awash in

evil and the battle is still to be waged. We are right now in the most discouraging period

of that long conflict. Humanly speaking, we can say we have lost all those battles[15]." This

reflects the language of the culture war and the belief of some Christians that they are

part of an underdog-like resistance to overwhelming forces of evil (Diamond 1998). In

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[13] Populism in the U.S. is related to the political party founded in 1891, which advocated for "common men" like farmers and laborers.

[14] Focus on the Family is "…a global Christian ministry dedicated to helping families thrive. We provide help and resources for couples to build healthy marriages that reflect God's design, and for parents to raise their children according to morals and values grounded in biblical principles." (Focus on the Family website, http://www.focusonthefamily.com/about_us.aspx)

[15] http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/04/12/james-dobson-conservative_n_185954.html

response to Hunter's conclusion that the culture war will continue and intensify, McConkey (2001) uses GSS data to conclude that although tension will remain high between evangelicals and the broader culture, strategies actually resembling warfare are unlikely to be used. Hunter's conclusions are also questioned by Davis & Robinson (1996), who find that conflict is mostly limited to schooling, sexuality, reproductive rights, and the gendered division of labor. These categories pointed out by Davis & Robinson illustrate the common field of tension in the "culture war": family.

Family life, connecting both public and private spheres, has often been the center of these "culture war" tensions, and this is reflected in related literature. Research has sought to understand where family decline is concentrated among Christians (Brooks 2002), what changes have led to the decline in traditional family structures (Cherlin 2004), and how those beliefs shape family planning attitudes (Ellison & Goodson 1997). Looking at a special journal article with eighteen articles concerning family decline, Glenn (1987) found that they predominately emphasized change in family structure and subsequent concern about the well-being of marriages and children. By focusing specifically on the response of Christians to changes in family structure, this research reinforces the association between religious orthodoxy and concern with family decline.

Within research on the Christian Right, attention is also given to the structural components that allow its political and moral agenda to be communicated en masse. Diamond (1998) demonstrates that the Christian Right has continued to grow and remain effective not because of its political strength, but because of its cultural strength; social

networks with the Republican party and a variety of subcultural institutions serve to reinforce values and meet the needs of its members. The theological backbone of the Christian Right is Christian Reconstructionism, also known as dominion theology. Paul McGlasson (2012) presents four key ideas central to this theology: epistemological dualism (the sharp division of humanity into believer and non-believer), application of Mosaic law to society, cultural Christianity (every aspect of life should reflect Christian values and worldview), and Christian political domination. Although McGlasson acknowledges that not all Christians adhere to Christian Reconstructionist theology, he argues that these ideas have largely influenced political discourse (3).

Feminist Tensions

Another target for the culture war was the feminist movement, which was understood to be "secular" and anti-Christian. Feminist emphasis on egalitarian marriages did not line up with biblical interpretations of particular denominations and faith leaders, so feminists were subsequently treated with suspicion. Examining why theologically based ideas about egalitarianism have remained marginalized by evangelicals, Gallagher (2004a) found that having a distinctive view on gender relations was a way for conservative Protestants to distinguish themselves from mainline and moderate Protestants. Despite this general tension with ideas of Christian feminism, groups like the

Evangelical Women's Caucus (EWC) created print resources, advocated for gender-inclusive language in Bible translations and supported female preachers (Swartz 2012).

However, theological distancing from egalitarian theology is not the whole picture of the relationship between Christians and feminism. Evangelical women have expressed gratitude and support for the gains made by the feminist movement (Gallagher 2004b). However, Gallagher points out that discourses about men being the head of the family, political conservatism, religious subcultures, and denominational affiliation continue to perpetuate the stigma associated with "secular" feminism. Bartkowski and Read (2003) use the concept of a "cultural crescent wrench" to describe how evangelical women adjust their understandings of submission within a Christian framework according to their own context and needs. Although evangelical feminist and egalitarian theology has failed to become integral parts of Christian organizational structures and culture, women navigate this middle ground by presenting alternative ways of approaching gender within a Christian framework. Before beginning to ask what Christian feminism is, however, we must first turn to feminism as a whole.

FEMINISM: THEORY, LANGUAGE, POPULAR CULTURE, AND RESEARCH

Definition & Theory Overview

Feminism, as a word, theory, and identity, has warranted the immense amount of scholarship dedicated to studying it and its definition. In her essay *Defining Feminism: A*

Comparative Historical Approach (cited in Bock & James 1992) Karen Offen

summarizes the changing understanding of feminism, writing that any definition should

reflect the historical trajectory of feminism and understand how that trajectory is

contextual to different cultures and groups. When the label of "feminism" was

introduced, Offen notes how it was a "theory and/or movement concerned with advancing

the position of women through such means as achievement of *political, legal, or*

economic rights equal to those granted men" (Bock & James 1992, 70, original

emphasis). Critiquing this limiting definition, Offen presents a new postulation:

"feminism emerges as a concept that can encompass both an ideology and a movement

for socio-political change based on a critical analysis of male privilege and women's

subordination within any given society" (82). However, Offen recognizes that this

definition seeks to destroy "masculinist hierarchy but not sexual dualism".

     For reference, I have listed several main groups of feminist thought, followed

with a short description. These categories are very briefly summarized from Rosemarie

Tong's (2009) introduction to feminist thought.

A) Liberal Feminism: First popularized movement of feminism, with a focus on equal
education and liberty, suffrage, equal rights, and "women" are understood to be a distinct
group. General desire to free women from oppressive roles in society.

B) Radical Feminism: Critiqued liberal feminism by emphasizing the practice of
consciousness-raising. Emphasis is placed on sharing personal experiences as women and

that all personal action is also political. There are two sub-groups: radical-libertarian feminists[16] and radical-cultural feminists[17].

C) Marxist and Socialist Feminism: Focus on a class analysis, instead of gender analysis, to understand women's oppression. Capitalism and patriarchy are understood are allied to oppress women.

D) Psychoanalytic Feminism: The fundamental explanation for women's way of acting is rooted in a woman's psyche, particularly in the way that women think of themselves as women. Particular emphasis is placed on the theories of Sigmund Freud.

E) Care-Focused Feminism: Attention is given to how particular traits, values, and virtues are assigned to women in particular cultural and historical contexts. Women's capacities for care are understood to be a human strength rather than a human weakness. This "ethics of care" is sometimes presented as a substitute or complement of traditional ethics of justice.

F) Multicultural, Global, and Postcolonial Feminism: The diversity of women is recognized, especially experience and context. Challenges the idea of female essentialism and critique privileged women who speak on behalf of "all" women. Rejection of "sameness" feminist thought.

G) Ecofeminism: Draws heavily from Multicultural, Global and Postcolonial feminism, while adding an extra emphasis on the domination of humankind over nature and the Earth. Parallels are made between patriarchy and the exploitation of natural resources.

H) Postmodern and Third-Wave Feminism: Rejects any mode of feminist thought that claims to present a single explanation for women's oppression. Each woman can decide what kind of feminist she wants to be, and there is less importance placed on appropriate labeling.

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[16] "Radical-libertarian feminists claimed that an exclusively feminine gender identity is likely to limit women's development as full human persons. Thus, they encouraged women to become androgynous persons" (Tong 50)

[17] "Radical-cultural feminists expressed the view that is is better for women to be strictly female/feminine. Women should not try to be like men… they should try to be more like women, emphasizing the values and virtues commonly associated with women" (Tong 50).

As these definitions demonstrate, there is a wide understanding of how feminism is defined and conceptualized. This tension of defining feminism is that the very act of defining it is a discriminatory act that intentionally includes, omits and reconfigures concepts and relationships according to specific goals and intentions. Ultimately, these tensions highlight a central concept in feminist theory: power.

Looking at trends of power in feminist theory Allen (1999) identifies three conceptual trends: power as resource, power as domination, and power as empowerment[18]. With this understanding, she summarizes and critiques the power theories of Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, and Hannah Arendt. Adjusting the strengths and shortcomings of their three conceptions of power, she presents her own "feminist conception of power" that has three dimensions. The first dimension is *Power-Over*, which she defines as "the ability of an actor or set of actors to constrain the choices available to another actor or set of actors in a nontrivial way" (123). The second dimension is *Power-To*, "the ability of an individual actor to attain an end or series of ends" (125), and the third dimension is *Power-With*, "the ability of a collectivity to act together for the attainment of an agreed-upon end or series of ends" (126) These different dimensions of power are useful tools in understanding power within the context of feminist theory because they allow power to understood in its multiple (and often contradictory) forms. For more specific context on changes between the first and second

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[18] Power as Resource: power is social good, which needs to be redistributed to women. Power as Domination: power is a relation of male dominance and female subordination, and this all must be dismantled. Power as Empowerment: power is the ability to transform and empower oneself, others, and the world. (Allen 7-29)

wave of feminism please see Whelehan (1995) and for a complete overview see Donovan (2012).

Language of Feminism

Using these frameworks, language comes under fire as also being embedded in systems of patriarchy (Spender 1990). Although language is a tool to communicate oneself, even the means in which we do so are also subject to oppression. Reflecting on language and the instability of meanings, Hughes (2002) makes this important observation:

"Language is of political importance for feminism as it highlights both material and subjective aspects of women's lives. Indeed, it is logical to extrapolate from the foregoing that in denying and denigrating women language is denying and denigrating women's senses of self, their everyday practices and their ways of being in the world… how then do we recognize the contradictory ways in which language world when at a general level we can also recognize its hierarchical ordering?" (15)

Using post-structural and Foucault's theories as her guide, Hughes questions if "equal opportunity feminism is promising the impossible" and critiques several narratives in women's contemporary lives: "women have made it," "the best of both worlds," "women are caring,", "having it all," and "doing it all". Also looking at language, David (2003) examines how political changes in the U.S. and feminist theories have become embedded in the way we understand ourselves and the world around us. As as method and a movement, feminism has become a tool for examining the patriarchal structures of society, but it is also itself subjected to its own probing and change.

Feminism & Popular Culture

As I have already noted, the ways feminism is understood by theorists is widely

debated, and this is also true for the social sphere and popular culture at large. Burack &

Josephson (2003) point out that:

"…it may appear that feminist ideas have penetrated our national consciousness and
influence political debate about family issues, but…despite it's potential, feminist theory
has had little influence in constructing an alternative to traditional American, and liberal,
understandings of the relationship between the individual, the family, and the
social." (127)

The role of feminism in popular culture and society is highly contested, as Hollows

(2000) demonstrates in her work concerning the intersection of feminism, femininity, and

popular culture. Hollows points out several narratives about feminism in popular culture

that have coexisted: negative narratives (feminist backlash and post-feminism), popular

feminism (the commercialization of general feminist ideas), and transformative feminism

(where the goal of feminism is to find recruits to help "make-over the popular and the

ordinary woman).

Hammer (2002) also addresses some of these narratives about feminism in

popular culture, and she specifically addresses how the "postfeminist" narrative allowed

for a significant loosening of what "feminism" is and what a "feminist" does. Hammer

critically examines the distrust of the label "feminist" and that "the fantasy of the man-

hating feminist plays a fundamental role in betrayal feminist' indictment against "gender

feminism." They are, in fact, exploiting and embracing the new right's take on feminism,

which equates "all feminism with hatred of men, sex, marriage and family"" (87).

Despite this negative label, however, Hammer notes that young women are using the feminist label because they understood their own personal complexity to be mirrored in the theory itself.

Feminist Theology

Feminist ideas have also been a resource for Christian theologians as they seek to understand the relationship between God and humanity. However, just as academic discussions have reached no clear consensus about the definition, purpose, or means of feminism, so feminist theologies have struggled to define themselves. Althaus-Reid & Isherwood (2007) chronicle these controversies in feminist theology, and they include the following topics: gender and sexuality, feminist theological hermeneutics, the Virgin Mary, Christology, and life after death, with even more controversy about the future of feminist theologies. For more resources concerning feminist theologies, please see Reuther 1998 and Storkey 1995.

Research methods

The art of research itself has come under feminist analysis and critique, for the act of researching is in itself embedded with social constructions of how we create and interpret reality. Kirsch (1999) addresses this, and concludes that "no single methodology is feminist in itself, nor have feminists invented new research methods. Rather, it is a

feminist perspective, including a commitment to improve women's lives and to eliminate

inequalities between researcher and participants that characterizes feminist research" (5).

Representation, interpretation, publication are three key issues in research for Kirsch, and

she emphasizes that many measures should be taken by the researcher to protect

participants, and that this should be an ethical priority. For another comprehensive

analysis and guide to feminist methods of social research, please see Reinharz (1992).

CONCLUSION

As this literature review demonstrates, research concerning the identities of

Christian women is highly intersectional and contested. Drawing on this body of work, I

have designed a qualitative research project that seeks to understand how Christian

women in the general Los Angeles area understand their identities as Christian and

female, gender roles, experiences as a Christian woman, and their definition of and

identification with feminism. Through this research I hope to further substantiate

previous research and to modestly contribute to it with my own findings.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Research Questions

How do Christian women understand their religious and gendered identity? How

is this shaped by their religious beliefs and experiences? How do these women

understand feminism, and do they consider themselves to be feminists? Why or why not?

These research questions assume that participants have reflected upon their

identity as a Christian and as a woman, and have potentially also thought about how those

two identities interact with each other.

Definitions:

- Christian women = women whose religious beliefs center around the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, as found in the Old Testament and New Testament

- Feminism = the advocacy of women's rights on the grounds of political, social, and economic equality to men[19]

- Gender role = the socialized assumptions, expectations, and behaviors assigned to a person according to their biological sex

- Marriage = the legal, economic, and social union of two individuals (assuming a monogamous relationship), which often has religious significance

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[19] New Oxford American Dictionary. Please read the Literature Review for various perspectives on how feminism has been interpreted.

DATA & METHODS

For this research, I conducted qualitative research on self-identified Christian women in the Los Angeles and Pasadena areas of southern California. Qualitative methods were used for two reasons: 1) as a response to previous research that calls for more qualitative research concerning Christian women, and 2) to give participants the opportunity to present a more holistic and complete (albeit more complicated) understanding of their experience and opinions. The interviews were semi-structured, which allowed for my questions to be consistent throughout the interview process but also allowed me to deviate for the purpose of asking follow-up questions about my participant's initial responses. I had a fixed set of questions that I brought into each interview, and these questions were grouped thematically and printed on notecards that I held in my hand while the interview was in process. Please see Appendix B: Interview Questions and Survey for the specific interview questions and post-interview survey.

In order to create as comfortable a setting as possible for my participants, I did not take notes during the interviews, which were recorded using a digital recorder (voice only). In accordance with research requirements for Scripps College, I completed all requirements for the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and received approval from the board to conduct research with participants. As a part of this approval process I completed the Ethics program through the National Institute of Health (NIH). Participants were not compensated for their time, but were informed about how their participation would contribute to sociological understanding about Christian women.

I interviewed 13 women in one-on-one interviews, and the cumulative total time of all interviews was 10 hours and 30 minutes. The length of interviews ranged from 25 minutes to 1 hour and 15 minutes, with an average interview length of 48 minutes. Participants were interviewed in several settings, ranging from public to private. Locations included coffee shops, living rooms, kitchens, offices, and various locations on the grounds of the Claremont Colleges. Participants were not compensated for participating in the research. Every interview was audio-recorded and most were fully transcribed following the interview. Out of the 13 interviews, 11 were fully transcribed and 2 were re-listened to with relevant quotes extracted to be included in the analysis. I was the only person with access to the audio recordings, and all identifying formation was removed from the transcriptions to ensure confidentiality and anonymity for all participants. At this time, all interview audio has been deleted to ensure future privacy for participants. All participants have been given a pseudonym for the purpose of discussing specific interviews while still protecting participant identity.

This research model is compatible with the existing qualitative method of "grounded theory"[20], which is is hypothesis generating, inductive in nature, and allows the data to suggest themes instead of having a preconceived theoretical framework used to interpret data. However, since my questions were very largely informed by the literature review previously elaborated, it would be false to say that the questions and

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[20] See Chapter 6, Section 1: "Social Science Framing" in *Analyzing Social Settings: A Guide To Qualitative Observation and Analysis*. Wadsworth/Thomson Learning. Belmont, CA. 2006.

data were unassociated with any conceptional frameworks. The strength of this approach, though, is that it allowed me to notice similarities and differences with previous research findings, in addition to introducing new themes. During the interviews I intentionally used open-ended questions in order to reduce the chance of leading questions that would guide participant responses. A few times I supplied words or phrases when the participants seemed at a loss for words, but I only did this with great discretion and in a way that was consistent with their previous responses.

OBTAINING THE SAMPLE

This sample was obtained through my personal social networks. First, I created a Google form survey with information on my research, my contact information, and multiple text-entry spaces to collect several pieces of information: confirm self-identification of female and Christian, contact information (email or phone number), consent to have the interview audio-recorded, and preferable meeting location (optional). Second, I posted this Google form to my personal Facebook page and asked my connections to share it with Christian women in their own social circles. I checked the Google form every day for new participant information, and subsequently followed up with each individual participant using the contact information they had provided. 19 Christian women submitted their information through the Google form, and out of those 12 were actually interviewed. The remaining 7 individuals who I contacted did not

respond to my attempt to schedule an interview. Two of my Facebook connections shared my post on their own personal pages, thus multiplying my recruiting efforts.

Since I was only able to interview willing participants in the Los Angeles and Pasadena area, using my personal social networks was a recruiting strategy because the majority of my connections are within that area and this increased the chances that anyone interested would also be within an acceptable distance to be interviewed.

DESCRIPTION OF THE SAMPLE

All 13 participants identified as both Christian and female, which was a requirement for participation in the research, in addition to all participants being at least 18 years old for consent purposes. The age range of participants was 19 to 58, and the average age is 26 years old. It is worth noting, however, that the oldest age in the sample is an outlier. Removing this outlier, the average age of participants is 23. The majority of participants are currently students, in undergraduate, masters, or doctorate level programs. All participants have at least begun their undergraduate education, and 7 have already completed their undergraduate degree. A total of 9 participants are single, and 4 are currently married. One of these single participants was also engaged to be married within the year. All of the married participants were on their first marriage; none have divorced or remarried. Ethnic identities of participants totaled 10 white, 2 Asian/Asian-American and 1 biracial participant (white and Latina). Due to the limited nature of my social networks and resources to conduct this research, this sample is not representative

of the female and Christian population in the U.S. The number of women in the U.S. in 2010 was 15.6 million, comprising of approximately 50.8% of the population[21]. In 2008, the U.S. Census Bureau reported that out of a total population of 22.8 million people in the U.S., approximately 1.7 million identified as Christian, with the largest subgroups of Catholics (5.7 million), Baptist (3.6 million), and Methodist (1.1 million)[22]. Although I was not able to find specific data concerning the number of Christian women in the U.S, the population of California in 2000 was 42.3% Christian[23], and that same year reported 18.7 million women in California, which calculates to approximately 7.9 million Christian women in California in 2010 (assuming a 50-50% gender ratio).

The following chart summarizes the participants in the sample:

[21] http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-03.pdf

[22] http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2012/tables/12s0075.pdf

[23] http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2012/tables/12s0077.pdf

#	Name (Pseudonym)	Age	Occupation (General)	Marital Status
1	Eleanor	25	Graduate student & Therapist	Married
2	Alma	23	Student (undergraduate)	Single
3	Rene	20	Student (undergraduate)	Single
4	Brittany	29	Student (graduate)	Married
5	Anna	56	Graduate professor	Married
6	Sophia	21	Student (undergraduate)	Single
7	Ella	22	Full-time work (engineer)	Single
8	Blair	21	Student (undergraduate)	Single
9	Naomi	19	Student (undergraduate)	Single
10	Iris	24	Full-time work (human resources)	Single
11	Molly	30	Full-time work (church)	Married
12	Hannah	27	Full-time work (media)	Single
13	Charlotte	19	Student (undergraduate)	Single

POTENTIAL CONCERNS

The first concern about this research and the sample is that the majority of the participants were white, with two Asian participants and one participant who identifies as bi-racial (Latina and white). Due to this and other factors, this research is not generalizable to the general public, primarily because I did not attempt to make the sample representative of national demographics.

Another potential concern in this research is that all of the women interviewed for this research were very highly educated. Of all the participants, 6 are current

undergraduate students, and the other 7 participants have already completed their undergraduate degree. Of those 7, 4 participants are working full time, 1 participant is completing her PhD., 1 is completing her Masters of Divinity, and 1 participant already has a PhD. Due to their high levels of education, participants may have been more knowledgeable about existing research on gender and religion than the general population, and their language in describing their experiences and opinions is more likely to be consistent with academic language and concepts.

Related to the concern of education is location of the research: Claremont, Pasadena, Azusa, and Los Angeles. Southern California is a center for progressive Christian thought, and educational centers like Azusa Pacific University and Fuller Seminary are hubs for intellectual discussion and critique of both theologies and social theory. The implication here is that participants who participated in the research are more likely to have come into contact with these institutions and intellectual circles, and this may skew the data to be more liberal and progressive than the general population. Although not all participants had direct connections to these thought centers, it is worth noting as a potential concern.

The last potential concern is my own bias as a researcher, which can be interpreted as both a strength of the research and a weakness. Since I am personally and consistently involved with various Christian communities, it is likely that some of my own interpretations and understandings are shaped by that experience. Additionally, I am more likely to be normalized to participant response concerning their Christian beliefs,

and this could make it more difficult for me to spot trends and nuances in their

experience. However, my positionality can also be interpreted to be an asset to this

research. Since I share similar backgrounds with many of the participants, I believe that

this commonality allowed for more trust to be established during the interview and this

ultimately led to more honest and comfortable sharing.

INTERVIEW FINDINGS

I. INTRODUCTION

After conducting the thirteen interviews with participants, three main themes

emerged that addressed the complexity of their identities: idealized theories, complex and

contradictory practice, and rejection of labels. The first theme, idealized theories,

demonstrates how participants presented an idealized understanding of their Christian

faith, an idealized understanding of themselves and others, and an idealized

understanding of the nature of gender conflict in the Christian church. These idealized

theories are how participants thought about themselves and the world around them, and

these understandings were often grounded in opinion or interpretation. The second theme

is complex and contradictory experience, and this highlights the experiences of

participants as women, in marriage (anticipated and real), and in public life. In these

different contexts, participants sometimes acted in ways contradictory to their intellectual

understanding, and sometimes navigating those experiences was very complicated for

them. The third and final theme is rejection of labels, and I highlight how participants

rejected the negative connotations associated with Christian women and feminism/

feminists. Following these findings, I discuss the results and implications of each theme.

II. IDEALIZED THEORY

As participants described their beliefs and experiences to me during interviews,

they demonstrated an understanding of idealized faith, idealized understanding of

themselves and others, as well as a theoretical understanding of the cause of gender issues in the church. These understandings were often expressed as opinions, general statements, and impressions. Often these understandings were not contextualized with an experience to qualify them, but simply *were*.

A. Idealized Faith

The way several participants described their Christian faith as a positive influence and belief was one way that they idealized their faith in interviews. Specifically mentioned benefits of faith included peace, confidence, joy, daily encouragement, community, and hearing from God. As Eleanor put it, "I think the way my faith plays out in everyday life is that I'm a lot more at peace with things than people who don't have a strong spirituality. I think I have a lot more faith that like, there is an ultimate plan... it just gives me more confidence and ability to find joy in things." Although participants consistently expressed concerns about how Christians were perceived by others, their own understanding of their faith was a source of positive encouragement and strength. Participant descriptions of faith were often generally ambiguous and used overarching, positive language, and these broad concepts idealized their understanding of Christianity.

Another way that participants idealized their faith was by describing it as a "journey" or "process" (as opposed to a fixed moment in time when they became a Christian). Naomi made a decision to become a Christian at a Christian camp when she was in the 7th grade, but this decision was more than just a one-time experience. She

says, "It was more like, this is a gradual thing, and at that point [at camp] I still didn't fully understand what it meant to be a Christian or to follow, and so it was just more like, that was me deciding that I wanted to continue that process of like, learning what it meant and learning how I wanted to live my life as a servant of Christ." This understanding of faith as a process was often retrospective, with participants reflecting upon their childhood exposure to Christianity and how their understandings of faith grew in response to their experiences and development. Although most participants couldn't pin down the moment at which they became a Christian, most could identify when it became *significant* to them in a new way. For Sophia, this came through an impactful conversation with an aunt, after which she reflected, "I like to think that that's the point when I really became a Christian, based on my own decisions, and based on things that I hadn't just been taught." Thus, "coming to faith" was marked not by formal rituals or public commitments, but was remembered symbolically as a moment of personal understanding of faith.

The idea of a "calling" from God was yet another way participants idealized their faith, and this was a source of great comfort and peace. Alma explained her calling to me, saying, "…part of me has always really had a heart for missions, and part of that is because my mom had me read so much on missionaries. Basically now I'm interested in going into missions, so I think that was very influential in terms of preparing for that eventual calling when I heard it from God." What was notable about participant responses is that they understood their specific interests and experiences as ultimately

coming from God's plan for them, instead of just interpreting them as contexts that explained their current situation. This also sometimes included being willing to conform oneself to an idealized understanding what God wanted for them, as they understood it. Naomi shared that, "I don't just make decisions based on what like, what I want for all the time, but I more prayerfully consider and I prepare my heart for the Lord's will and try to follow that with my life." In describing their "calling", participants idealized their future in relation to their faith in a way that was comforting and sometimes challenging.

B. Idealized Understanding of Self and Others

Most participants used their faith as an idealized lens for understanding themselves in relation to all other aspects of their identity. This is was especially true for participants who grew up in the church, because their entire understanding of their identity is linked to Christianity. Rene explained this, saying, "I've really never known myself without Christianity, so it's hard to say… It's always been such a big part of me that like, I don't know if I can say how much [it shapes me]. I have nothing to compare it to, as like, whether I identify by it or not. Like, it's something that defines me." As Rene described, identity as a Christian was usually so fundamental to the self-identity of participants that there was no other way to describe it but in abstract, all-encompassing terms. A couple of participants also expressed a desire for their faith to become integral to their understandings of themselves. As Iris explained, "I think it's a goal…that my faith would be so completely a part of me that it wouldn't be able to be divided from me… I

always want my faith to inform every part of me." This idealized understanding of faith as integral to self was common among participants, and they communicated that knowledge confidently and simply.

Also central to this idealized understanding of self in relation to Christian faith was the concept of gender. Sometimes, the faith of participants itself was gendered in a way that was idealized. Thinking about this, Alma shared the following with me: "One of the things that I tend to hear from God is "you're my precious daughter"… and that, that's a role that I really like, I love that role… the way I understand God is from my point of view of being a woman. I mean, it actually sounds kind of weird for me to think about understanding God like, just from the perspective of being a person, a human being." Here, gendered faith is something that Alma enjoys and idealizes, and it ultimately makes her faith more personal and relatable. In contrast, Sophia had much more of a genderless understanding of God, but that was still idealized. She said, "I want to say that I see God as an androgynous being, but I haven't really thought about it that way… I would be of the opinion that God sees his as more or less androgynous beings. I think he sees people for who we are, and I don't think gender is a part of that." Although the perspectives of Alma and Sophia fall on two different ends of the spectrum of idealized gendering of faith, the way they both speak about their gender in relation to their faith was both idealized and more normal for them to think about[24].

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[24] It is also worth mentioning that participants almost exclusive used the male words "him", "his" and "he" in reference to God (in addition to Jesus or the Holy Spirit). Many Christians often capitalize these words in writing to denote additional respect for the divine.

Although discussions of identity mostly focused on each participant as an individual, some participants did speak about how their faith shaped their understanding of others, and this was idealized as well. There were no consistent themes to report, but one participant response was notable. For Ella, her faith helped her to find a similarity between her own brokenness and that of others and this led to an intentional effort not to objectify others. She says, "We can either approach people as "I'm saved, you're not" and then…objectify or de-humanize them in that way. Or you can look at them thinking, "I'm a sinner, you're a sinner, let's all stop trying to sin together." This way of conceptualizing general commonalities between oneself and others using a Christian framework was one other way that participants idealized their faith and allowed that understanding to shape their lives.

C. Idealized Explanation of Gender Issues

The way most participants idealized their faith in relation to its overall influence in their lives and how they understood themselves and others was generally positive, but their idealized explanations for gender issues in the church were primarily negative. The most common explanation that participants shared was that gender roles derived from particular interpretations of the Bible. Subsequently, participants critiqued those interpretations by affirming that gender oppression in the church is a deviation from how Jesus interacted with women. Central to this critique was the paramount role of cultural and historical context as an appropriate tool to use for biblical interpretation. This

misinterpretation was then reinforced by church traditions and using the Bible to justify already determined expectations about gender roles.

The most common generalized response that participants had to explain their understanding of gender issues in the Christian church was the Bible itself. Molly explained this simply to me, stating that "There's absolutely a lot of scriptures that are like, women should not be leading. So I think that's where it starts, it's just, it's the interpretation of scripture." As Molly described it to me, these understandings were often blanket statements about the nature of the Bible and how others interpreted it. Eleanor spoke generally about Bible translations, telling me that "I think for the most part it's just trying to find really accurate translations and um I think some of that is really good. Because I think there are a lot of things that have been misunderstood. And like, just hearing about certain translations where like, gender pronouns are actually, in Greek or Hebrew, was a gender neutral pronoun and now it just comes out as he. Things like that." As participants brought up these issues of interpretation and translation, their idealized allowed a more streamlined connection between the issue and the result, restricted gender roles for women.

By far, the issue of cultural context came up for almost every participant as they discussed how the Bible has contributed to unequal treatment of Christian women. This was an especially idealized concept, and although some participants tried to give examples they often stopped mid-way or expressed insufficient knowledge, preferring to stick to broad ideas and concepts. Since this was such a significant theme, I've included

three extended quotes that illustrate how their views about the significance of cultural

context was idealized:

Alma: "I think the way I see that is, I don't know all the particulars about it, but the way I understand it is like, in the context that Paul was writing in, it made sense for the church that he was speaking to. Because I think in one of those, the women in the church were just out of control and the men weren't speaking up or saying anything. Which in that case, I mean, I can kind of see why Paul would say, "you know what, like seriously, control yourselves." It's um, I think it can be kind of frustrating when you look at a text about women and don't see it in the historical or the cultural, or even the situational context."

Ella: "So yeah, I'm not convinced that the New Testament is literally true, and I'm still trying to puzzle out which parts I believe are true, which are reflections of the times. Especially when Paul was writing to all these different congregations. We don't necessarily know what was happening in those congregations that he was writing to. That's why he sometimes gives different advice to different people."

Naomi: "When I really get down and like, look at scripture for… when I'm like looking at a topic like that and I'm trying to interpret it, I definitely want to know more of the background, and I don't like just looking at verses. I like knowing like, the whole chapter, like, why are they saying this, and what's the context, who are they talking to. Especially in Paul's letters, what was the church like that he was writing to."

However, in claiming that participants spoke generally or more broadly about

these topics I am not equating their response with how they have engaged with this

material on their own. Instead, I hope to point out how in communicating these ideas

their general understandings of a issues like interpretation and context were condensed to

communicate essential ideas and principles. This general understanding of context, as

noted by participants, included the following: cultural traditions, religious traditions,

political conditions, and the intended audience. Although several participants admitted

that sometimes it's difficult for them to understand how to approach a biblical text, but by

the way they identified their intentions to understand the context they affirmed and

communicated their desire to connect deeply and meaningfully with the text.

Another idealized understanding of gender issues in Christianity mentioned by

participants was the concept that in the New Testament, Jesus was very concerned with

the well being of women. Using this idea, participants used it to support their views of

egalitarian roles in the church. Alma told me,

"I think there's a general theme throughout the Bible of women being honored far more
than they were in the culture, the surrounding culture. I mean, especially if you look at
the ministry of Jesus. I would say almost that Jesus really honored women a lot…I think
the church would really have a lot more credibility if, um, if we actually took the Bible
seriously and took like, what we saw in [the book of] Acts and what Jesus did seriously,
and gave women more of a voice, more than we see in the mainstream culture. Because
we want to be countercultural, but we want to be countercultural in the right way
[laughs]."

In Alma's understanding, the way Jesus generally treated women was countercultural,

and she believes that this principle should still be alive today in the Christian church. By

looking at the "general theme" of women in the Bible, she has concluded that that also

reflects God's desire for women's equality. This was even more directly expressed by

Brittany, who shared that:

"I am fully convinced now of a really radical feminist hermeneutic in scripture that God
is extremely concerned about the welfare and roles of women in society. That really
probably a lot of people would say, "that's really a progressive stance," but I think it's
just a biblical stance. Viewing the whole of scripture, um, I really don't think… I think if
you really take the lenses off a little bit and start to see how God is continually choosing
women who have been outcasts, or giving voices to women and giving them platforms
and continually putting them in a more progressive role of leadership than their current
cultural context would have them."

Like Alma, Brittany sees that the consistent pattern of God's interaction with women is empowering, both personally and socially, so she doesn't understand her views to be unorthodox.

Almost all participants affirmed the compatibility between Christianity and feminism, and Blair did this when she told me that, "The stories that are in the Bible, they were all male-dominated societies…but then the whole New Testament, the whole gospel is like, equality for everyone, and there are so many stories about how Jesus is entirely countercultural and goes to interact with women. The longest conversation that he has with any one person in the Bible is with a woman, and he, it just shows how he, Jesus, radically changes that culture. And since the Bible is about like, Jesus coming and shaping our world with his teachings and stuff, I feel like it is advocating for women." Although her response briefly specific, it is the big ideas and general themes of gender equality in the Bible that gets Blair to hold those views for herself. By generally claiming cultural context and Jesus' pro-women example, participants found a new way to interpret stories previously used to justify gender discrimination.

In addition to the Bible, participants pointed to Christian tradition and education to explain gender issues. Since men have traditionally held leadership roles in Christian communities, there is little precedent for women to also lead. Talking about church tradition was often idealized, as Blair explained, "So I guess just based on tradition like, it's always been men who have fulfilled those roles, and women fall into the jobs that aren't taken."Although she says this nicely, Blair understands that in this traditional

model of leadership, men get the preferable and powerful positions in the church, while the women usually get the "leftovers" that get passed up. Molly affirmed this perspective, saying, "I think also it's a long standing value of men leading and being uncomfortable with sharing that role." For these participants, the role of tradition is a strong deterrent for women in leadership because doing so would completely change the structure of churches and often men in power are unwilling to relinquish the control that they have through their positions.

When explaining tensions surrounding gender in their church experience, the idea of following a teacher other than Jesus was a narrative that sometimes came up. Iris grew up in a liturgical church, and she remembers that in Sunday school:

"We used Luther's small catechism, which is his interpretation of the Bible, and it was like, this is fact. And so it wasn't like, let's read this and talk about it and what do we think it means. Like, there was a little bit of that, but it would often be informed by like… and now we read Luther's small catechism next to it, and those two are our interpretation. And there's many ways like, the cynicism of "good Lord, people, you're following Luther and not Jesus."

Although she speaks specifically about the reverence for Luther in her home church, the root of Iris' tension is that she disagrees with the significance placed on teachings other than Jesus. Brittany echoed this sentiment, and she understood that this could happen with church leaders as well as Christian celebrities. She said,

"[People say] Oh, I trust my pastor or whoever taught me growing up, I trust them and they've never led me wrong", I think that's a huge part of it. I don't know, I would just say loyalty… It's just very simple in terms of, these are trusted voices in the church, and we're just going to trust them, about pretty much what they say about everything… And then we are all like "Oh, Catholics are idolatrous, they do it". We do it! [Laughs] Our

pope is just John Piper. You know like, every group seems to have some sort of pope figure that you just don't really question very much."

As Brittany clearly articulates, there is a lot of trust in Christian tradition and Christian leaders, and this narrative is an example of how participants could trace the root of gender issues to people outside of God.

Another way that gender tensions were theorized by participants was through the idea of deductive study, or that individuals approached Bible study with pre-existing expectations of gender roles. Ella reflected on this, saying, "sometimes I feel like we, the interpretations that we come up with are more to justify our own opinions about it and to justify our habits than they are actually interpretation. Like, especially the head covering verses. I feel like some of the interpretation there is like, "well, Christian women don't wear headscarves, there must be a reason for it. Ok, let's come up with a reason why we don't wear headscarves." Brittany also emphasized the importance of recognizing our suppositions in studying the Bible. She told me, "I think the big framework that has been helpful for me is realizing that we interpret those things through the lenses that we have. We don't interpret them blindly. So they are clear to certain people because of their context, that already makes them believe that men have greater leadership capacities or… so if you're able to kind of remove yourself a little bit from that context, and think like, um, what would be a different way of viewing these verses." Naomi understood that sometimes families provide the template for understanding the Bible, saying, "I think that Christians should draw their views from the Bible, from scripture and go back to see what

scripture says. But I think often times we draw it from examples in our church, and examples in our families. And so people's views, kind of like politics, people's views tend to align with what their family believed and how their family functioned." By identifying this narrative of deductive interpretation, participants could separate socialization from the text itself.

However, this tension was also in the participants themselves and the way they interpreted the Bible. They challenged themselves to be open to new interpretations, and some were actively cautious against imposing any view of theirs on the text. Molly, too reflected on the intentionality that she herself needed to take while studying gender roles in the Bible, saying "It would be very uncomfortable for my life if I did come to a different conclusion. I feel like I would be awry in doing the research if I was not open to that possibility." Iris also echoed this feeling, saying that "And I can see how you get there, I can see how you can read all of this and get there. There's still a tension again in me, of my experience second guessing it. But I don't want to end up on that side. I don't want those scriptures to say that…but there's a way that it's like, I just don't want the Bible to say this so I'm going to ignore those parts." Although participants pointed to church culture and their families to explain pre-existing expectations of gender roles, they also acknowledged their own role is approaching Bible reading with specific expectations.

III. COMPLEX AND CONTRADICTORY PRACTICE

Participants had an idealized understanding of their faith, self, others, and reasons for gender issues in the church, but these things were often related to their personal experience and practice. Sometimes their experiences were even contradictory to their understandings, or vice versa. Here I highlight how participant experiences as a Christian woman, experience in marriage (real or anticipated), and experience in public life was sometimes complex and/or contradictory.

A. Experience as a Christian Woman

The first way that participants seemed identified a complex relationship with their identity as a Christian woman was in describing their early exposure to Christianity. Many participants grew up in the church and had exposure to some sort of Christian education, so it was difficult to distinguish when faith began. For Alma, it was difficult for her to understand when she became a Christian because she had grown up in a Christian home. She told me, "there's a debate about how I actually came to faith… Basically I prayed when I was four, four years old, so [my parents and I] have different stories about how that happened, literally it was so long ago. And actually that really bothered me for a while until I was like ten. Because it was like, if I don't remember it didn't really happen." Brittany also expressed this idea, but her tension wasn't quite as strong as Alma's. Her mother was a Christian and her father was not, "So I grew up, I would say, from a pretty young age, oriented toward faith. Like, having a skeptical

perspective but um, just kind of leaning in the direction of yeah, I like life better with this framework." This general "orientation" was a positive thing for Brittany, as it was for Alma. However, for some participants this inseparability between self and faith from such a young age made it difficult for them to understand themselves separate from their faith.

In addition to early church exposure, another complexity that emerged from participant interviews was that their experiences ranged from very positive and empowering to very hurtful and discouraging. Often negative experiences were shared through stories, while positive experiences were less descriptive. These positive and negative experiences were not always exclusive, and participants sometimes recognized how these two realities co-existed.

Positive Experiences as a Christian Woman

Although many participants did share negative experiences as women in the church, an equal number of participants expressed feelings of equality, acceptance, and opportunity in their faith communities. Comparing her experiences to Christian males she knows, Eleanor told me that, "I have not personally had a lot of experiences that have been different from a lot of males in my life, in terms of roles and abilities to do things… I don't know if it's just the churches that I've gone to, but I don't feel like I'm any less heard, or less valuable, or less able to help as a woman." This sentiment of feeling was

echoed by several other participants, and their responses to this question was often short because they had no story or example to give to demonstrate unequal treatment.

Ella associated this equal treatment with attending a more politically progressive church. When I asked if she had ever been expected to do something in a church setting because she was a woman she told me, "Most of my experiences have been with congregations that are fairly liberal. Yeah, I don't think there's ever been a time." In her understanding, the liberal politics of her church equated to more progressive gender roles for women, and this was the factor that seemed to be the cause of her positive experience. As an undergraduate student, Blair even made the connection that in her college context it was easier to be a Christian because she is a woman. She explained this, saying, "It's almost easier to be Christian and a woman here than for men…being religious or spiritual kind of seems like soft and not manly." This is a notable observation, because it opens up the possibility that positive experiences for Christian women may, in part, derive from social expectations that women are more spiritually inclined or religious than men are.

Negative Experiences as a Christian Woman

Primarily, negative experiences for participants involved a limiting of roles that they were allowed to hold as women, and this was justified by religious views of what "proper" roles were for them. Often, tension in the participants resulted because their own views did not align with those understandings. Rene angrily expressed that, "I was basically told I was worth nothing outside of begin able to take care of children. So being

a woman in the church is definitely something that has separated me from it a little bit and made me kind of bitter… I had a marriage and family class in high school, where they told us what our roles were, and mine was not to be anything that I considered what I wanted to be in society." This is a very explicit story of Rene being explicitly told what she could do and be as a woman, and her rejection of those roles also resulted in subsequent alienation from her faith. Negative experiences like this were additionally painful because they were communicated as factual truth, and the participant's own experience did not validate that view.

Negative experiences also occurred for participants in leadership roles, and their abilities were questioned because of their sex. Serving as a campus minister with her husband, Brittany quickly noticed different treatment because of her sex, saying, "when we went on staff, we stared being exposed to like, that the organization would interact with [my husband] when they needed things, even then I was the one who was ministry oriented… so there were a few years when it was really frustrating, or maybe more than a few years, realizing that like, my gifts were not welcome in the organization because I was a woman." Although she was not targeted with a negative experience, the avoidance of communicating with Brittany was another way that the leadership reinforced gender roles that she did not agree with.

With this variety of experiences, it's hard to get a clear and cohesive picture of how these participants experienced their faith. Regardless of how they experienced these things, however, they still all currently identify as Christian and are still involved in the

church in some way. Since their faith is so incorporated into their sense of self-identity, these positive and negative experiences shaped that understanding but never threatened it. There was always something that participants came back to in Christianity, regardless of the treatment that they experienced. However, their experiences significantly changed the nature of their relationship with faith, whether that was shown through their understanding of God, their career path, or advocacy.

B. Experience in Marriage (Real or Anticipated)

Whether married, engaged, or single, participants shared with me the expectations, ideals, and realities concerning their current or anticipated marriage. As they described their experiences and expectations in marriage, there were often contradictions between what they said and what they experienced. Or, for participants who were not yet married, there was a few places where they wanted to break their own expectations and values. Three broad ideas emerged: leadership, decision making, and roles and expectations. Throughout these themes, participants primarily understood their marriages to be egalitarian in some ways, and single participants expressed their strong desire to be in an egalitarian marriage in the future. However, this idea of "egalitarian" was often flexible; several participants expressed ways that they desired their spouse to lead them in some capacity, and some responses contradicted their alignment with egalitarian values. All participants valued the institution of marriage, but their

conceptions of gender roles, decision making, and other related topics varied

significantly, and this is an example of complex and contradictory practices in their lives.

The overall trend among participant responses concerning leadership in marriage

was that no particular spouse should lead - there should be an emphasis on equality. For

Blair (unmarried), this was expressed when she told me that in her future marriage, "I

fully expect to lead and be led…it would be healthy if like, I was better at him than

something, and he was better at me than something else so we could share that and be

more equal than just like, if the woman is like, the timid one who always has to submit to

her husband and he's like, always the head and makes the final decision on everything."

In this understanding, the strengths of each respective spouse are maximized, thus

making a more "equal" relationship. By allowing each spouse to lead in their strengths, in

this understanding, a marriage can be determined to be egalitarian. In this understanding,

Blair is also claiming a leading role for herself in a future marriage, but she doesn't

discount the strengths and abilities of her future spouse, either.

One insight about the flexible nature of egalitarian leadership came from Brittany,

who is married with one young child. She expressed to me that "We definitely thought

that he would be the head of our home, whatever that meant," and this was influenced by

their religious backgrounds and Christian books they read about marriage. However,

things began to change after they got married:

"So, like, we really felt like this [male as leader] was the only option, the only model for
marriage that worked. And then we got married then we realized like, we're just very

different than what people say men and women will be like… So we just didn't fit the mold and we realized very quickly that that was not going to work for us…people have always said it's unhealthy and dysfunctional if marriages work this way, but it doesn't really feel unhealthy or dysfunctional. And it's not even like it feels like that, but everyone's telling us it is."

This is a notable story because it demonstrates how the practical, every-day reality of a marriage can often be in conflict with the ideological and theological perspectives of the couple. For Brittany, this dissonance between their beliefs and their actual marriage led to a shift in their theological understanding of their marriage. If her theological perspective had been more rigid, then it is less likely that she and her husband would've embraced an egalitarian perspective. Although she had been taught that egalitarian marriages were unhealthy, her own experience was what ultimately led to her to conclude that that marital structure was right for her an her husband.

This focus on experience as informing leadership also came up when I was talking to Molly, who is married with a young child. Specifically, she explained to me how her support for Christian women in leadership roles was, at least in part, derived from her experience of marriage. She told me, "I know that a part of why it always has resonated with me, that women and men would lead together, is that I really believe in marriage, and the unity, the mutual submission of marriage and the trust that is built there." Since Molly had experienced "mutual submission" in her own marriage and found it to be healthy, she believed that that model could also be replicated in church leadership

structures. What both Brittany and Molly's stories highlight is how important experience was in informing participant's views on leadership roles in marriage.

However, not all participants used strictly egalitarian language. Naomi had a more complicated understanding of gender role with in marriage, as she explained to me, saying, "I believe that there is like, a leader in the family and that the man should be a leader, but I don't believe that it's like a hierarchy. I think it's more of a partnership." What's interesting here is that Naomi still uses the language of male leadership, but she interprets the implications of that differently. To her, being a leader and being a partner is not mutually exclusive. However, this distinction became more clear when I asked if there were any *specific* areas of a marriage she would want her husband to lead in. She told me,

"I would want him to be a spiritual leader in the sense that I would want him to like, to encourage my walk with Christ and to like, I don't know. I would want him to be mature in his faith and so like, lead in the fact that he knows what God wants for us. And so like, if I'm making a decision and he feels like it's not aligned with what the Lord wants, I would want him to lead me in the right direction, if that makes sense."

Although she initially explained to me that she desired to have a marriage that was a partnership, here Naomi expresses her desire for her husband to be the spiritual leader in their marriage. Trusting that her husband would be asking God about the future of her marriage, she would allow his understandings to change her decision.

These stories and perspectives demonstrate how participant understandings about leadership in marriage were often complicated and sometimes contradictory. Although

they frequently used egalitarian language, there were sometimes ways in which they still followed traditional marriage models of male leadership.

Decision Making in Marriage

Closely related to the concept of leadership in marriage was decision-making, and participants continued to express language of equality and emphasized the importance of joint-decision making. When I asked Rene about how she expected an egalitarian relationship to look in her own life, she told me that, "I think just like, joint decision making. And the, not only the tolerance, but also the desire of the man for the woman to have a career and have a life." Although she doesn't elaborate much on what joint-decision making looks like, Rene also seems to hold high importance on her future spouse valuing her career and goals in life. Naomi also echoed this sentiment for support for her career, saying, "I would want to support to support my husband, I would want to be a partner with him. But I would also want him to support me in like, what I do. And I wouldn't necessarily want it to just be like him leading me, I would want it to be a group, a co-decision." Although I just highlighted how Naomi had expectations that her husband would be the spiritual leader in their marriage, here she clearly expects decisions to be discussed about together.

Molly's criteria for which spouse had more weight in a decision was relatively more straightforward: "I feel like the person that has the most say is the one with the most conviction about the, whatever the said topic is." However, this criteria raises the

question of how decisions get made when both spouses feel strongly about their perspective. Eleanor dealt with this issue in a way not expressed by other participants; her husband gets the final say about big decisions. She explained it to me like this:

"It just so happens that I prefer not to be responsible for big decisions, like, it just gives me a little more anxiety than it does for him, so I'll default to him to make big decisions. That doesn't mean that we don't talk about it, but like, it's very important to us that we have thorough discussions and both of us can have opinions and input. But in the rare case where we don't come to agreement in that sense, I will generally default to him to make ultimate decisions…[after giving example] But in that case, I ultimately just deferred to him... he was very adamant about this and I can see his side, and even though that's not what I want, *I'm going to let him make that decision for the sake of our marriage.*" [my emphasis]

Here, Eleanor openly shares that her husband is given the ultimate authority to make big decisions in their marriage. What's notable about this is that their roles are framed as strengths or personality tendencies, and this is seen as favorable because it allows Eleanor to avoid extra anxiety. Additionally, she says that she *lets* him make this decision, all for the sake of their marriage. Therefore, in understanding that her husband acts on behalf of the betterment of their marriage, she supports that decision by following his lead. However, after telling me about her resistance to a decision he made concerning his career, she said this:

"[He] was always like "this is what I feel called to do." And so then as a Christian I felt like I couldn't really argue with that. Like, it wasn't really what I wanted ultimately, but I cared more about his sense of purpose and happiness than like, what I... life is not meant to be easy. So we just had to figure it out…so we talked about it a lot, but ultimately it was one of the decisions that I think... I mean, we made it together, but if he hadn't been so adamant about it, if I had protested more it may have gone differently."

Here, the decision made between Eleanor and her husband is further complicated by Christian language and his sense of purpose. Initially Eleanor tells me that she felt that she "couldn't argue" with his sense of calling by God, but she still suggests that she could have changed the end decision if she had "protested" more. Hannah also shared this kind of contradictory expectation for marriage. She expressed how they lead in their strengths, saying, "he's a worship leader, so he definitely leads in general our relationship in terms of like worship and I think through God's word as well… my strength more is prayer, so that's the area where I feel like I lead us more in that." but she shared that "I feel like I still look up to him to make big decisions." Charlotte, too, expressed an agreement for the her future husband to be the head for the household, but this came with some conditions:

"Yeah, as far as different spheres…for certain household goings on he would be the final say on something, but for other things I would be the final say on that. Yeah, trying to figure out partnership within that, where as long as there's actually mutual respect and love it is ok for someone to have a final say on one thing and another person for the others…I feel like as long as it comes with all those other things, the head of the household idea is something that I would definitely be good with."

For Eleanor, Hannah, and Charlotte their value for an "equal" marriage is directly in conflict with their decision to let their husbands lead in their marriage, but they don't understand these things to be contradictory because of their focus on personal strengths and mutual submission.

Concerning spousal roles (and expectations of possible roles) in marriage, participants expressed a variety of views but one common thread was a gender-free

division of roles. However, having roles was not necessarily understood to be a bad thing. Alma saw the idea of having specific roles as a positive thing, saying, "I think for me, personally I'm still in the process of forming my own opinions on that, but from what I've seen, I think that to a certain extent I actually do think that there should be gender roles within a marriage. I'm not... I tend to think that there should be freer gender roles when it comes to people in the church or for people in romantic relationships, but when it comes to a marriage, I think that it actually is good to like have some gender roles." Although she doesn't say that all gender roles are inherently bad, there is nothing inherently wrong with them, either.

Molly presented her own theory about why traditional gender roles are still attractive to married couples, saying, "I think that there's some romanticism around traditional roles, also. There's some beautiful images from the fifties, before the sixties came, before the seventies came, you know?… sometimes it's just like, [having roles] is simpler. When you get married you realize that it's a lot more work if everyone's doing everything." Again, particular roles are not necessarily assigned to one spouse here, but roles are presented as a necessary division of labor. In this understanding, having roles is "simpler" and is more logistically effective for daily activities. This idea of having divided responsibilities was common among participants, and the emphasis was on not having those roles divided by gender. The exception to this, however, was if both spouses chose those roles voluntarily. As Ella explained,

"I don't think that gender roles should define each spouse's role. Just because you're a woman you should fill such and such role. There are some people where its going to work out better for them to have a more traditional marriage. And if that's what they want and if that's what they're suited towards…but that has to be their choice. They have to look at it and say, "ok, I have such and such characteristics, I'm…I do better in such and such roles." Rather than saying, "I'm a woman, ergo I must cook dinner every night and be a stay at home mom."

Thus, many participants were very conscious about traditional gender roles when talking about marriage structure, and their ultimate priority was choice. As long as a gender role was voluntarily chosen, it was understood as a positive quality. The possible contradiction here for participants was that they often chose into traditional roles, but they didn't understand this as being against their desire for women's opportunities because they felt they had honestly chosen that role for themselves.

Contradictions and Complexity in Leadership

Participant relationships with leadership were also contradictory and complex, and their understandings and opinions varied widely. For some participants like Brittany, leadership in the church was something that was provoked because of a negative experience. She told me, "I got pregnant and had a miscarriage and was looking up resources about it, and there was like, crap available. It was horrible. It was all this fluffy, feel-good stuff, the Bible scholarship was non-existent… I really felt like I wanted to go into Bible scholarship. I think that was what pushed me over the edge, so say you love this, and there's a need for this, for your voice." Although Brittany didn't explicitly understand this decision as one of leadership, by pursuing education she was making

herself an available resource for other women. Anna too, pursued Biblical scholarship in a male-dominated field, but she understood this form of leadership and teaching as it related to her own personal interests. Again, although both Anna and Brittany had negative experiences, pursing educational leadership was a way for them to integrate their faith and interests while contributing to the problems they experienced.

As participants reflected about their interests and career paths, they often understood their leadership roles as simply following God's will for their life. As Blair told me, "I feel like my purpose is just to spread the joy that I have. And with that comes the love that I know that I've found in Jesus and God… and I know it's such a generic answer to say that 'I want to be a doctor because I want to help people', because you can totally help people in ways that are not medicine. But I think it's just one way that I've discovered I enjoy doing and it also helps me fulfill that…" For participants like Anna, Brittany, and Blair educational leadership was a central requirement and process of attaining their goals, which were implicitly endorsed by God through direction, inspiration, or experience. These participants didn't explicitly understand their roles to be "leadership" because they weren't explicitly in a church context, but their actual experienced revealed it to be just that.

In her church where women aren't allowed to preach, Charlotte volunteered to read the Bible during a service and experienced some initial pushback to her idea. In talking to men on church leadership, she told me that she had to "convince them that "No, I'm going to do a good job with this." But feeling like, yeah, it doesn't automatically

show that I'm going to do well at this. I had to prove it… It was nice that I felt that I proved it but not as nice that I feel like I had to." Although Charlotte was ok with working through existing church structures to lead through reading during service, she also didn't totally agree with the position she had been put in in the first place.

Being involved in some form of church leadership was common among participants in this study, although it was not something that all participants embraced. Eleanor pointed out an interesting trend while speaking about women's leadership in Christian contexts, saying, "There are some churches who have followed doctrines or interpretations of the Bible that really believe that women are not fit to be leaders… I've also not sought after leadership. I feel most called to work with children, and I feel that it's something that's very accepted in Christian realms." What's notable about this response is that it highlights how certain forms of leadership for women may be less likely to receive negative responses because they fit with preconceived ideas about women's roles in the church. Since Eleanor feels called (again, use of language here implies God's direction) to work with children, a more accepted role for women, her academic leadership in pursuing her PhD is more celebrated, and "it hasn't come up as such an issue for me, like [my] friends that want to be in journalism or in politics." Thus, leadership for Christian women may also be gendered, and this should be taken into account for every specific role.

In addition to discussing their own leadership roles (or lack thereof), the women interviewed also stressed the importance of seeing women in more public and visible

leadership roles. Due to her more conservative church experience growing up, Anna

pointed out that "…when I went to seminary I hadn't thought of being ordained… I knew

subconsciously that that's something women just didn't do." Since Anna had grown up in

a church context with female leaders, she had no reason to believe that women could

serve as pastors. After hearing a talk, however, she realized that "I have to get ordained.

If I'm teaching a class and encouraging women in ministry, women and girls and boys

and men, they need to see women behind the altar teaching and preaching, and not just

the supplicants, not just the ones serving." Anna felt personal responsibility for increasing

the visibility of female leaders in the church, and shaped her career around that

understanding.

Two other participants also brought up the value of seeing women in

nontraditional leadership roles, with one participant noting an observation and one

participant sharing a story. Concerning her own egalitarian marriage and women in

church leadership roles, Brittany told me that,

"The most convincing argument now is seeing people live it, and seeing women in
leadership as pastors, as chaplains, campus pastors. I think it's harder to argue with that,
because you can talk about what the Greek means, but a when I think you start to change
people's frameworks, like, this maybe isn't as crazy as it seems."

Here, Brittany explicitly addresses the fact that people's frameworks for understanding

women in leadership are adjusted when they actually see it in action and working well.

While there may be many people who believe that translations offer support for women

in church leadership, that is not correlated to more women in leadership. One participant, Blair, shared a story of a time when she caught herself being surprised by a woman in church leadership. She said, "I guess even though I'm, I would have no problem with a woman pastor, I would like, notice and like, do a double take I guess, if a woman pastor suddenly took the stage. And I did react that way when I was studying abroad and there was a woman pastor one day [makes gawking noise]." This story demonstrates that even women who support women in church leadership are unaccustomed to seeing women in those roles, and this then may have a significant impact on if they decide to pursue leadership themselves.

One trend that emerged among positive experiences of Christian women was the guidance of a Christian woman (or a group of women) who acted as mentors and support for them in different stages of their life. When she began leading the women's ministry at her church, Molly reached out to the previous leaders and experienced empowerment through their support and guidance. She explained this, saying, "…part of why the authority that I have in the community now is because of their mentorship and because of… because so immediately they bestowed authority upon me, and trust. They went to bat for me." Although she couldn't immediately understand why they supported her so completely, the support of these women made Molly's own transition into a position of leadership easier. Specifically, these mentors led the participants into leadership roles, and two things were critical: guidance for them to enter into those roles well, and developing the practical skills to keep leading well.

Many participants expressed positive experiences in being a Christian woman, but these experiences were often not far from other negative experiences. When viewed from different perspectives, some experiences could be interpreted to fall on one side or the other. Iris grew up in a conservative Christian church without women in leadership, but she never felt that she was not supported in her own personal goals because of her sex. She expressed this paradoxical situation to me, saying, "I feel like potentially the tension is even bigger for me in that like, my immediate circle growing up was 100% supportive, but that the larger context of us as Christians was not. Just the dissonance between [my parens and I] has made it a much bigger tension in my life." Thus, the line between positive and negative experiences for the participants was not always a clear one. However, many of them shared stories and options about how being a Christian woman was a disempowering, and sometimes hurtful experience.

IV. REJECTION OF LABELS

As participants shared their experiences with me, they pushed back against two labels: Christian woman and feminist. However, they did not often have any fundamental disagreements with how they understood those terms and identities, but they instead rejected the label as representative of qualities and beliefs that they did not espouse. Elaborated below are specific tensions, hesitations, and disagreements with the connotation associated with "Christian woman" and "feminism".

A. Rejection of "Christian Woman"

During the interviews, I asked participants about their perception of expectations for Christian women. Although the expectations that they shared were not always their own personal views, most participants expressed a rejection of assumptions that would be made of them as Christian women. Specific topics that were common in responses included implicit sexism in the church, the importance of service, emphasis on children and the domestic sphere, the unspoken expectation of marriage, and additional expectations about their relationship with men.

Implicit Sexism in the Church

As the participants shared both their experiences with me, I noticed that when they shared about how they learned about expected gender roles they couldn't point to an explicit teaching or moment when those expectations were discussed. "They didn't even preach against women in ministry," Anna told me, concerning her conservative church upbringing. "…They didn't even dream that it would ever be possible." Anna's story demonstrates that there wasn't even the need to combat the idea of women's leadership, because it was so accepted as a norm in her church community. This theme of unquestioned exclusion of women from leadership roles showed up in several other participant's responses, too. For women with leadership skills, like Iris, this ultimately has made it more difficult for them to visualize themselves in leadership positions. It shaped her own understanding of her potential, and she explained this to me, saying, "…

growing up in a church that didn't allow women as pastors, I think I never even considered that as a potential calling of mine. It wasn't a role model that was before me. And I think I still don't consider it as highly as I think I should. Pastoral care is probably something that I will end up doing with my long-term career, but there's a lot of mental dissonance there for me." Although Iris recognizes that she possesses the skills required to succeed in a pastoral role, it is still hard for her to reconcile that understanding with what she saw in her home church culture. This is an important dimension to this theme of implicit sexism in the church, because it also takes into account the *psychological* effects of limited roles for women in church. Women might be able to intellectually justify their own leadership capabilities, but that potential might not actualize into actual leadership roles because of conditioned insecurities.

Another dimension to this implicit sexism is the language that is used in Christian settings, which subtly communicate fundamental assumptions about gender roles. Brittany reflected on her childhood experience growing up in the church, saying, "I think a lot of it [gender roles] were so subtle and non-explicit growing up that I didn't even pick up on a lot of it. I mean, there was a ton of language, completely accepted in every sphere I was in. Like, the man is the head of the home, which [laughs] is not in the Bible." In Brittany's experience, this normalized, gendered language was damaging not only because it was based in an inaccurate paraphrase of the Bible, but also because it was undetected. This implicit sexism is made even more difficult to identify when churches verbally affirm non-traditional roles for women but do not make structural

changes to embody that belief. Alma expressed her frustration about this at her home church, and she shared that "I think [not respecting women] is definitely, at least within the church culture that I grew up in, it's definitely very implicit. I mean, they say that they're really accepting of women in ministry, but their leadership doesn't reflect it, and neither do their actions." For Alma, the ultimate test of support for women's leadership in the church was their representation in leadership, and the failure of the church to implement this idea was another barrier. In all these implicit ways, sexism permeated participant's experiences of learning about gender in Christian contexts and from Christian structures.

The Importance of "Service"

One unanticipated theme that emerged concerning expectations for Christian women was the idea of service. The way participants critiqued the idea of service and used it to describe their own experiences revealed that often service was an expected quality that had alternative connotations of submissiveness and subordinance. Alma directly called this expectation out, saying:

"I think there's a pretty common theme that women are the helpers, women are the people who usually serve or do the serving. I mean, I think especially that [serving]. I mean, not that serving is bad… I mean, I even was talking to a gal that I'm discipling right now, actually, and she was talking about... I was asking her to list her strengths, and she listed the top one as serving, service. Which I don't think is a bad thing, but I tend to see it a lot of Christian women who tend to list…that as their top strength. And I mean, service is great but I kind of wish that we... we tend not to see men list that, I don't think men list that at all because it's not a part of the stereotype, because men are typically the leaders, quote on quote."

Although Alma is quick to affirm that she sees no fundamental issue with women and service, she also critiques its feminine gendering. In this way, the concept of service can be used to justify and solidify women's roles as "helpers", which are deemed appropriate roles for them to fill.

Sophia recalled her understanding of service in relation to her family, which she similarly critiques. She told me, "it's sort of like the woman is the servant. Like, my dad said that in my oldest cousin's wedding vows, part of the vow was, you know, swearing before God that "you are this man's servant, and your job is to serve him and to obey him." And my dad said that my mother's horror stricken face was a sight to see [laughs]". Here, the idea of service is understood in the context of marriage, and her cousin's vow of service to her husband was noticeably one sided. The additional commentary about her mother's reaction demonstrates how the implications of "woman as servant" are likely to be more damaging but are consistently reinforced through religious validation.

One participant that frequently used the language of service in relation to herself was Naomi. "For me," she said, "nursing is like kind of a way that I live out my faith, and a way…yeah. A way that I live out my faith in that like, God has called me to *serve*, so nursing is a way that I can *serve* people, but through pursuing something that interests me and like I said before, bringing in science and helping people together. So nursing is where God has shown me that that's where I can bring passions that I have together and really *serve* him and *serve* his people, and learn what it means like, better to be a

Christian just from like, interacting with God's people." It is important to note here that

Naomi's use of service here is extremely positive; she understands her service to God to

be embodied in her pursuit of a nursing career. However, what I wish to point out is that

the frequency at which she uses the word (4 times in this quote) supports the idea that

service is a more frequent expectation for Christian women than for Christian men.

One outlier response about women in leadership roles came from Hannah, who

agreed that sometimes it is better for women not to be in preaching roles at church. She

told me:

"…not having women up at the pulpit is actually a more loving thing to men than we
realize, and it's just because our culture tells us that if you're not on equal footing that
you're somehow limited. But sometimes its completely more loving and more you know,
like, it's more serving to God to not do that. And I think that's something a lot of women,
especially growing up in the church, yeah, once you're aware of how easy it is for a man
to get distracted and how easy it is by the clothes you're wearing or whatever, you realize
it's not out of some law, that they don't want you to preach."

Although this response was an outlier, it is notable because it shows how her

understanding about women in leadership is based on other assumptions about how men

are "wired" to see women. She understands her perspective to be based on her love and

care for men, but still affirmed women's leadership in other capacities when it was

edifying to all.

Children & the Domestic Sphere

Another prominent expectation that all participants talked about in some way was the role of mother and homemaker. The role of mother included birthing children and being the primary parent responsible for childcare, which sometimes included staying home to be able to do so. This was often lumped into to discussions about taking care of children, or participants would rattle off a laundry list of ideas without much concern to their relation to each other. Speaking about the expectation for Christian women to have children, Naomi told me that the expectation is "…that a Christian woman should be a good mother and like, love her children. And yes, I believe that if you're a mother you should love your children [laughs]. But again, I don't believe that that is necessarily a Christian woman's role." Although she doesn't deny that women should love their children, Naomi also critiques the expectation that being a mother is not something that all women should be obligated to be. Ella also pointed out that sometimes the desire of women to not have children is understood to be like having psychological or mental health issues. She explained, "there's a common notion in America in general that women, especially women who don't want kids, there's something wrong with them. It's less unusual for a man to not want children. But [imitating a voice], "she doesn't want children? She needs to see a shrink!" This example again shows how deep the expectation is for women to have children, and this may be even more pronounced for Christian women. Although she currently doesn't have children, Eleanor connected her faith to her desire to have children:

"I've always wanted to have kids, but I do feel much, like it's much more important now than it used to be. I feel like this... it's almost like there's so many bad people in the world, I want to... nothing is guaranteed, that if you have kids they'll become Christian, but I feel like I have a good opportunity to try and bring up more Christian people in the world. And not that like I have to procreate to sustain our religion or anything like that, not anything to do with my eternity or anything like that, but just the sense that like, what a cool opportunity that I can contribute to someone else that could spread the word of God in the world. Plus I think that it would be super fun!"

The expectation that a Christian mother should stay home to take care of her children became clear to Brittany when her husband would watch her son while she was on a work trip. She told me, "I would travel for work and I would leave him here with my husband. And people would ask me, "who has your child?" and I would be like, "um, his father." [Laughs]. He's not been abandoned. So I think it's just those practical things is where we've seen it like, come out a lot. People just aren't used to seeing what it looks like." As Brittany explains, this expectation continues to exist because it continues to be replicated in families to this day. The surprise of people who found out her husband was watching her son likely comes out an expectation (conscious or not) that the woman is the default caregiver for children. In discussing these expectations of being a mother and the manager of their home, the participants consistently emphasized their desire that a woman should have the choice to choose her role, without social penalty.

Sophia embraced her ability to choose her own role, and the one that she desires to fulfill is that of a stay-at-home mom. She told me, "I really, really want to have children and I feel like that is something that I am meant to do in my life, is to be a mother, and I really want to focus on my kids for a significant part of my life…that was

an interest that I had when I was in high school, but I felt really uncomfortable thinking it just because of the environment that I had grown up in." Although she had felt this way since she was young, she was uncomfortable to bring it up to her mother, whose definition of feminism was that "I got myself through Harvard law school and became a lawyer, my intelligence is the most important thing about me."

Sophia's open desire to embrace these traditional roles is subsequently paradoxical, because from the surface she embodies the socialized role for Christian women, but her motivation and awareness of that allow her to feel empowered in her choice to be a stay-at-home mom. She is very clear that this is her own decision, saying, "I would want to fill the role of being the mother and you know, being a stay-at-home mom and I would want to fill that role but not because it's what I was expected to do. I would just ideally like to marry someone who would be more of the breadwinner, so to speak." I bring Sophia's story in discussing this expected trend of being a mother and homemaker because it exemplifies how many participants understood these expectations; they rejected the pressure to fulfill those roles, but they still understood them to be attractive options for their future. However, their understandings also don't take into account the socialization that they've experienced their whole lives that have prepared them for those specific roles, so that raises the question about how much choice they've really had to reject or embrace the role of mother and homemaker.

Although homeschooling was rarely brought up by participants, it is still a finding to note. Alma was homeschooled by her mother after she and her brother experienced

bullying at their Christian private school, and the new system gave her mother more control over what she was learning. She explained, saying, "[My parents] basically came to the conclusion that if they were going to be teaching me anyway, my mom would rather give me the best part of her day instead of the crappy, worst parts of her day. That was the reasoning. Also just in terms of values, a lot of the kids my age… were watching things and reading things that my parents didn't agree with. Just cultural values, sort of thing…So they just saw the trend of where that school was going, and they said, "Umm, we really don't want our kids to be raised in this". Homeschooling was also mentioned by Molly, who had a Christian sister-in-law that homeschooled all of her children. This theme of homeschooling is the fulfillment of the expected roles of wife and homemaker, because it is the assuming of total authority of the home and children, and this is accomplished by shifting the center of education to the home as well.

Expectations in Church Settings: Administration and Limited Leading Capacities

Within a church setting, some participants identified the expectations of teaching and performing administrative duties. Although this was not a pervasive theme in the interviews like motherhood and homemaking were, it was brought up enough to be noteworthy. The role of administration also sometimes took on the language of "planning". Blair explained this to me, saying, "Women might be more expected to be like, the Sunday school teachers, or do like administrative stuff. Plan events and things. And men are more like, the up front people on the stage, like delivering the sermons and

announcements and stuff." The way Blair juxtaposes the teaching with the "up front"

roles of the men makes it clear that women are expected to make the church logistically

run and take care of most behind the scenes responsibilities. This expectation made Alma

feel frustrated as she reflected on the ways women's roles are limited at her current

church. She told me,

"Um, basically... so there aren't any women elders at my church and women tend to be in
more traditional roles. Like, I think the only women on staff right now at my old church
are... I think there is a woman who's leading the childcare ministry and a woman who is
leading the women's ministry. And then secretaries. And that's about it. Which frustrates
me. I think that women definitely in the church tend to have a lot less voice and a lot less
authority in the church."

Although Alma doesn't explicitly devalue the roles that the women in her church fill, she

recognizes that they are ultimately not positions of authority and she knows that their

status as women is a fixed barrier from entry into positions of power.

Additional Expectations Concerning Men

In addition to the expectations about their own role, a few participants noted that

Christian women were also expected to support their husband and maintain a level of

sexual modesty. Speaking about expectations, Naomi said, "…as a wife, [a woman]

should support her husband and that she is second to her husband. And I believe that

there is like, a leader in the family and that the man should be a leader, but I don't believe

that it's like a hierarchy. I think it's more of a partnership." Here, Naomi points out that

the expectation of supporting one's husband is also an expectation for the woman to hold

a secondary level of importance in the marriage. Words that participants used to describe men in receiving this support were "headship" and "leader", whereas the expectations were that women would be "submissive" and "second".

Sexuality was another area that a few other participants mentioned as women's responsibilities. Molly interpreted this expectation as "being modest", which possibly leads to the assumption that Christian women are responsible for the sexual decisions of Christian men around them. This expectation was very explicit for Rene, who explained, "I was even told by my parents, like, my mom was like, you will be expected to be a virgin when you're married, but don't expect your husband to be." This expectation concerning sexuality, as described by Rene and Molly, is potentially two sided: maintaining ones own sexual purity, while also abiding by understandings of modesty to protect men's sexual integrity.

B. Rejection of "Feminist"

When I asked participants about their definition of and identification with feminism, a notable trend emerged. When defining feminism participants were generally supportive of the concepts of equal rights and opportunities for women, but they immediately showed signs of tension in accepting the term feminist because of particular conceptions of what feminism is and who feminists are. By their own definitions participants called themselves feminist, but their responses show a strong label rejection to the term "feminist" and associations with it.

Definitions of Feminism

When discussing their own definitions of feminism, participants consistently used the word "equal" to describe it. This was often followed by a word like "rights", "opportunities", "capability", or "intellect", and these terms specified the type of equality they meant. As Molly told me, "what comes to my mind is equality for women. [Pauses] And I guess what I think of when I think of equality for women is the opportunity for a woman to take up as much space as a man takes up." For participants who brought up this idea of "equality," often the implicit standard of that equality was men, as Molly explicitly mentions. However, this equality with men went only so far for some participants. Naomi told me the following about her definition of feminism:

"Feminism is…[pauses to think again] I guess like, just the belief that women have… I think there's like extremes, and so I think that feminism is just the belief that women should have some of the power and that they should be self-empowered as well. Like, they should be allowed to be who they want to be, and they should be allowed to assert, like, do what they want to do and be part of whatever they want to be a part of, that kind of thing. And that women should be equal with men, but that they aren't the same as men."

Although Naomi affirms that women should be "self-empowered" and should "do what they want to do," she still holds that there is a fundamental difference between men and women and that gender homogeneity should not be the ultimate goal. Different types of "equality" that were mentioned by participants include opportunities, social equality, worth, capability, and intellectual.

Similar to the emphasis on "equality", participants also consistently brought up the importance of choice as a dimension of feminism. Specifically, this choice was almost always about fulfilling roles that were chosen, not proscribed because of gender. There was no specific hesitation if women fulfilled traditional roles, however, as long as that choice was authentic. Sophia explained that, "for me, feminism is women being able to do what they want to do with their lives and not being criticized or judged for that." This language of "whatever they/she wants" was common among participants. Ella, however, still affirmed a woman's right to choose her role, but that there should be some exceptions. She told me that "[women should not be shut out of any job or role purely because of their gender. Unless gender is a major role. Like, a male cannot…well, except for female to male transgender, a man can't be a pregnancy surrogate or a surrogate mom. And you know, there are obviously some cases where you want someone of a certain gender to fill the job." Although she was the only participant with similar views on this topic, it highlights how some participants had caveats to their own understandings of feminism and its practical application to life and work.

For some participants, these goals of feminism are ultimately for women's empowerment. For Iris, this understanding of feminism as empowerment is connected to actively advocating for that belief. She told me,

"Feminism characterized for me is still, at its root, that the beliefs are that women are worth just as much as men, women are capable of all the things men are, and the fact that that isn't true or being exercised in our society. So I think its the same conversation of, like, it's not enough to just not be racist, you have to be an anti-racist. I think that has a very live spin for feminism to me, too. It's just not enough to say that you believe that

women are equal, but that you would be advocating for it and standing up against the places where that isn't true."

Iris's response is notable because in her understanding, empowerment feminist empowerment comes only through acting on that conviction - intellectual knowledge is not enough. Other themes that were brought up by participants about female empowerment in relation to feminism were getting more women into ministry, removing restrictions of society, and allowing women to gain more power in society.

Hesitations

Although their positive affirmations of the ultimate goals of feminism was strong, sometimes participant hesitations were equally as forceful. It is also important to note here that there was a distinction between some participants who *held* the views that they described, whereas others talked more about their understanding of how others perceived it. The top hesitations were that feminism affirmed power over men (effectively oppressing them), men are hurt and judged unnecessarily, and feminists are understood to be militant "Femi-Nazis". Additionally, feminism was identified to be a "dirty word" among Christians, although it was conceded that many Christians believe in equality for women.

One of their primarily participant hesitations was that feminism was about women's superiority over men. When I asked Alma about her understanding of feminism the following dialogue took place:

A: Uhh, feminism. I think I tend to define feminism - I think of it in terms of the movement. I think of it as the movement that argued in favor of women's rights.
M: So legal rights?
A: No, not just legal rights. I think women's rights, women's equality, um, and in some cases women's superiority - which I don't really agree with - I think that sometimes feminists can take it too far, and can really berate men, which I think is definitely the pendulum swinging the other way. I think that people who do that take it too far. I think feminism done right though can be a force for good and a force for women's rights, and equality for women with men. I think that it can lead to things that are good.

Several things are notable about Alma's response, and this trend also happened during other interviews. First, she discusses what she thinks feminism is and why she's hesitant *in the same response*. I don't need to ask a follow-up question - she anticipates that there is something about the word feminism that she immediately needs to clarify, and she does so quickly. A part of this is that she clearly separates herself from the ideas and actions that she does not agree with, so that I will not connect my idea of her with those associations.

Another trend was that participants felt feminism was trying to "reverse" the oppression of women to oppress men, and this added to their label rejection. Molly got this impression from a gender and women's studies class in college, and she felt that in that class, "…often what was aggravating about feminism was that it was a complete disavowal of men altogether. Almost making them property, or making them less than. And that, to me, is just never ok. Like, it's not ok to do that to a woman, and it's not ok to do that to a man. And so I think that often that's what I would be afraid of, sometimes subscribing to feminism is that I have to make a man less than what he's supposed to be."

Other participants felt the same way, and Eleanor believed that this power shift is based on a desire for revenge. She said, "I think a lot of feminists think that's what they're doing but end up making it look like they want women to have more power because they didn't have the power before, and it often unfortunately comes out as almost like a reverse, that they want women to be in power and that men should not have as many opportunities to be in power… I don't necessarily believe that there's some sort of debt owed that women should have more opportunities than men because they didn't in the past. By equating the oppression of women as a "debt owed", Eleanor's hesitation is that the desire of women for power is spiteful and comes out of a place of hate. Alma echoed this sentiment, saying, "I think that sometimes feminists can take it too far, and can really berate men, which I think is definitely the pendulum swinging the other way. I think that people who do that take it too far." As these responses show, participants had a strong aversion to associating themselves with feminism because they felt that it hurt men and took away their rights and dignity.

Specific phrases that kept reoccurring in participant responses were the phrases "dirty word" and "Femi-Nazi". Often, participants used these terms in conjunction with the fear that feminism would hurt men. Rene told me, "I think it's kind of become a *dirty word* in Christianity. As soon as you dismiss a woman as a feminist, she loses all kind of credibility, because I think a lot of people think that feminism means, like, a woman thinks that she's better than men… And I've even heard women in the church describe women in the church as "Femi-Nazis", and like those sorts of terms." In using both of

these phrases, Rene clearly connects the stigma of feminism with the association of man-hating and superiority.

Reflecting about one of her colleagues, Anna shared with me that "Yeah, [feminism] is a single term and it's so loaded. One of the women that I mentioned, the very fact that she's trying to get a women's resource center and women's studies minor together, she gets labeled a Femi-Nazi." In this story, Anna's friend was labeled as a "Femi-Nazi" because she was actively trying to create more resources and academic opportunities for women on her campus. This association with Femi-Nazi was even stronger for Ella, who said that "Some people see feminism as Femi-Nazis who want to enslave men…" These negative associations confirm that feminism is still very much a taboo topic in Christian communities and even implies that it is synonymous with fascist power, slavery, and intense hatred.

As these participants shared their reflections about feminism with me, it became clear that they agreed precisely with their own definition of the term. This is not surprising information considering the virulent associations with feminism, but as a consistent finding it is worth noting. Although some participants had less qualifications about being associated with feminism, more often than not there were some conditions presented to make it align to their understanding.

SURVEY FINDINGS

Following the conclusion of each interviews, participants were asked to complete

a short survey that surveyed frequency of behavior (Figure 1) and attitudes toward

particular beliefs (Figure 2). Out of the 13 participants who were interviewed, 11

completed the survey. As mentioned before, this small sample size is definitely not

representative of any groups, but it is helpful information that supports the qualitative

findings. Below I briefly review how the survey findings fit into previously described

thematic categories of idealized theory, complex and contradictory practice, and rejection

of labels. One additional note about the survey - since the survey was administered

following the interview, it may be possible that survey results were affected by interview

questions and my own influence in the interview. However, I do not believe that the

results would be different if the survey had been administered prior to the interview,

because all participants were aware of the topics to be discussed when they volunteered

to participate.

Idealized Theory & Complex and Contradictory Practice

In the survey responses, 72% of participants strongly agreed that their faith is the

most important part of their lives, and 63% strongly agreed that belief in Jesus is the only

way to heaven and eternal life. These findings are consistent with participant responses,

because they demonstrate how participants faith was a centering identity for many of

them. Responding to their idealized understanding of their faith, participants

demonstrated through this response that they believe their beliefs are true for both them and others. Although 54% of participants indicated that they share their faith with non-Christians at least yearly, 100% of participants indicated that they either strongly agree or agree that they should share their faith with others. This discrepancy between ideal and practice supports how participants had idealized understandings of their faith, themselves, and others.

Rejecting Labels

In addition to demonstrating a complex relationship between their behaviors and beliefs, participants also responded strongly to questions that were aligned with popular understandings of Christian women. 54% of participants strongly disagreed that a woman's priority should be taking care of her home and family, and 63% strongly agreed that men do not have more spiritual authority than women. By indicating that they strongly agree or disagree with these statements, participants not only communicate their opinion but separate themselves from identities that are associated with those sets of beliefs. However, there was much less participant rejection concerning opinions abortion and pre-marital sex: 81% of participants strongly agreed or agreed that couples should wait until marriage to have sex, and 72% strongly agreed or agreed that abortion was wrong. This selective rejection can be interpreted to support the idea that through their responses, participants specifically affirmed and rejected particular questions to the extent that those questions were extensions of a particular stereotype or identity. Since most

participants who took the survey pray with others, attend church, and read the Bible on a monthly basis, it is plausible that they have consistent exposure to Christian communities and they are actively responding to those experiences and understandings. An additional note about the tables: the N/A column has been removed from this table because it was a response not chosen by any participant in Figure 1 or 2.

Figure 1

1) Please indicate how frequently you participate in the following activities.					
Activity	**Frequency of Participant Responses (N and %)** **N = 11**				
	Daily	At Least Weekly	At Least Monthly	At Least Yearly	Never
Pray on your own	6 54.5%	3 27.3%	2 18.2%	0 0%	0 0%
Pray with others (outside of Bible study or church)	3 27.3%	5 45.5%	1 9.1%	2 18.2%	0 0%
Read the Bible on your own	3 27.3%	5 45.5%	2 18.2%	0 0%	1 9.1%
Read the Bible outside of Bible study or church	3 27.3%	5 45.5%	2 18.2%	0 0%	1 9.1%
Attend a church service	1 9.1%	8 72.7%	4 36.4%	2 18.2%	0 0%
Participate in a Bible study	0 0%	5 45.5%	4 36.4%	2 18.2%	0 0%
Attend Christian conferences or trainings	0 0%	0 0%	1 9.1%	8 72.7%	2 18.2%
Read Christian books or use similar resources	0 0%	1 9.1%	6 54.5%	3 27.3%	1 9.1%
Share my faith with non-Christians	0 0%	0 0%	5 45.5%	6 54.5%	0 0%
Teach others about Christianity (outside of Bible study or church)	0 0%	1 9.1%	4 36.4%	6 54.5%	0 0%

Figure 2

Question 2: Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements.						
	Frequency N = 11					
I believe that…	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
The Bible is literally true.	1 9.1%	4 36.4%	2 18.2%	4 36.4%	0 0%	0 0%
Same-sex marriage is morally ok.	2 18.2%	3 27.3%	1 9.1%	2 18.2%	1 9.1%	2 18.2%
I should share my faith with others.	5 45.5%	6 54.5%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%
Women should desire to have children.	0 0%	1 9.1%	4 36.4%	2 18.2%	4 36.4%	0 0%
Being a Christian is the most important part of my life.	8 72.7%	1 9.1%	2 18.2%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%
Men do not not have more spiritual authority than women.	7 63.6%	4 36.4%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%
Belief in Jesus is the only way to heaven and eternal life.	7 63.6%	1 9.1%	1 9.1%	1 9.1%	0 0%	1 9.1%
A woman's priority should be taking care of her home and family.	0 0%	0 0%	4 36.4%	1 9.1%	6 54.5%	0 0%
Abortion is morally wrong.	3 27.3%	5 45.5%	1 9.1%	0 0%	0 0%	2 18.2%
Women should desire to marry.	0 0%	0 0%	6 54.5%	2 18.2%	3 27.3%	0 0%
Couples should wait until marriage to have sex.	6 54.5%	3 27.3%	1 9.1%	1 9.1%	0 0%	0 0%

DISCUSSION

As participants shared their beliefs, stories, and opinions with me, their

understandings echoed many themes raised by sociological theory. Here I discuss the

findings of the qualitative and quantitative research, addressing the themes of idealized

theory, complex and contradictory practice, and rejection of labels. Throughout these

themes, participants demonstrated a critical awareness of how their identity as a woman

and a Christian places them in a unique position that requires intentional navigation

through their ideas, experience, and labels. Following this discussion I note suggestions

for further research.

Idealized Theory

For participants, the idea of their Christian faith is especially conducive to an

idealized theory because, in a way, it is a belief outside of their immediate experience and

is something that is intellectually grasped. All the participants in this sample were highly

educated, and it was clear from their responses that many of them had spent a significant

amount of time seeking to understand their Christian faith intellectually, and this was

often a way that they grew in their faith. These idealized understandings of belief were a

constant source of comfort and purpose to many participants, and they were aware of the

implications of their beliefs. Therefore, participants were even more confident in their

beliefs because they had intellectually worked through to those conclusions.

However, this intellectual reasoning of beliefs is hard to separate from early church exposure and the socialization as Christian women. This is consistent with Beit-Hallahmi's (1991) findings concerning the role of religion as both a psychological and collective identity, and participants identified that their faith is both something they think as well as something they do. It is of critical importance to better understand how this process of faith happens, because in it lies the contextual, spiritual, and relational components that have shaped their participant's lives. Idealized understandings of gender issues in Christianity also helped participants to make logical sense of their experience as women in the church, and by identifying these negative ideas they were able to override them with their own narratives. For some participants that had had a negative experience in the church, they chose not to turn away but to stay and (sometimes) create positive change. As structures of community, comfort, and belonging, these participants understood the value of their Christian faith to their lives and it was not something that they wanted to give up because of a negative experience, no matter how difficult.

In describing their identity, it was often very clear that participants understood their Christian identity to be central to how they thought about themselves and the world. Although they definitely identified themselves as women too, that identity was something that was more assumed and in the background than their faith was. While some participants expressed how they had struggled with their faith, gender was something that always remained stable. Some participants told me that they desired their Christian identity to be their primary identity, but the reality of how this was negotiated seems to

indicate that several identities hold a primary position and then subsequently influence each other.

Complex and Contradictory Practice

As their responses show, the Christian women that I interviewed are constantly living in a paradoxical existence where there beliefs, practice, and identity label are constantly readjusting. However, this raises an important question: paradoxical by whose standard? It has been difficult to summarize and condense the findings of this research because each participant herself was a microcosm of larger social, historical, and religious trends. Importantly, participants who expressed contradictory actions and beliefs did not interpret their actions to be contradictory; instead, by interpreting their experiences and contexts in relation to their core beliefs. In this way, the idealized theories of participants allowed for complex and contradictory practice because they could respond broadly to a given situation and have it still align with the broader principle of Christianity (as they interpreted it). Just as participants identified the importance of context in biblical translation, so they also valued the context of their own lives, and by drawing away from literal interpretations of the Bible participants found freedom and flexibility within their Christian framework.

These results were consistent with the findings of Bartkowski (2001), Bartkowski & Read (2003), and Gallagher and Smith (1999), which all emphasized how Christian women negotiate gender in their marriages and in their every day lives. A trend in this

research is that although Christian women often still use the language of traditional gender roles their behaviors also reflect egalitarian values. However, some of the participants in this study also suggest that the opposite may be true: Christian women may have symbolic egalitarian views but practice traditional gender roles in their life. This leads to the possibility that egalitarian language has been adopted into Christian contexts more quickly than practical and structural changes, so although there may be an intellectual awareness of "equality", that may not reflect the reality of day-to-day operations in Christian communities.

Rejection of Labels

Perhaps the most interesting finding of this research is that participants rejected both the labels of Christian woman and feminist not because they didn't identify as such, but because they were rejecting the stereotypes and beliefs associated with such labels. This label rejection is consistent with the findings of Gallagher (2004b) and Hollows (2000) which identified negative stereotypes about feminism. By allowing them to define feminism and what it meant to be a Christian woman, participants were given control to avoid these stereotypes and explicitly communicate what ideas they agreed with. In this way, participants can be understood to be intentionally avoid the "culture war", as described by Hunter (1991). Instead of picking sides, these participants picked values and ideas that were both relevant and applicable to their lives, and they seemed to experience no obligation to defend the rhetoric of the Christian Right.

However, the language used by participants to describe themselves was highly influenced by the language of the Christian Right and the first wave of the feminist movement. This demonstrates how the language of the feminist movement and the Christian Right have had a lasting influence on how Christian women understand themselves. Instead of subscribing to just one or the other, participants actively picked the values in each group that they agreed with and incorporated them into their identity. With less value on the explicit label of what they are, participants felt free to pursue various paths and roles. However, although the participants felt comfortable identifying as feminist by their own definition, their actions often still reflected traditional patterns of behavior for Christian women.

Although participants argued that feminism means that women should have the choice to choose whatever role they want, what happens if "feminism" has come and women are still holding the same roles as before? Thus, while participants enthusiastically supported feminist ideas of equality for women, there is still a dissonance about how that should subsequently shape their lives. This intellectual understanding may contribute to the understanding that we are living in a "post-feminist" world, but participants were clear that women still struggle with second-class status in Christian communities. The disconnect, then, is that the lingering stigma of feminism's associations with secular culture have also dissuaded participants from explicit activism for women in the church. However, through their careers, decision-making, and interpretations of the Bible, these participants were actively creating a Christian feminism unique to their

context and beliefs that both empowered them for the future and connected them to religious traditions of the past.

Areas of Further Research

There are many further areas of research that still need to be addressed, and at the top of this list is is nationally representative research that seeks to understand how Christian women understand and interpret feminism. Although my research sheds some light on this topic, nationally representative sample would be required to generalize this research to the broader U.S. population. As the theory and data show, understandings of feminism are constantly changing, and it is always worthwhile to identify the sources of these understandings and the implications for behavior and attitude. Although it would be time consuming and more complex, I would recommend that qualitative research be used because it allows for a flexibility and an openness of response that is authentic to the experience of Christian women. Additionally, since the participants in this research had fairly stable gender identities, another area of further research would be trans* Christians. Their observations about the flexible nature of both gender and faith could be fruitful research for understanding gender expression and conception within a religious framework.

CONCLUSION

Through the findings of this research and the related sociological literature, it seems that a shift is happening in how Christian women are understanding their faith and applying that knowledge to their lives. The participants that I interviewed were reluctant to be stereotyped as a "Christian woman" or as a "feminist", so they intentionally controlled how they defined themselves and those concepts in an attempt to more accurately reflect what their faith means to them. The language of the Christian Right and the feminist movement were embedded in how participants explained themselves to me, but these definitions were highly flexible and were molded to fit each participant's life. In short, it is my belief that Christian women are more likely to pursue a Christian faith using context and experience as their guide, instead of doctrine and defined roles.

Although it is promising that many of these women seem open to the ideas of feminism, the label rejection was strong and it raises questions about how "feminist" Christian women can ultimately be. Feminist theologies are promising ways that Christians can engage in critiquing gender oppression, but its marginalized status makes it appear as unorthodox and sometimes heretical, and it is subsequently avoided as a resource for Christian women. Out of their two identities, the Christian identity of participants was the more flexible one, but it was also the identity that they were the most conscious of. In contrast, their understanding of their gender identity was much more stable but much less thought about - it was merely a pre-existing condition that shaped the rest of their experiences.

Although these research findings can't be generalized to the U.S. population, it raises questions about how Christian women engage with and understand feminism. Looking at these women's perspectives, I suggest that there is a new intellectual awareness to feminism that has been receptive to Christian women. However, this understanding is first filtered through a Christian lens, and its ideas will be modified (if not altogether rejected) if they don't align with an individual's understanding of the Bible and their faith tradition. However, the turning point for some women toward theologically compatible ideas of feminism was the study of the Bible, focusing on different forms of context that place it in a historical, cultural, and religious context.

Although there is going to be an inherent disconnect between the research-based approach of the sociologist and the faith-based approach of the participant, but I believe that qualitative research offers a way to allow participants to more fully share their beliefs, and this should ultimately lead to more relevant sociological theory that can categorize and theorize the experiences of Christian women.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTIONS & EXCERPTS

ELEANOR

M = Megan (Interviewer)
E = Eleanor (Pseudonym)

M: So tell me a little bit about you, your religious background, your family background...

E: So I grew up in a family who would probably say that they believed in God but definitely did not identify as Christians. We never went to... my parents and I never went to church, my maternal grandmother, my dad's mom, worked at a Christian elementary school, taught there. So I went to Sunday school with her occasionally, at the church that her school was through. And had family members that were Christians, um, but I never really identified myself. And then in high school I started dating my now husband, who was a Christian and grew up in a Christian family and invited me to church with him. And I had gone to church with different friends throughout the years, but I had never just felt like I identified with it strongly enough. Like I always believed in a higher power, but I always had questions about different religions, which one was the right one. But the more I started going with him, and we went to a Baptist church for a few years, I really just came to believe in Jesus Christ and identified as a Christian. And then in college I got baptized, and then came back - I went away to college - came back here, and we've been going to a Presbyterian church for the last couple of years.

M: So are you currently enrolled at [graduate school], or...

E: I am, I'm wrapping up my doctorate in psychology.

M: Oh ok, fantastic! So do you think that's been a part of the faith journey for you?

E: I think so. It's been really neat to go to a Christian school, because I didn't go to a Christian undergrad.

M: Where did you go to undergrad?

E: [Names undergraduate university].

M: Did you also study psychology there?

E: Yeah. So it was really neat to come back to a program that... the grad program is very different from the undergrad, you're not required to attend chapel or attend theological classes, anything like that. We just have a lot of faith integration courses within our program, so we probably do take some courses that some psych programs wouldn't have. But they're not Bible classes, and I liked that they were very... it wasn't required, you didn't have to sign a statement of faith or anything. So we integrate a lot of faith, but it was more in general, like how would you incorporate spirituality into your work with clients and a lot of self-disclosure and self-awareness of what are your beliefs and how does that influence how you work with other people. Things like that. So it was neat to have that blend but not feel like it was... I'm not becoming a Christian therapist, I'm a Christian who is a therapist, you know? I'm glad that I went to [my graduate school], but I didn't just go there for the Christian background.

M: So you're hoping to do therapy?

E: Yeah. I'm working right now as a PA, a psych assistant, so I'm doing individual psychotherapy right now, and I just got my internship placement...

M: Congratulations!

E: Thank you. I'll do an internship next year and then graduate.

M: Ok, so this can also relate to your career, but how do you think your faith shapes your everyday life or the way that you understand the world?

E: I think in a lot of ways, it's... I think the way my faith plays out in everyday life is that I'm a lot more at peace with things than people who don't have a strong spirituality. I think that I have a lot more faith that like there is an ultimate plan and that the end line is a thousand time better than what we could plan. So any time I think... it doesn't make things not difficult, like things are still hard in life, but I think knowing that my creator has a plan for me, I feel like... when I look at other people I'm close to that aren't Christian I find that life just seems to make more sense and seems to be less stressful to me. I think it... yeah. It just gives me more confidence and ability to find joy in things.

M: For sure. So does that also shape what you do on a daily basis?

E: Um, in some ways. I guess I do frequently think about... yeah, like my values and morals are somewhat shaped by my faith and there are certain things that I wouldn't do or say based on whether or not I feel like that's something that is acceptable to God. So I think it does shape... and I think my sense of feeling like I need to serve others is

definitely... it's a bit of a weird journey because when I first started out wanting to be in psychology I wasn't as strong in my faith, so I've always wanted to help people, even before I became a Christian.

M: But now...?

E: But now I feel like there's more purpose in it. Um, it's not just to help those people, it's to show God's glory and then try to transmit some of that to those people as well.

M: Totally. So how do you... do you think being a woman specifically affects your faith or... how does being a Christian woman differ from being a Christian man? Do you think that's true for you?

E: For me, it hasn't. I have not personally had a lot of experiences that have been different from a lot of the males in my life in terms of roles and ability to do things. Identity as a Christian... I know that it is an issue for people, and I can see that. I'm not denying that there are issues where it comes up. For me personally, um, I can probably count... the only one incident that it was a clear distinction was at my grandmother's church, when we were having my grandpa's funeral, we were trying to set up for the reception and her pastor insisted that I not help with like, physical labor. Like, he would only let the men do it. But... and I honestly at that point just... it didn't really offend me. Well, it kind of offended me, but it was just kind of a like "Well fine, you don't want me to help". Then I'm not gonna help. And that's literally the only incident that comes to mind in terms for me being able... and I don't know if that's just the churches that I've gone to, but I don't feel like I'm any less heard or less valuable or less able to help as a woman. So for me it hasn't really been a thing.

M: So where do you think some of those bigger issues come from, for people that do experience it... what do you think is at the core of those issues, or their interpretation of things?

E: I think it's super unique to every woman. I think there are some churches who have followed doctrines or interpretations of the Bible that really believe that women are not fit to be leaders, and then if you grow up in a church like that and you are a woman who wants to be a leader, that obviously is going to cause a lot tension and a lot of frustration. I think that's valid. If I had been to churches like that where... I think a part of it is that I'm not... I've also not sought after leadership. I feel most called to work with children, and I feel that that's something that's very accepted in Christian realms. I think it's just women feeling like there's certain people who interpret the Bible to say that women are not fit for certain things, and they feel like that is not fair or not accurate. And I would

say that it's... I don't feel like there's any way to distinguish "men are good at this and women are good at this", I feel like every single person is different and has different strengths and weaknesses.

M: Yeah. So how long have you been married for?

E: I've been married almost 2 years.

M: So is your husband... did you have a talk before you got married about gender roles or just expectations of your roles?

E: Yeah, we did. We've been together for almost ten years, so we've kind of grown up together, and developed our roles and identities. It just so happens that I prefer not to be responsible for big decisions, like, it just gives me a little more anxiety than it does for him, so I'll default to him to make big decisions. That doesn't mean that we don't talk about it, but like, it's very important to us that we have thorough discussions and both of us can have opinions and input. But in the rare case where we don't come to agreement in that sense, I will generally default to him to make ultimate decisions.

M: Are there any examples of times when you've had that?

E: The biggest one that comes to mind was, um I have a younger sister and she had some financial instability. She's now married and has a baby and so they at one point asked to live with us. And we... my husband and I live with my grandmother, she lives in a very large house by herself, so we pay rent and live there. There are still extra rooms, technically, and we use them for office and whatever but there's still room. And so my sister had asked if she could live with us for a time, and that was something that my husband was very opposed to, just because my sister has a track record of not following through with things. So he very much saw it as, "if we let them live with us, they'll never leave, and then all your attention will go to them, and our marriage will suffer because you are paying more attention to your sister and her family." And while I understand that, I also feel bad turning my sister away and saying no, you have to go into debt or find someone else when I physically have the space that she could live in. But in that case, I ultimately just deferred to him to say... he was very adamant about this and I can see his side, and even though that's not what I want, I'm going to let him make that decision for the sake of our marriage.

M: Do you have other married friends who have... have you seen them have those discussion about roles? Or even unmarried friends? How have you seen other people deal with that?

E: We have a lot of friends that are couples, that have very different ways... we have one particular couple where I feel very much like they're... they're a heterosexual married couple and I feel like the woman has the final say. She very much is in charge - from the outside perspective. And I know that they've had conversations about that, and I think for them it's just a matter of strengths, where I feel like it's almost a relief to let someone else... let the responsibility fall on someone else to make big decisions. I think that the husband in that marriage feels the same way. So that's worked out for them, I just don't know if it's a biblical issue. They are a Christian couple but I don't know that it's in terms of like biblical gender roles. I think they just feel it's more of what their strengths are. I know another couple who, um, is has really initially prided themselves on being really egalitarian and having a very equal role, and then it just turned out that they ended up having the wife be a stay-at-home mom. So, it looks very much, to the outside world... like he actually works at a church, so it looks like a traditional male role, but that actually wasn't their intention. I think... I don't know... I think the couples that I know that are more rigid about traditional male or patriarchy I guess are older couples. Yeah, like I have an aunt and an uncle that are very much that way.

M: So do you think that younger couples are more likely to embrace egalitarian relationships?

E: I think it's just more of a conversation. My sense is... this is not like factual... my sense. In the past it was just assumed that if you were a Christian couple that the man would be somewhat in charge, and I feel like now it's up for discussion much more. And so, it's becoming less and less common for it to be always the male as the head of the household because people are actually having those conversations and they're not just assuming that it's going to be that way. Which I think is great, because I would hate to assume that and then get into the marriage and find that my husband didn't want to have anything to do with making the decisions, you know? It's important to talk about that.

M: Why do you think that shift is? Do you think things have been happening in society, or why do you think that those are more common conversations?

E: Yeah, um. I would imagine that... well, I don't know a lot about like, the history of feminism, which would embarrass one of my close friends because she's really into it. [tangent about a mutual connection] So anyways, I don't know that a lot about the specific feminist history, but I imagine that ever since civil rights in the sixties and stuff there's just been such a bigger awareness of power differentials and people's roles in life. I imagine that need for equality has come up more and more since then that like, just

because you're different doesn't mean that you're less or more than someone else. So to me it seems like ever since then it's just grown and grown.

M: How would you define feminism?

E: So, what I think feminists think feminism is [laughs] is just that women...women have...er, all genders have equal, I guess, rights and abilities. Well I don't know about abilities. Rights and access and recognition, that they just have the same opportunities. I think a lot of feminists think that's what they're doing but end up making it look like they want women to have more power because they didn't have the power before, and it often unfortunately comes out as almost like a reverse, that they want women to be in power and that men should not have as many opportunities to be in power. And power meaning lots of different things and levels, but um, yeah I think some people get a little bit too gung-ho about it and it can be off-putting. I totally agree with the principle that things should be... opportunities should be equal. I don't necessarily believe that there's some sort of debt owed that women should have more opportunities than men because they didn't in the past.

M: Would you consider yourself a feminist?

E: I think so. From my understanding of the idea that we're looking for gender equality, then yes. I just think that... I don't identify with all feminists just because I am a feminist, and I don't identify with all Christians because I'm Christian, so....

M: Yeah, it's an interesting issue. So for you... you mentioned scriptural interpretation and how people interpret the Bible, so for people that are Christian and feminist do you think they are looking at the Bible through a feminist lens or do they think it's already there?

E: Yeah. I think for the most part its just trying to find really accurate translations and um I think some of that is really good. Because I think there are a lot of things that have been misunderstood. And like, just hearing about certain translations where like, gender pronouns are actually, in Greek or Hebrew, was a gender neutral pronoun and now it just comes out as he. Things like that. So I think for the most part they're just looking for accurate translations and then being able to interpret it through that. But I think that any time that you're looking for something, um, there's a risk of finding things that aren't really there. If that makes sense?

M: That makes sense. Have you, either in undergrad or in your graduate work, have you taken any courses that were specifically about women, sexuality, or gender?

E: Nope. Nope.

M: So it's more just that you've talked about it? How have you learned about these issues?

E: I have... I have a few friends who are very interested in the topic and bring it up frequently, so I think just through discussions with friends and then attending a few like, I don't know... like lectures and seminars, things like that. Just like, leisurely, not required or anything. It has just become a discussion in different circles.

M: In your doctorate program, are most people Christian in the doctorate program?

E: Most people are.

M: Do you find that most people... do you have a sense of if people are more aligned toward traditional gender roles or feminist views, or egalitarian views?

E: Um... I get the sense that there's more like, egalitarian views. I haven't had a ton of conversations about it with my classmates.

M: Have you found that in your study of psychology that some of the things are in conflict with your faith, or that you've had to negotiate?

E: Yeah, reconcile. Um... I feel like yes, there have been conflicts, but I'm trying to think of an example. [Pauses to think] I think the biggest conflict is probably just finding um, that blend of 'I have certain abilities as a human being to change the way I think and therefore influence the actions that I do in my life and the way that my life goes' but at the same time, like, prayer can create miracles and things can go differently, or things might not go my way just because I restructured my cognitive and behavioral way of doing things. Um... so I think that it's almost that philosophical questions of like human will power and where does that fit in with like God's ultimate plan. And is there's a predestined plan or are we able to make our own decisions, and I think that there's some of both. And so sometimes that conflicts in psychology as well because you get some clients who just insist that "I'll just pray about it, just pray about it, just pray about it" and "I don't really need to do anything about it my own self, as a human on Earth, because God will just take care of it for me" and then there's people that insist that God has nothing to do with it and that they're the locus of control. So I think it's just finding that blend between doing everything you can as a human to make things better for yourself, but then trusting that if it doesn't go the way you planned there's some greater understanding of why, that we just don't know. I don't think it necessarily affects my day

to day with most clients, but there are some that are very adamant on one end of the spectrum or the other, so then it's about trying to help them be more realistic.

M: How did you decide to pursue your doctorate?

E: So I went into college, for my bachelors, saying, "I'm never going to grad school, I worked my tail off in high school" and I was the valedictorian in high school, so I said, "I don't want to go to grad school, because I'm done". And I didn't know what I wanted to do, I knew that I wanted to help people and I was like "Ehh, I'll do psychology, it's interesting." And then, like, a year or two in, I realized that it's going to be kind of hard to become a therapist if I don't go to grad school. So I applied to um, so I think this was one of the biggest God moments in my life. So in the fall of my senior year... sorry, in August right before the fall of my senior year, I took the GRE's because I knew that I probably wanted to go to grad school, but I only like, studied for three weeks and then took them once. And then I went to study abroad...

M: Oh, where did you study abroad?

E: [Names country] Um, and got back in December and had three weeks to do all my applications for grad school because they were due in January. So, I only applied to three or four places, only one of them was a doctoral program... [pausing]. No, two doctoral programs and two marriage and family therapy programs. Um, and I got an interview at APU, so I came back for spring break and interviewed there and then got called like, that afternoon, it was in the morning, saying that they had offered me a spot in the program.

M: That's great!

E: Yeah! And so I said yes. And that was it. Like, I literally got phone calls... I did not submit the right number of recommendation letters and I got phone calls from the office of APU being like, "Um, we didn't receive your letter" and I was like, "Oh, I think it's in the mail". Then they were like, "You know what actually, a lot of people have been having trouble this year, we're just going to waive it and not..." Like, random things that it was like, so easy, I barely prepared for any of this and, in fact, did not fulfill all of the requirements. And then got an interview and then asked to be in the program. So, um, it was somewhat haphazard, honestly. Like, I just was like, I should do... like, I loved the program, I loved the idea of incorporating Christianity into my education, um, but I kinda just got blessed with that one.

M: So you mentioned earlier that you... you like working with kids?

E: Yeah.

M: So kids psychology. You mentioned earlier that because you work with kids, as a Christian woman, it's less of an issue, there's less tension.

E: Yeah, well and that's mostly within the church. I, like I, the places I've chosen to serve are in the nursery or with kids and things like that, or at VBS [Vacation Bible School] and things like that. So I don't think that at church it's any question... I'm also now a member of a church where there is a female... a female on the pastoral staff. Two. So I don't think it would be an issue anyways. Yeah, and then I guess... yeah. I guess maybe that's part of why it hasn't come up as such an issue for me like friends that want to be in journalism or in politics or things like that. And so maybe it is harder for them to get recognized as a female. But I never really thought about that part. But um, in terms of like becoming an educated woman, I never felt like I had any less opportunities than anyone else.

M: What does your husband do?

E: He is in the [armed service], and he is right now getting his masters [degree]. And he was working for a congressman when he got into his masters program, he decided just to do the army and the masters program. And then potentially go back into some sort of public service, but he's not sure at what level. Because now he's done a few internships and paid positions with federal congress members, and so he's thinking he might go into the public sector or even just, um, lower level city or state. Public government stuff. I don't know, we're still sorting it out. But he's in the army, that's his primary job right now.

M: And I think especially because you two have been together so long... ten years, right? [Nods head in affirmation]. So was there ever... did you ever have the conversation about career path, if you want to go here, I'll go here, things like that?

E: Yeah. So we actually broke up for a few months at the time that I was applying for grad schools.

M: So this was your senior year?

E: Yeah. I'm done with classes, I've been done with classes for like, almost a year now, but I didn't match to an internship last year, so I just have to do the internship to graduate. But I'm done with dissertation and classes and all that. Um... so anyway... it was kind of odd, because - and I don't know if that was a God thing or what - but we weren't making decisions together when I chose to go to grad school. So I got into grad school, moved out here, and we got back together.

M: Was he here at the time?

E: Yes, he went to [undergrad school] for undergrad. Um, so we... I mean, we got back together before I had started grad school but I had already agreed to be in the program. So there wasn't a ton of discussion about my career. I think he always knew that I would want to do something big. Uh, but then when he joined the army that was kind of one of those "he makes the default decision, he gets the ultimate say," kind of moments for us, I think, because I don't love the idea... I'm still not super thrilled by it, um, of us being a military family. But it was really important to him. And I felt like, I completely respected his rationale for doing it, like he is very patriotic, he wants to... like my feeling of service is to help children, and his service is for his country. He's always been interested in it, it wasn't like a random thing or "I don't know what else do do", or for money. It was always like a "this is what I feel called to do." And so then as a Christian I felt like I couldn't really argue with that. Like, it wasn't really what I wanted ultimately, but I cared more about his sense of purpose and happiness than like, what I... life is not meant to be easy. So we just had to figure it out. And it was a job, you know, it was still going to support us financially while I was in grad school, um, so we talked about it a lot, but ultimately it was one of the decisions that I think... I mean, we made it together, but if he hadn't been so adamant about it, if I had protested more it may have gone differently. I don't remember what the question was [laughs].

M: Oh, no problem! I was just asking about what your jobs. What were your specific hesitations about the army?

E: Yeah, I think the primary issue was like, the danger potential. So any time you're in the military you could get deployed and you could die. It's just the reality of it. Um, so I think that was the biggest issue. And then after that it was like, "So that could mean that we move a lot, and that could mean less..." [searches for word]

M: Stability?

E: Yeah, stability. So I was hesitant about that idea, and then the more I was... he originally wanted to go in as an active duty soldier, but he wanted to go in as an officer. And at the time that he joined he wasn't able to go in as an active duty officer. So he went into the reserves, which meant that he got based locally, and meant that there was a lot lower likelihood of deployment and all that stuff.

M: So are there future plans for him to be on active duty?

E: [sighs] we were just talking about that yesterday. Um, because there's always the slight... we're in the weird middle ground where like, reserve person can become active reserve...? It's like this weird middle ground thing. But, um, he could become a full time employee and have like a nine to five, a nine to five army job, but that would mean that he could get transferred. Um, and while he would super love that, just last night I was like "Yeah, no, I'm going to veto that," even if it was a possibility, because I'm getting closer and closer to getting licensed in California. And so if I move, either that means that I don't work, which I'm not entirely opposed to, or I'll have to get relicensed in every state that we move to. But that would be expensive and tiring and like, really difficult to get reestablished with a new clientele every time I move so... so yeah. I would... we've talked about it.

M: Are you two planning on having kids?

E: Yeah, um, I'm more eager than he is [laughs]. Yeah, we've mostly just been waiting to get toward the end of school so I can be done with all of my full time requirements and then be able to have kids when I have a few less demands. I know it's never going to be easy, but I think that once I graduate things will be... our hope, MY hope is... well, my hope is our hope, is to like, start trying during internship, so I would be able to have a baby immediately following that internship.

M: So hypothetically, once you finish, would you want to be working and...

E: My ideal would be, my super ideal would be for both us to work part time and for us to have... for him to have some sort of job where that could work. Because for me it could totally work. Because the office I work at is a private practice, so I can determine how many clients I want and how many hours I want to work. I mean, it does dictate how much money I make, but um, it's not a low paying job. So if he had a job that was, where it was feasible for him to work part time, that would be ideal. Otherwise we'll just both work and find external child care.

M: Do you think your desire to have kids is based on your faith? Or is it just a general desire to have kids...?

E: I've always wanted to have kids, but I do feel much, like it's much more important now than it used to be. I feel like this... it's almost like there's so many bad people in the world, I want to... nothing is guaranteed, that if you have kids they'll become Christian, but I feel like I have a good opportunity to try and bring up more Christian people in the world. And not that like I have to procreate to sustain our religion or anything like that, not anything to do with my eternity or anything like that, but just the sense that like, what

a cool opportunity that I can contribute to someone else that could spread the word of God in the world. Plus I think that it would be super fun!

M: Yeah, I think especially because of your line of work! Do you think... obviously some verses in Genesis about procreation are taken very seriously by a lot of Christians, like, so when you read passages about parenthood or marriage, are you read them more literally, or are you more contextual? How do you interpret these passages?

E: I... so I've been a lazy and I haven't been thorough in my reading of them. But when I do I am never content with just reading it and then going on, because if that's all I do then I just end up with more questions. So generally that's what I do. I'll read it and have a bunch of questions, and sometimes I seek out the context and translations to answer those questions, and sometimes I just ponder those questions and don't find answers to them.

M: Yeah, people like [mutual friend] are a great resource for those questions. Well I think that's most of what I have, it was great to talk to you and to hear your stories. I have a short survey here, if you don't mind filling that out...

E: Sure. [Fills out survey].

[End of interview]

NAOMI

M = Megan (Interviewer)
N = Naomi (Pseudonym)

M: Well tell me a little bit about your family background and religious background.

N: So I grew up in a Christian family, we have gone to a Lutheran church my whole life, and it's generally been more like a contemporary Lutheran rather than…[tries to find words]…what's the word I'm thinking of.

M: Traditional?

N: Yeah, traditional. And it's a lot more liberal than most liberal churches.

M: You said you're from the [region] area, right?

N: Yeah, [names city]. So I live right next to [names other city]. So the church we were in when I was very little was like, a little more traditional than the one we go to now. And it was a very small church and then we switched churches about when I was leaving elementary school and starting middle school. And that's when I…my family was always very involved in the church but like, that's when I started getting very involved in the church. And so I went to [specifies a Christian camp]. So I started going in middle school and went all through high school, at Ponderosa and whatever the middle school camp is called. So yeah, that, I was involved in the youth group, I loved going to youth group. I was really committed and I ended up being a leader in the youth group my junior and senior year of high school and helped to plan one of the student-led retreats. Yeah.

M: So do you think your faith process was a gradual thing, or was there more of a moment of understanding?

N: It was more like a gradual process. I mean, at Hume Lake there was like, the first time I went there was that moment where they're like, "if you want to dedicate your life to Christ," and so I went up and went through that process. But it was more like, this is a gradual thing, and at that point I still didn't fully understand what it meant to be a Christian or to follow, and so it was just more like that was me deciding that I wanted to continue that process of like, learning what it meant and learning how I wanted to live my life as a servant of Christ.

M: So you said that was when you were how old, again?

N: Seventh grade.

M: Ok. And so what was that like in high school, were there any changes in your faith or growth?

N: Yes, definitely. High school was a very growing time for me. My…I guess like, I went through some experiences and family illnesses and just stuff like that that really kind of shook me and made me question, gave me questions. And so one of my leader's at church was the person that I would always go to with question, and she would answer in the best of her abilities, and just continually pointed me back to God and telling me that it's ok to not have answers. So high school was really a time when I learned like, a solid foundation and learning like learning that it's ok to have questions and to not always have the answer that you're looking for. And I really like, so I got, in high school I developed a foundation for faith, but then in college I really learned a lot of the personal application

and what it means to have a personal relationship with the Lord rather than just it being an idea and like, a theoretical thing.

M: What does that look like for you on a daily basis? How does it shape your life?

N: So it's more like instead of just going to church or just going to youth group, because that's really what my faith was in high school, that's like how it manifested. Now its manifests in like, I have a commitment to spend time with God and like, I have a conversation with him and like, my prayers are like, more… I feel like I know, if you can know how to pray, I feel like I'm more comfortable praying. And I like, don't just make decisions based on like, what I want all the time, but I more prayerfully consider and I prepare my heart for the Lord's will and try and follow that with my life.

M: So you mentioned that the nursing program is one of the thing that attracted you to APU, so what was that process like of deciding?

N: It wasn't clear cut. At first it was, and then it wasn't, and then it was [laughs]. So I was looking at nursing schools, and my top three were [names three top schools]. And so um, just because those were the three best that I had heard of, really, and I was completely against coming to [my school now]. I didn't want to come here even though my whole high school grade was like, "I want to go to a private Christian college," and I would like get into fights with my dad over it because he didn't want to pay for it. And then I was like, when it actually came time to actually agree on it I was like, no I don't want to. But I came down here for a preview weekend for trustees, the trustees scholarship finalists, so they put on this big weekend, and the point was to lure us to the campus and make up like, fall in love with it. And it totally worked! [Laughs] The food was so much better then than it is now. [Laughs] But that's ok, it totally, like, worked. And it was just like, the community I saw at [my school now], and I felt like I fit in here and I could really see myself here in the future. I didn't get into [another school], and I got into Irvine, but I looked at Irvine and it like, was so impersonal and just didn't seem to be the right place for me. So then I was like, "Ok, I'm going to [my school]." And then, so I committed to [my school], and then after May 1st I got off the wait list for [another school]…

M: Oh, ok, so that kind of changed things?

N: Yeah, so I had to reevaluate, and I had to look at [my school] as not just the place that I was going to go, but maybe I could go somewhere else, even though I had been envisioning myself at [my school] for two months now. And so that was really hard. That was when I really made the decision to come to [my school], rather than just saying, yeah, I'll go there. And so it was like, what do I want out of a college? What do I want

out of my college experience? And the thing that [my school] had that [another school] could offer was the study abroad experiences, I am studying abroad next spring and next summer…

M: Oh, where are you going?

N: This summer, I'm still… I'm going to High Sierra in May, we have a camp that's in the high Sierras, so I'm taking philosophy there in May and then in August I'm studying abroad with the nursing program in India, just for the month in August, and then next spring I'm going to South Africa.

M: Oh, ok! Quite a trip! That'll be great, though. Are you looking forward to it?

N: Definitely.

M: Have you been abroad before?

N: I've been to France, and I've been to England and Scotland. And I've been to Mexico and Canada, but I haven't been to anything like India or Africa, so.

M: So were the Europe trips family travel, and was the Mexico trip for high school mission trips?

N: Yeah, and I went on mission trips in high school.

M: Yeah. So how is nursing a part of your faith, or how does that fit in for you?

N: For me, nursing is like kind of a way that I live out my faith, and a way…yeah. A way that I live out my faith in that like, God has called me to serve, so nursing is a way that I can serve people, but through pursuing something that interests me and like I said before, bringing in science and helping people together. So nursing is where God has shown me that that's where I can bring passions that I have together and really serve him and serve his people, and learn what it means like, better to be a Christian just from like, interacting with God's people.

M: So what did God leading you into this look like?

N: It was a gradual process. When I was in 8th grade my mom was diagnosed with breast cancer, so throughout that process, the same mentor that I had come to with questions in high school, she was my mom's nurse practitioner, as she was going through, and still

continues to go though follow up appointments and stuff like that. So throughout my mom's radiation process, and treatment and recovery, she was there for me, and she showed me like… she kind of opened up my mind to the idea of nursing, and showed me that like, it really is like the nurses who know the patients and understand what they're going through. And just like the, in talking with her about it to, the differences between being a doctor and being a nurse. The nurses are the ones who provide the bedside care, they're the ones who have the relationships with the patients, and so I wanted the more holistic, psychosocial and spiritual and physical approach that nursing like, is all about. That's what we learn about in every class. And so that's like, that was what opened the door. And my grandmother was a nurse for 40 years, so listening to her stories when I was growing up was always like, that sounds like it was a crazy life. But like so fun and fulfilling.

M: So you were already interested in science before that point?

N: Yeah, I've been really interested in science since like, elementary school.

M: Awesome. So was that kind of a pretty simple decision for you, to decide that's what you wanted to pursue and keep following?

N: Yeah, it wasn't like dramatic or anything. It was just like, [laughs], I like thought about it, and someone - a nursing student, she had just graduated from [graduate school] - came in to my high school, and talked to us, and she had gone through the nursing program there. I talked to her afterwards, because I had thought about nursing, but I had thought that I wanted to go get a bachelors of science in something else before going back to nursing. When I talked to her, she was like, "No, you should just go ahead and do it, if you know, just go ahead and do it." And I was like, "Well, do I know?" and then I was like, "Yeah, I know. So I'm going to do it."

M: Great. So it sounds like from what you've been telling me that your nursing really is shaped by your faith and how you see other people. Do you also think that your faith shapes the way you see yourself?

N: Um, yeah. I, I mean, I have, I think we all have problems placing our identity in the wrong things, and so for me, I tend to place it in like, my achievements and my accomplishments. And so… but I don't always achieve what I want to or accomplish what I want to, and I don't always do well on stuff like that. And so then that becomes kind of an identity crisis, and I had that a lot throughout high school. And especially coming to college, it's been a struggle to continually remind myself that like, that's not where my identity lies, my identity lies in Christ and in the fact that he redeemed me

means that I don't have to accomplish anything. God loves me no matter what, so yeah, that's how it shapes how I see myself.

M: Do you think that's also related to being a Christian woman? Is there something unique about your faith as a woman?

N: I think that as a woman, I've actually been talking about this a lot with, recently, with some of my friends, sort of, and one of the resident directors of one of the dorms on campus. I met with her about a week ago to talk about identity, and value and what we find our worth in. And I think as women we have like, we are very different men, and I think the way that God pursues us is different just because he like, loves us each for who we are, and he wants to meet us like, for who we are. And he's like, our relationship with him is different than a man's would be or than another woman's would be. And so I think a lot of women struggle with their worth and their value, and like, a lot of people… women have trouble looking in the mirror and being happy with what they see. So I think that God comes in and shows us that it doesn't matter, that he loves us, he loves the way he created us and that he thinks we're beautiful. And like, that is what we need to find our rest in, and so I think that that's something that maybe some men struggle with, but it's like a different way. And so I think God um, or like as Christian women it is very different from being a Christian male. And I think that as women, together, we have something that men don't necessarily share. Yeah, I don't know if that was organized thought process, but yeah.

M: Do you think, so are your identities of Christian and woman inherently tied to each other? Can you see yourself as a woman separate from your faith or vice versa?

N: I think that we, that I can see them as separate, but I don't think that I could fully be either one without being both of them. So like, I see myself as a Christian, and I can see myself as like, just being a Christian without the identity as a woman, but I wouldn't be a full Christian that I am, and I wouldn't be the full woman, I wouldn't be as like, whole and have such a sense of being loved if I didn't have the identity as a Christian.

M: Yeah. Do you think… so what's it been like for you as a Christians woman? Have you had good experiences, tensions… what's that experience been like for you?

N: Um, in high school most of my friends from my high school were not Christian and so it was definitely a difficult, kind of a difficult path. The way they viewed Christians wasn't with the best light. They looked down on Christians as like, being kind of ignorant and not well-educated, or they just didn't like understand science or whatever, like evidence. And that was hard for me being someone who does value science and who does

try to understand but still like, knowing there is a greater power and that Jesus did die on the cross to save us. And so, I just sort of, my response to that was just sort of ignoring their comments or ignoring the facts that they didn't believe, and that they would… like, I never really argued it because I didn't see it as worth my time and my energy, and I didn't know how to articulate myself really. So… but that's really the main difficulty I faced as being a Christian. And just not being interested in some of the things that other college students do, like, I'm not interested in partying or um, I don't know, other things that college spend their lives doing. And so it like, kinda causes a rift in some friendships, or like people think that I think that I'm better than them because I don't. And it's like, "No, it's not something that I want to do. You live your life, I'll live mine," kind of thing.

M: Are those friends at APU, or friends from home?

N: Generally just friends from home. My friends from [school] are pretty much like, we all have very similar social lives and like, beliefs.
M: What's it like in the science courses at [your school]? How do they integrate faith and science together?

N: Some of it, in my anatomy class the integration was like… we would like, I don't know, like, some of it was responding to how you would respectfully treat… because we dissected corpses. And so how you would respectfully treat someone's body after death. And so we would like write little responses on prompts that he would give, and that was his faith integration part of it. In my physiology class, it was more… each teacher does it differently.

M: So there's like a required faith integration component?

N: Yeah, for every professor and every department. And yeah, I like it because then it's tailored to who they are and what their personality is, rather than like, this has to be, this is how it is. And so my physiology class was more like, she would make comments about like, "Isn't it amazing that God made this? Or made it work this way?" And then my microbiology class, she she kinds of stretches it sometimes by including Bible verses, like, that are like about tiny things… I don't know, it's funny, she's funny though. And so it's just sort of like how every, how the professor does it.

M: Cool. Do you think your faith has been strengthened by your study of science or that experience?

N: Yeah, the more I study science the more I don't understand, or like, realize how complex everything is. And so that just like, affirms the fact that there was a creator. This

is *not* random, I don't see how this could just be random, there is like a purpose behind it and it was designed.

M: So kind of going back to what you were talking about not having experienced negative experiences as a Christian woman, what do you think some of the expectations people have for Christian women?

N: I think some of them are that they um, should be like, a wife and that their role is a wife. And that's like key to the identity as a Christian woman, which I don't necessarily believe is true, I think that that can be a part of your identity, but I don't think that it is like, the basis. But I think that there are many people who do. And then, can you ask the question again?

M: What are some general expectations of Christian women?

N: So in that, as a wife, she should support her husband and that she is second to her husband. And I believe that there is like, a leader in the family and that the man should be a leader, but I don't believe that it's like a hierarchy. I think it's more of a partnership. And like, uh, that a Christian woman should be a good mother and like, love her children. And yes, I believe that if you're a mother you should love your children [laughs]. But again, I don't believe that that is necessarily a Christian woman's role. And then I think that like there's a big split in the church where some people believe that women should be involved in church leadership, and some believe that they shouldn't. The one's that should be involved in church leadership, I believe, I kind of think that there's the stereotype of the Christian woman that's like *super* involved in the church and is always baking for the potlucks and like, brings whatever she can and that kind of thing. And then the ones who don't believe women should be involved in leadership, the stereotype is more like, she supports her husband, and her husband's involved and she does whatever she can for her husband, or like she sits quietly and worships. I don't know, that wasn't really my upbringing so, I don't want to stereotype.

M: Yeah no worries, I'm just interested in people's general impressions. So you said your experience wasn't like that growing up? So you feel like you didn't have those expectations?

N: Uh, not really. My mom is sort of a feminist, so she's sort of like, you can do whatever you want! [Laughs] And my parents have always been very supportive in whatever I want to do, whether it was against gender norms or not, like, they were supportive. My dad would purposefully buy me toys like my brothers had so I wouldn't just be playing with Barbies all the time. So it would be like, a remote control car, that kind of thing.

M: How would you define feminism?

N: [Sighs] Umm [laughs]. Feminism is…[pauses to think again] I guess like, just the belief that women have… I think there's like extremes, and so I think that feminism is just the belief that women should have some of the power and that they should be self-empowered as well. Like, they should be allowed to be who they want to be, and they should be allowed to assert, like, do what they want to do and be part of whatever they want to be a part of, that kind of thing. And that women should be equal with men, but that they aren't the same as men.

M: So would you consider yourself a feminist, do you think?

N: Ehhh, to some extent. I mean, I guess. I don't really know.

M: What's your hesitation?

N: Like, I don't think I'm as much [of a feminist] as my mom is. But I do believe if that were the definition of feminism I would believe it and like, say "Yeah, I agree with that." But I'm not like, it's not something I think about, so I wouldn't say I'm a feminist in that I… that's not something that I feel called to advocate for, necessarily.

M: What do you think the reception is toward feminism in the Christian community?

N: I think it's kind of like, seen as unnecessary. And I think, well I think the connotation of feminism today is like, in the church it's seen as unnecessary and like, umm… like, taken to an extreme.

M: Why do you think it's seen as unnecessary?

N: Well, I don't really know what I'm saying…

M: That's ok, I was just wondering why you think churches don't find it necessary.

N: Well, just cause like, I think in the church… I don't really… [pauses for about 30 seconds]. I don't know, I guess the way I see it is that the scriptures say, like, that we are equal as human beings, and so… I don't know. I see it more as like, a need for equality over everything, rather than just between man and woman. I don't really know like, the church's view.

M: Yeah, I've been thinking about it a lot too, and it's pretty complex. Have you taken any classes related to gender or women's studies at APU?

N: I haven't. I think we have to take something that like, we can take, like we have a gen-ed or something that one of those would fall into, but I haven't taken that yet.

M: So how do you think you've learned about feminist ideas?

N: Yeah, through pop culture and through like, my friends from high school, like they were very into politics and into just like, different ideas and movements, that kind of thing. So they would like, talk about just random things that I knew nothing about, but I just absorbed some of their conversations. And just like, through my mom and her feminism and her random rants about women's equality and stuff like that [laughs].

M: So do you think that was a factor for you growing up, hearing her talk about that?

N: Yeah.

M: So for her, was it something she mostly talked about, or was she also involved in things?

N: I know she was involved in like, when she was in her MBA at UCLA she was involved in a women in business thing. And then I want to say that when she got to college at UCSD she was involved in some sort of women's activist group or something. I almost want to say that she was a women's studies major at UCSD, but I really don't remember what she majored in undergrad.

M: So where do you think these ideas about gender come from, regardless about where people fall on the spectrum?

N: Like, people in general, like the general population or like Christians?

M: Or, maybe Christians.
N: I think that Christians should draw their views from the Bible, from scripture and go back to see what scripture says. But I think often times we draw it from examples in our church, and examples in our families. And so people's views, kind of like politics, people's views tend to align with what their family believed and how their family functioned. So I think… well, either align or completely disagree. So they saw what the roles were in their family and they thought that it was completely wrong, then they would

disagree with that. But if it worked for their family, the tendency would be to stick with that and think that's what's correct.

M: Are there any parts of the Bible that you think people look to or that are often used to support or negate a particular view?

N: What is it…I read it the other day. I think Proverbs 31. That talks about like a wife and what she should do. So I think that is sometimes used um, to describe what women should do. And I feel like there's… I feel like Paul talks about it, but I don't know what parts he talks about.

M: Do you think those difference comes from interpretation of those verses?

N: Yeah, I think a lot of it is interpretation or like, reading verses and not looking at the whole context or not looking at what was written in like, what was written and when it was written. What the culture was at the time, because I think that was a key part of like, how people wrote and how people viewed things back then. And I don't necessarily think that what was right in that culture is right in our culture now.

M: For sure. Has that been a part of how you approach reading the Bible?

N: Um, yeah, when I really get down and like, look at scripture for… when I'm like looking at a topic like that and I'm trying to interpret it, I definitely want to know more of the background, and I don't like just looking at verses. I like knowing like, the whole chapter, like, why are they saying this, and what's the context, who are they talking to. Especially in Paul's letters, what was the church like that he was writing to.

M: So how do you feel when people are looking at the same verses but are coming to very different conclusions about women? Does that like elicit any sort of feeling or response in you?

N: I get kind of annoyed. [Laughs] Just like, ok, that's not what you…you need more information, than just twisting it to be what you want it to be, kind of, to support what you're saying. So I just get kind of annoyed and kind of frustrated. People do that because…then it just makes a bad name for all Christians.

M: At [your school], is that a point of discussion often? The role of gender, and the relationship between men and women?

N: Yeah, it is a discussion. I think it's like undertones in a lot of different topics that we talk about, and the difference between men and women and what their roles are. And then there's times when it's brought to the forefront of discussion. I haven't been involved in that many of those, but um, I know that they do happen.

M: So there are like, actually discussions about the topics?

N: Sometimes. Sometimes they'll have them or like, they'll have a speaker presenting. Recently we had [Christian woman speaker] here. Yeah, so she came and talked about gender roles.

M: Did you go?

N: Yeah, it was good and it was really interesting. I liked what she had to say.

M: What was her main point?

N: She talked a lot about her mom and her mom's role in her life, and how her mom ended up discovering herself. And basically her mom, when she was growing up, was very much the wife and took her to soccer and took her to stuff, but didn't really pursue her own passions. And so she talked a lot about how women's should pursue their passions, and how her mom was always involved in the church, and her father founded [a large church] in Chicago. And when they were founding the church, they did some research and looked in the scriptures and came up with a book about women in the church and like, how they should be involved in leadership. Something like that. And so yeah.

M: And so what she was saying, was that in line with what you thought about or how you think about those kind of things?

N: Yeah, pretty much.

M: What the gender culture around [your undergraduate school] with regard to marriage?

N: What's the gender culture?

M: Or, how does that tie into discussions about marriage?

N: Umm. I think that like, what their, what the woman's career plays a part in that. And… but I think that there's a very wide range of what people believe a woman's role is in

marriage at APU, and so… but I would say that the majority of people believe that a woman should be able to work if they want to work, and then some women feel that they're like, when they're married their desire is to be the one taking care of the family. So it's very different. There's very different ends of the spectrum, but yeah.

M: So it sounds like there's a divide about careers, if women should stay at home or pursue a job. What's your opinion about how people approach spiritual roles in the family? And your own views, too.

N: I think for the most part people believe that the father and the mother… or like, the husband and wife should be spiritually aligned. They should have the same spiritual beliefs and that they should raise their family according to those beliefs. I think that's the majority of people's opinions.

M: What do you think about leadership in marriage?

N: I think that most of the women that I've talked to say that they want a man who can lead them. But a lot of them are also so strong that they can't be led by anyone else, like they're leaders themselves [laughs]. And so I think it just like, depends on the personality of the person and like whether they would want to be led or whether they would want to lead together. But I think that whatever they want, I still think there's still the like, stigma of like, the male should lead the family spiritually and the woman should follow her husband.

M: So if people do hold those views, do you think they're hesitant to share them with other people?

N: I think that pretty much like, most issues are free spaces to talk about it, like there's not a huge judgement on what people believe, just because there's so many… we all have like, such a one central belief, and there's so many varieties of how that plays out. And I think our school affirms that and says that's wonderful and that's ok. So I think it's a pretty free space to talk about it.

M: Yeah, I was wondering about how [your school] handled those differences in opinion. You talked earlier about marriage, do you want to get married?

N: Yeah. [Laughs]

M: And you mentioned that it's important on campus for people to marry someone to share their beliefs, is that also true for you?

N: Yes, definitely. My mom would slap me if I didn't. [Laughs] She probably wouldn't let me get married.

M: What's your perspective on your role within a marriage? What would you hope your role would be?

N: I would want to support to support my husband, I would want to be a partner with him. But I would also want him to support me in like, what I do. And I wouldn't necessarily want it to just be like him leading me, I would want it to be a group, a co-decision. Because I feel like a lot of times it's like, the husband got this wonderful job offer, so the wife follows. And I'm more independently minded and so I feel like, if I got a good job offer I would want him to follow me, kind of. [Laughs] But like, have his job… I would want him to pursue his job as much like, with as much perseverance and passion as I have for mind, so just balancing the two.

M: Do you think in addition to career, are there any of a marriage that you would want him to lead in?

N: Umm… [laughs] Finances? [Laughs] I don't want to deal with that. I think there is like, I would want him to be a spiritual leader in the sense that I would want him to like, to encourage my walk with Christ and to like, I don't know. I would want him to be mature in his faith and so like, lead in the fact that he knows what God wants for us. And so like, if I'm making a decision and he feels like it's not aligned with what the Lord wants, I would want him to lead me in the right direction, if that makes sense.

M: Yeah. What do you think about kids? Do you want them?

N: Yeah, I think so.

M: Have you thought about how that would work out between you and your husband?

N: I would probably want to work at least part-time, just because I'm not good not working, I have to have something to do. And so like, it would depend on what he wanted to do and what works for us, what kind of income we were making, and how that would all play out. But I mean, I wouldn't mind both of us working, or one of us staying home.

M: Yeah, there's a lot of conditions going into that decision. I've also heard the phrase "Ring by Spring" a lot at [my school], what are your opinions about that?

N: Well, one of my friends are getting married this summer, as a sophomore in nursing. So [laughs] that's kind of been a topic a lot recently, because it's just like, so early.

M: So she's 19?

N: She's 20. She turned 20 the day she got engaged. [Laughs] And so I think that it doesn't work for everyone. And I think that a lot of times there's a pressure to have a ring by spring, and I don't think that's right. I think it should be in it's own time, and that just because you're graduating college doesn't mean you have to get engaged. So the fact that that is a stigma, and that that puts pressure on relationships that shouldn't necessarily be there. But I think for some people it is the push they need to commit and decide that that's the person they want to be with for the rest of their lives. And so I think it's more of a case by case basis. And some people it works for, and for some people it is completely the wrong decision and they should not get a ring by spring or looking… I don't think it should be the focus. I think a lot of people think that they're in college, they need to be dating. And I don't see it as that. I see college as a time of growth, and if you want to date someone and there's someone that you enjoy spending time with, that's great, go ahead and pursue that relationship. But I don't think that it should be your focus to find someone.

M: For sure. Where do you think that pressure comes from?

N: I think just like, the idea that you should be in a couple. Society… like, you see couples and you think, "Oh, I should be in a couple," that kind of thing. And like a lot of women, errr, a lot of girls at [my school] want to be married in the future, so they're like, "Oh, I need to find someone now," because there's this idea that "I need to get a ring by spring or I'm never going to get married." And it's like, no, that's not true.

M: So is there a fear of not being married?

N: Mmhmm. Definitely.

M: What do you think they're afraid of?

N: I think they're afraid of not feeling loved, and they're afraid… if they don't get married it means they're not worth… like, they don't have as much worth as someone who is worthy to marry, if that makes sense. So I think some of that comes with like, misplaced identity.

M: Do you think in churches, do you think married women are valued more highly in the church than single women?

N: I think at a certain age they are, and then it switches. Because I feel like, there's a certain point where, older women who were never married are seen as like, "Oh, she's independent and strong, she made it though life on her own. That's wonderful!" But like I think up until, I don't even know when that point is, single women are seen as like, "Oh, you should find someone." And it's like, no, "I'm good on my own, maybe. I don't need anyone." Yeah.

M: Yeah, at some point it becomes a virtue.

N: [Laughing] Yeah, like, "No one could settle you down!"

[End of interview]

OTHER INTERVIEW EXCERPTS:

"I like to think that that's the point when I really became a Christian, based on my own decisions, and based on things that I hadn't just been taught."

"…part of me has always really had a heart for missions, and part of that is because my mom had me read so much on missionaries. Basically now I'm interested in going into missions, so I think that was very influential in terms of preparing for that eventual calling when I heard it from God."

"I've really never known myself without Christianity, so it's hard to say… It's always been such a big part of me that like, I don't know if I can say how much [it shapes me]. I have nothing to compare it to, as like, whether I identify by it or not. Like, it's something that defines me."

"I think it's a goal…that my faith would be so completely a part of me that it wouldn't be able to be divided from me… I always want my faith to inform every part of me."

Alma shared the following with me: "One of the things that I tend to hear from God is "you're my precious daughter"… and that, that's a role that I really like, I love that role… the way I understand God is from my point of view of being a woman. I mean, it actually sounds kind of weird for me to think about understanding God like, just from the perspective of being a person, a human being."

"I want to say that I see God as an androgynous being, but I haven't really thought about it that way… I would be of the opinion that God sees his as more or less androgynous beings. I think he sees people for who we are, and I don't think gender is a part of that."

"We can either approach people as "I'm saved, you're not" and then…objectify or de-humanize them in that way. Or you can look at them thinking, "I'm a sinner, you're a sinner, let's all stop trying to sin together."

"There's absolutely a lot of scriptures that are like, women should not be leading. So I think that's where it starts, it's just, it's the interpretation of scripture."

Alma: "I think the way I see that is, I don't know all the particulars about it, but the way I understand it is like, in the context that Paul was writing in, it made sense for the church that he was speaking to. Because I think in one of those, the women in the church were just out of control and the men weren't speaking up or saying anything. Which in that case, I mean, I can kind of see why Paul would say, "you know what, like seriously, control yourselves." It's um, I think it can be kind of frustrating when you look at a text about women and don't see it in the historical or the cultural, or even the situational context."

Ella: "So yeah, I'm not convinced that the New Testament is literally true, and I'm still trying to puzzle out which parts I believe are true, which are reflections of the times. Especially when Paul was writing to all these different congregations. We don't necessarily know what was happening
in those congregations that he was writing to. That's why he sometimes gives different advice to different people."

"I think there's a general theme throughout the Bible of women being honored far more than they were in the culture, the surrounding culture. I mean, especially if you look at the ministry of Jesus. I would say almost that Jesus really honored women a lot…I think the church would really have a lot more credibility if, um, if we actually took the Bible seriously and took like, what we saw in [the book of] Acts and what Jesus did seriously, and gave women more of a voice, more than we see in the mainstream culture. Because we want to be countercultural, but we want to be countercultural in the right way [laughs]."

"I am fully convinced now of a really radical feminist hermeneutic in scripture that God is extremely concerned about the welfare and roles of women in society. That really probably a lot of people would say, "that's really a progressive stance," but I think it's

just a biblical stance. Viewing the whole of scripture, um, I really don't think… I think if you really take the lenses off a little bit and start to see how God is continually choosing women who have been outcasts, or giving voices to women and giving them platforms and continually putting them in a more progressive role of leadership than their current cultural context would have them."

"The stories that are in the Bible, they were all male-dominated societies…but then the whole New Testament, the whole gospel is like, equality for everyone, and there are so many stories about how Jesus is entirely countercultural and goes to interact with women. The longest conversation that he has with any one person in the Bible is with a woman, and he, it just shows how he, Jesus, radically changes that culture. And since the Bible is about like, Jesus coming and shaping our world with his teachings and stuff, I feel like it is advocating for women."

"So I guess just based on tradition like, it's always been men who have fulfilled those roles, and women fall into the jobs that aren't taken."

"I think also it's a long standing value of men leading and being uncomfortable with sharing that role."

"We used Luther's small catechism, which is his interpretation of the Bible, and it was like, this is fact. And so it wasn't like, let's read this and talk about it and what do we think it means. Like, there was a little bit of that, but it would often be informed by like… and now we read Luther's small catechism next to it, and those two are our interpretation. And there's many ways like, the cynicism of "good Lord, people, you're following Luther and not Jesus.""

"[People say] Oh, I trust my pastor or whoever taught me growing up, I trust them and they've never led me wrong", I think that's a huge part of it. I don't know, I would just say loyalty… It's just very simple in terms of, these are trusted voices in the church, and we're just going to trust them, about pretty much what they say about everything… And then we are all like "Oh, Catholics are idolatrous, they do it". We do it! [Laughs] Our pope is just John Piper. You know like, every group seems to have some sort of pope figure that you just don't really question very much."

"sometimes I feel like we, the interpretations that we come up with are more to justify our own opinions about it and to justify our habits than they are actually interpretation. Like, especially the head covering verses. I feel like some of the interpretation there is like, "well, Christian women don't wear headscarves, there must be a reason for it. Ok, let's come up with a reason why we don't wear headscarves.""

"I think the big framework that has been helpful for me is realizing that we interpret those things through the lenses that we have. We don't interpret them blindly. So they are clear to certain people because of their context, that already makes them believe that men have greater leadership capacities or… so if you're able to kind of remove yourself a little bit from that context, and think like, um, what would be a different way of viewing these verses."

"It would be very uncomfortable for my life if I did come to a different conclusion. I feel like I would be awry in doing the research if I was not open to that possibility."

"And I can see how you get there, I can see how you can read all of this and get there. There's still a tension again in me, of my experience second guessing it. But I don't want to end up on that side. I don't want those scriptures to say that…but there's a way that it's like, I just don't want the Bible to say this so I'm going to ignore those parts."

"there's a debate about how I actually came to faith…Basically I prayed when I was four, four years old, so [my parents and I] have different stories about how that happened, literally it was so long ago. And actually that really bothered me for a while until I was like ten. Because it was like, if I don't remember it didn't really happen."

"So I grew up, I would say, from a pretty young age, oriented toward faith. Like, having a skeptical perspective but um, just kind of leaning in the direction of yeah, I like life better with this framework."

"Most of my experiences have been with congregations that are fairly liberal. Yeah, I don't think there's ever been a time."

"It's almost easier to be Christian and a woman here than for men…being religious or spiritual kind of seems like soft and not manly."

"I was basically told I was worth nothing outside of begin able to take care of children. So being a woman in the church is definitely something that has separated me from it a little bit and made me kind of bitter… I had a marriage and family class in high school, where they told us what our roles were, and mine was not to be anything that I considered what I wanted to be in society."

"when we went on staff, we stared being exposed to like, that the organization would interact with [my husband] when they needed things, even then I was the one who was ministry oriented… so there were a few years when it was really frustrating, or maybe

more than a few years, realizing that like, my gifts were not welcome in the organization because I was a woman."

"I fully expect to lead and be led…it would be healthy if like, I was better at him than something, and he was better at me than something else so we could share that and be more equal than just like, if the woman is like, the timid one who always has to submit to her husband and he's like, always the head and makes the final decision on everything."

"We definitely thought that he would be the head of our home, whatever that meant…So, like, we really felt like this [male as leader] was the only option, the only model for marriage that worked. And then we got married then we realized like, we're just very different than what people say men and women will be like… So we just didn't fit the mold and we realized very quickly that that was not going to work for us…people have always said it's unhealthy and dysfunctional if marriages work this way, but it doesn't really feel unhealthy or dysfunctional. And it's not even like it feels like that, but everyone's telling us it is."

"I know that a part of why it always has resonated with me, that women and men would lead together, is that I really believe in marriage, and the unity, the mutual submission of marriage and the trust that is built there."

"I believe that there is like, a leader in the family and that the man should be a leader, but I don't believe that it's like a hierarchy. I think it's more of a partnership."

"I think just like, joint decision making. And the, not only the tolerance, but also the desire of the man for the woman to have a career and have a life."

"I feel like the person that has the most say is the one with the most conviction about the, whatever the said topic is."

"he's a worship leader, so he definitely leads in general our relationship in terms of like worship and I think through God's word as well… my strength more is prayer, so that's the area where I feel like I lead us more in that."

"I feel like I still look up to him to make big decisions."

"I think for me, personally I'm still in the process of forming my own opinions on that, but from what I've seen, I think that to a certain extent I actually do think that there should be gender roles within a marriage. I'm not... I tend to think that there should be

freer gender roles when it comes to people in the church or for people in romantic relationships, but when it comes to a marriage, I think that it actually is good to like have some gender roles."

"I think that there's some romanticism around traditional roles, also. There's some beautiful images from the fifties, before the sixties came, before the seventies came, you know?… sometimes it's just like, [having roles] is simpler. When you get married you realize that it's a lot more work if everyone's doing everything."

"I don't think that gender roles should define each spouse's role. Just because you're a woman you should fill such and such role. There are some people where its going to work out better for them to have a more traditional marriage. And if that's what they want and if that's what they're suited towards…but that has to be their choice. They have to look at it and say, "ok, I have such and such characteristics, I'm…I do better in such and such roles." Rather than saying, "I'm a woman, ergo I must cook dinner every night and be a stay at home mom."

"I got pregnant and had a miscarriage and was looking up resources about it, and there was like, crap available. It was horrible. It was all this fluffy, feel-good stuff, the Bible scholarship was non-existent… I really felt like I wanted to go into Bible scholarship. I think that was what pushed me over the edge, so say you love this, and there's a need for this, for your voice."
"I feel like my purpose is just to spread the joy that I have. And with that comes the love that I know that I've found in Jesus and God… and I know it's such a generic answer to say that 'I want to be a doctor because I want to help people', because you can totally help people in ways that are not medicine. But I think it's just one way that I've discovered I enjoy doing and it also helps me fulfill that…"

"…when I went to seminary I hadn't thought of being ordained… I knew subconsciously that that's something women just didn't do."

"I have to get ordained. If I'm teaching a class and encouraging women in ministry, women and girls and boys and men, they need to see women behind the altar teaching and preaching, and not just the supplicants, not just the ones serving."

"The most convincing argument now is seeing people live it, and seeing women in leadership as pastors, as chaplains, campus pastors. I think it's harder to argue with that, because you can talk about what the Greek means, but a when I think you start to change people's frameworks, like, this maybe isn't as crazy as it seems."

"I guess even though I'm, I would have no problem with a woman pastor, I would like, notice and like, do a double take I guess, if a woman pastor suddenly took the stage. And I did react that way when I was studying abroad and there was a woman pastor one day [makes gawking noise]."

"…part of why the authority that I have in the community now is because of their mentorship and because of… because so immediately they bestowed authority upon me, and trust. They went to bat for me."

"I feel like potentially the tension is even bigger for me in that like, my immediate circle growing up was 100% supportive, but that the larger context of us as Christians was not. Just the dissonance between [my parens and I] has made it a much bigger tension in my life."

"They didn't even preach against women in ministry, they didn't even dream that it would ever be possible."

"…growing up in a church that didn't allow women as pastors, I think I never even considered that as a potential calling of mine. It wasn't a role model that was before me. And I think I still don't consider it as highly as I think I should. Pastoral care is probably something that I will end up doing with my long-term career, but there's a lot of mental dissonance there for me."

"I think a lot of it [gender roles] were so subtle and non-explicit growing up that I didn't even pick up on a lot of it. I mean, there was a ton of language, completely accepted in every sphere I was in. Like, the man is the head of the home, which [laughs] is not in the Bible."

"I think [not respecting women] is definitely, at least within the church culture that I grew up in, it's definitely very implicit. I mean, they say that they're really accepting of women in ministry, but their leadership doesn't reflect it, and neither do their actions."

"I think there's a pretty common theme that women are the helpers, women are the people who usually serve or do the serving. I mean, I think especially that [serving]. I mean, not that serving is bad… I mean, I even was talking to a gal that I'm discipling right now, actually, and she was talking about... I was asking her to list her strengths, and she listed the top one as serving, service. Which I don't think is a bad thing, but I tend to see it a lot of Christian women who tend to list…that as their top strength. And I mean, service is great but I kind of wish that we... we tend not to see men list that, I don't think men list

that at all because it's not a part of the stereotype, because men are typically the leaders, quote on quote."

"it's sort of like the woman is the servant. Like, my dad said that in my oldest cousin's wedding vows, part of the vow was, you know, swearing before God that "you are this man's servant, and your job is to serve him and to obey him." And my dad said that my mother's horror stricken face was a sight to see [laughs]"

"…not having women up at the pulpit is actually a more loving thing to men than we realize, and it's just because our culture tells us that if you're not on equal footing that you're somehow limited. But sometimes its completely more loving and more you know, like, it's more serving to God to not do that. And I think that's something a lot of women, especially growing up in the church, yeah, once you're aware of how easy it is for a man to get distracted and how easy it is by the clothes you're wearing or whatever, you realize it's not out of some law, that they don't want you to preach."

"there's a common notion in America in general that women, especially women who don't want kids, there's something wrong with them. It's less unusual for a man to not want children. But [imitating a voice], "she doesn't want children? She needs to see a shrink!"

"I would travel for work and I would leave him here with my husband. And people would ask me, "who has your child?" and I would be like, "um, his father." [Laughs]. He's not been abandoned. So I think it's just those practical things is where we've seen it like, come out a lot. People just aren't used to seeing what it looks like."

"I really, really want to have children and I feel like that is something that I am meant to do in my life, is to be a mother, and I really want to focus on my kids for a significant part of my life…that was an interest that I had when I was in high school, but I felt really uncomfortable thinking it just because of the environment that I had grown up in."

"I got myself through Harvard law school and became a lawyer, my intelligence is the most important thing about me."

"I would want to fill the role of being the mother and you know, being a stay-at-home mom and I would want to fill that role but not because it's what I was expected to do. I would just ideally like to marry someone who would be more of the breadwinner, so to speak."

"[My parents] basically came to the conclusion that if they were going to be teaching me anyway, my mom would rather give me the best part of her day instead of the crappy, worst parts of her day. That was the reasoning. Also just in terms of values, a lot of the kids my age… were watching things and reading things that my parents didn't agree with. Just cultural values, sort of thing…So they just saw the trend of where that school was going, and they said, "Umm, we really don't want our kids to be raised in this"

"what comes to my mind is equality for women. [Pauses] And I guess what I think of when I think of equality for women is the opportunity for a woman to take up as much space as a man takes up."

"for me, feminism is women being able to do what they want to do with their lives and not being criticized or judged for that."

"[women should not be shut out of any job or role purely because of their gender. Unless gender is a major role. Like, a male cannot…well, except for female to male transgender, a man can't be a pregnancy surrogate or a surrogate mom. And you know, there are obviously some cases where you want someone of a certain gender to fill the job."
"Feminism characterized for me is still, at its root, that the beliefs are that women are worth just as much as men, women are capable of all the things men are, and the fact that that isn't true or being exercised in our society. So I think its the same conversation of, like, it's not enough to just not be racist, you have to be an anti-racist. I think that has a very live spin for feminism to me, too. It's just not enough to say that you believe that women are equal, but that you would be advocating for it and standing up against the places where that isn't true."

A: Uhh, feminism. I think I tend to define feminism - I think of it in terms of the movement. I think of it as the movement that argued in favor of women's rights.
M: So legal rights?
A: No, not just legal rights. I think women's rights, women's equality, um, and in some cases women's superiority - which I don't really agree with - I think that sometimes feminists can take it too far, and can really berate men, which I think is definitely the pendulum swinging the other way. I think that people who do that take it too far. I think feminism done right though can be a force for good and a force for women's rights, and equality for women with men. I think that it can lead to things that are good.

"…often what was aggravating about feminism was that it was a complete disavowal of men altogether. Almost making them property, or making them less than. And that, to me, is just never ok. Like, it's not ok to do that to a woman, and it's not ok to do that to a

man. And so I think that often that's what I would be afraid of, sometimes subscribing to feminism is that I have to make a man less than what he's supposed to be."

"I think it's kind of become a *dirty word* in Christianity. As soon as you dismiss a woman as a feminist, she loses all kind of credibility, because I think a lot of people think that feminism means, like, a woman thinks that she's better than men… And I've even heard women in the church describe women in the church as "Femi-Nazis", and like those sorts of terms."

"Yeah, [feminism] is a single term and it's so loaded. One of the women that I mentioned, the very fact that she's trying to get a women's resource center and women's studies minor together, she gets labeled a Femi-Nazi."

"Some people see feminism as Femi-Nazis who want to enslave men…"

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND SURVEY

Pre-Interview Information
- Information about the research, types of questions to be asked
- Rights to privacy, confidentiality, and removal from the research (at any time)
- Consent to having the interview recorded
- My personal contact information

I. Background Information
   A. Can you tell me about your family and religious background?
   B. [If in college] How did you decide to attend _____ school?

II. Christianity
   A. How did you become Christian?
   B. How have you learned about what it means to be a Christian?
   C. How does being a Christian shape your everyday life?
   D. Does being a Christian shape how you understand yourself? Why?

III. Christian Woman
   A. What does it mean to be a Christian woman?
   B. Do your female and Christian identities influence each other?
   C. Do you think Christian women are expected to behave in any particular way? How so?

IV. Marriage
   A. Unmarried participants
      1. Do you plan marrying someday? Why or why not?
      2. Is it important to you to marry someone who is also Christian?
      3. What have you been taught about the role of women in marriage? Do you agree?
      4. What do you think the role of a woman is in marriage?
   B. Married participants
      1. Did you and your spouse discuss gender roles before getting married?
      2. How do you make decisions in your marriage?
      3. What has influenced your understanding of your role in your marriage?

V. Feminism
   A. How do you define feminism?
   B. Do you consider yourself a feminist? Why or why not?
   C. What has influenced your understanding of what feminism is?
   D. Have you taken any Gender/Women's Studies classes?
   E. Do you believe that feminism is compatible with Christianity?

Post-Interview Survey

1) Please indicate how frequently you participate in the following activities.

Activity	Frequency					
	Daily	At Least Weekly	At Least Monthly	At Least Yearly	Never	N/A
Pray on your own						
Pray with others (outside of Bible study or church)						
Read the Bible on your own						
Read the Bible outside of Bible study or church						
Attend a church service						
Participate in a Bible study						
Attend Christian conferences or trainings						
Read Christian books or use similar resources						
Share my faith with non-Christians						
Teach others about Christianity (outside of Bible study or church)						

2) Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements.

I believe that…	Frequency						
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know	N/A
The Bible is literally true.							
Same-sex marriage is morally ok.							
I should share my faith with others.							
Women should desire to have children.							
Being a Christian is the most important part of my life.							
Men do not not have more spiritual authority than women.							
Belief in Jesus is the only way to heaven and eternal life.							
A woman's priority should be taking care of her home and family.							
Abortion is morally wrong.							
Women should desire to marry.							
Couples should wait until marriage to have sex.							